

THE REASON BEHIND THE END OF THE OPERATION MARE NOSTRUM (OMN):

A Successful Search and Rescue Operation by Italian Navy during 2013-2014

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) has been facing the biggest humanity crisis since 2013. It sounds to have a serious problem on dealing with the coming migrant/immigrant people from many conflicting area in the world such as Syria (from the civil war), North Africa (especially from Eritrea which is rooted in its harsh military services), Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and many more. Operation Mare Nostrum (OMN) was established last October, 2013 and was considered as the most successful program with Italy as the sole host-state which was also held by their navy. It aimed to tackle the dramatic increase of migratory flows during the second half of the year and consequent tragic ship wreckages off the island of Lampedusa. In the last quarter of 2013, EU rejected to continue this operation and being criticized by many parties. The EU's prediction and Italy's decision were blamed as a wrong decision. However, there would be always reason behind the decision which was made by the Italy to end the OMN.

Keyword: *Operation Mare Nostrum, Migrant Crisis, Italian Navy, Joint Responsibility, Decision Making.*

ANALYSIS

Since its establishment in 1950, EU has transformed themselves especially in the economic sector. It succeeded in building a single market for goods and services that include 28 states with 500 million citizens free to move and settle where they wish. It succeeded not only in creating euro as a single currency but also has made it as the world major currency which makes the single market more efficient. As a special additional point, it has been the largest supplier of development and humanitarian aid programs in the world. These are just a few of the achievements so far.

The 28 EU member states and their citizens, which belong to the union, is the core of this organization. The unique feature of the EU is that, although these are all sovereign, independent countries, they have pooled some of their 'sovereignty' in order to gain strength and the benefits of size. Pooling sovereignty means, in practice, that the Member States delegate some of their decision-making powers to the shared institutions they have created, so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at European level. However, the joint interest could be somehow difficult to be done because of its system. The EU system itself sits between the fully federal system as found in the United States and the loose, intergovernmental cooperation system applied in the United Nations.

For example, in the migrant issue the joint responsibility from the EU states were not easy to be reached. It was not a new emerging issue but the growing and surprising number of their coming was new. This growing migrant crisis at the Mediterranean had made a state to deal with such a dilemmatic situation, especially those who were coming from the central Mediterranean Sea. The central Mediterranean had considered as the most effective route for crossing for several reasons which had been explained above in the chapter III and for those reasons Italy was an entry point for

most of them. Italy had been really good at giving fast response and launching the Operation Mare Nostrum. On the other hand, other EU states were just putting the burden on Italy alone. Finally, agreeing to end the operation which remained as the most successful operation ever held in the Mediterranean.

Italy brought the notion of a call for help with intention to get the EU member states support in terms of either money or means, not for replacing it. Instead of getting one of both choices they designed another operation to replace it, not in the same capacity like what had been promised called JO Triton. Both operations were having not only different capacity in terms of search and rescue operation but also in terms of mission, operational area and budget. It triggered people to question the reason behind the decision.

William D. Coplin, on his book “Introduction to International Politics: A Theoretical Overview”, stated that at least there are three influential factors which influence the decision makers in deciding their foreign policy: *First*, the domestic political conditions of the state, including cultural factors that underlie the human political behavior. *Second* is economy and military conditions or capabilities, including the geographic factor that has always been a major consideration in defense/security for years. *The Third* is international context, the circumstances of a state that has been a goal of the foreign policy and the influence of other states relevant to the faced problem. (Coplin, 1992)

Every decision maker should have been dealing with, at least, those three factors as their consideration when making a decision. They are not allowed to just ignore them and act or decide like what they want (without consideration) because like what had been stated by Slantchev:

“States do not act. People do. States do not make decisions. People do. States do not have goals. People do” (Slantchev, 2005)

Questioning the end of OMN should be never apart from understanding and relating it to the very first point which is Italy's decision to launch this Operation on 18 October 2013. It is because factors behind its ending could be developed from that point. The point when Italy opened the gate and for the first time turned its policy in facing the migrants which also means turned the whole EU to do so. The problem was neither the union nor the states, along with the citizen, were not ready enough to welcome them on their home considering many things to prepare, especially those related to financial matters. However, crisis seemed cannot wait.

It became really complicated then on the future. *First* thing to be affected by the decision was surely Italy's domestic politics. The coming migrants created a shocking environment for the Italian. Opinion was undeniable. The rising tension on the right wing party was evidence to the current situation. Moreover, the operation was not cheap and the country's facilities for looking after these refugees are being overwhelmed. It brought Italy to the terrible situation (Telegraph Web site, 2014)

Second, Mare nostrum spent more than 9 million € from Italy's budget and only got around 3 million € from the EU each month. It is the most expensive operation compared to any other operation which was ever held in Mediterranean Sea. Italy sustained for several months by its own money and with few aid from the union. However, states did not show their contribution in terms of any means or money when Italy called for help to the EU's member states in Brussels after those several hard months. Most of the EU's member states likely turned their back towards this problem. Let the Italy did the humanitarian mission alone. These are the things which most of states believed would not come if Italy did not open the gate. The more death in their water could possibly been denied just in case Italy stick not to open the gate. Finally, it reflected to the rejection of supporting Italy.

Third, two things above, the domestic politics and the international context, had made Italy deal with all emerging problems alone. Several problems even worsened the condition for example as more migrants coming in summer they had to deal with problems of hosting the migrants. There were no more places. It led Italy, as what had been explained in the previous chapter, to show their protest by letting the migrants passed without being finger printed even encouraged them to go north. This happened for months and affected Italy's economy very soon. Their economy was declining.

At least those three factors appear in the effort of understanding the case by implementing the decision making theory by William D. Coplin. By using this theory the writer will explain deeper about those three factors in order to get a better understanding and could see clearly that they matter.

Italy had passed a difficult time during the process of struggling the continuation of OMN. On one side, seeing the number of the coming migrants in their shore Italian authorities know that it would be impossible to stop the operation. On the other hand, seeing their citizen's complaint were growing all over the Italy the authoritarian was aware that they need to stop and ask for help to the union. Italian was sounding that they were not okay if they should let the government pay more attention to the migrant.

A great pressure came from the opposition side which was dominated by the international humanitarian organization like IOM, save children and also the world society. They were demanding Italy to keep running the operation to save the migrants. On the other side EU state started arguing that OMN was only a trigger for the arrival of the migrants. British even declared that they would not help since Italy was supposed to just stop the operation. It created opinion in the EU states which became a

different great pressure for Italy. Italy went in a very dilemmatic situation before finally it could decide willingly to end the OMN, put the responsibility to the union. The rest of this chapter will contain about the reason behind that decision.

A. Domestic Politics

The writer will try to explain how the states' domestic politics influences the decision making process which led Italy to be finally willing to end the ONM through analyzing:

A. 1 Socioeconomic impact

(Environment, Jobs, Security)

When the Operation Mare Nostrum was running in the Mediterranean Sea, Italy had been a host state for thousand hundreds immigrants coming from the horn of Africa, Middle East and other parts of the world. After entering Europe via Italy, migrants would at least stay for days to continue their journey to the north. Considering the number of migrants that Italy have already had and added with the recent number of coming migrants Italian could feel disturbed.

First thing to be affected by the decision was surely Italy's domestic politics especially in the socio-economic aspect which was job opportunity. The coming migrants created a shocking environment for the Italians. Like any other states in the union, Italy has been dealing with migrant-people who come from other EU states and immigrants-people who come from outside of Europe.

From the above data, we can see that Italy was included to a state that had more foreign-born employment rather than its own native-born. The foreign-born was dominated by both migrant people from EU state and immigrants from outside the Europe. Unemployment among young

people in Italy is around 42 per cent, prompting tens of thousands to emigrate in search of better opportunities, with Britain as the top destination. The overall jobless rate is 12 per cent.

Italy was hit by strikes, violent demonstrations and protests against refugees on Friday 14 November 2014, as anger and frustration towards soaring unemployment and the enduring economic crisis exploded onto the streets. It had been two weeks after the Mare Nostrum was replaced by Triton. Earlier this month Italy partially handed over its sea rescue operation to the European Union after coming under pressure domestically to end the costly operation.

The ongoing recession had exacerbated racial tensions, with some Italians blaming refugees and immigrants for their economic woes. Italy has been struggling to cope with the huge number of refugees and economic migrants. This protest had been growing since the second quarter of the year but it was just exploded in November. Italian had no longer been feeling secure since the immigrants came in a huge number and were dominated by people from various states. (Squires, 2014)

The locals, the working class-neighborhood, were attacking at the migrant centre in Tor Sapienza which was located in Roma, Lazio, Italy. They were smashing windows with stones, setting fire to dumpster rubbish bins and fighting running battles with riot police during several nights of violence. They stated that the attack had not been incited by racism but by desperation since they were tired of the ongoing situation of violence and terror, Ippoliti said. "We are not extremists, but we want to be safe in our own neighborhood and the authorities are ignoring our complaints", he added. (Phillips, 2014)

The ongoing situation which the protester said was related to what they called as the years of neglect by government authorities who have allowed gypsies, migrants and asylum seekers to settle in Rome

peripheries without providing adequate services. It stimulated on the establishment of violence and terror in their neighborhood which they believed should never happen.

A. 2 The growing of anti migrants group in the society.

The rising tension on the right wing party was evidence to the current situation. Opinion was undeniable. Moreover, the operation was not cheap and the country's facilities for looking after these refugees were overwhelming. It brought Italy to the terrible situation.

Opposition to immigration as explained in point 1.1 above had helped fuel a surge in support for the anti-immigrants by Northern League Party. In a demonstration which happened on 31 October 2014, the Northern League Party had sounded their demand. The demonstration used the slogan "Stop the Invasion". There were more slogans which expressed Italian feeling towards the coming migrants like "Italians first," "They invade us, and we pay", "Fewer immigrants = fewer diseases" and "We want to put children into the world, and not import illegals." (Speisa, 2014)

Critics said that Operation Mare Nostrum unintentionally encouraged migration. It was because people smugglers could guarantee that their human cargo would be rescued in the middle of the Mediterranean. So, the navy and coast guard unwittingly acted as a "taxi service" for tens of thousands of desperate refugees and economic migrants trying to reach Europe, critics said. That was why the Italian or the locals protested that the government had paid too much attention towards this issue. Moreover, after the Italy held the rotating EU presidency in June and started to comply the finger printing of the coming migrants again, Italy had become more crowded and Italian complaint was more ignored.

Since critics were heavily addressed to the authorities from the anti-migrant group and problems were clear to be undeniable Italy found

its decision as a boomerang. Moreover, Italy seemed to walk alone in facing this crisis that led them to recall for help to the union. After a tough discussion in Brussels for several times when states gave no hand to continue the operation, Italy had just been willing to end it.

B. The Economy and Military capacity

Giving any search and rescue action towards the illegal immigrants who keep coming from many conflicting areas in the world, a state should consider and figure out about their capacity at first. It will stimulate problems then if a state with less capacity put this humanity obligation above their citizen's welfare. It is just like Italy during the ONM expenditure which was not less than 9 million € per month while EU only gave 3 million € per month. It brought problem already for Italy, but it seemed that other EU member states did not do the same.

The operation Mare Nostrum had been the most expensive operation compared to any other operation which was ever held in Mediterranean Sea. Italy sustained for several months by its own money and with few aid from the union. However, states did not show their contribution in terms of any means or money when Italy called for help to the EU's member states in Brussels after those several hard months. Most of the EU's member states likely turned their back towards this problem. Let the Italy did the humanitarian mission alone. The things which most of states believed would not come if Italy did not open the gate. The more deaths in their water could possibly been denied just in case Italy stick to not open the gate. Finally, it reflected the rejection of supporting Italy.

Similarly Mirriam Dalli (a Maltese Labour Party Politician) stated:

“Because most of the time we talk about “responsibility sharing”, but when you look at the numbers only a few countries are really sharing this responsibility” (Mirriam Dalli) (Global: Debating Europe, 2014)

For a while, it might be fine for Italy since at the very first beginning they initiated this search and rescue operation because they were feeling guilty for the tragedy on October 2013 which caused the death of more than 600 hundred migrants in the shore. However, it just cannot simply to continue like this. Other EU member states should also be aware that what had been done by Italy was also on behalf of European Union not only on itself. Instead of offering help states were acting like it was just fine to end the ONM if it was not possible again to run it.

So, the rest of the paragraph on this part will try to analyze Italy's economy and military capacity in delivering the search and rescue operation.

First, in terms of military capacity Italy's assets which deployed on OMN was more than sufficient. Italy seemed to have almost no problem in delivering their assets in the operation. Its geographic factor had made Italy seemed fine to deal with this crisis. As known, Italy is an EU member state which was located in the southern border of Europe. It is exactly located in the heart of Mediterranean Sea. So, Italy readiness was great in terms of delivering the assets needed not in terms of money in supporting the operation for running its mission.

Italy set up Mare Nostrum to tackle the increase of migratory flows and consequent tragic ship wreckages off the island of Lampedusa. They had deployed five naval vessels, helicopters, five aircraft, and two submarines along with 900 military personnel. It was completed with more than sufficient crew of man power to conduct such search and rescue mission in Mediterranean Sea. With that military capacity, both the means and man power, quick and effective search and rescue operation had been conducted successfully. At least more than a hundred thousand migrant boat people had been saved from the death. (Lizzy Davies and Arthur Neslen, 2014)

Second, however it could not be ignored that any mission using military capacity needs money which was basically not owned by Italy for running their short-term operation longer. “Mare Nostrum is closing down because it was an emergency operation”, the interior minister Angelino Alfano told a conference. He also stated that the Mare Nostrum or "Our Sea" mission would end. It would make way for a smaller European Union scheme - and to help relieve the strain on Italy's public finances amid a three-year economic slump. As it had spent 114 million € to operate the mission over the past year, the closure would reduce spending “to zero” (Steve Scherer and Massimiliano Di Giorgio, 2014).

Opening the gate and getting critics was the first part of its long homework in facing the coming migrants. In dilemma of 3 October 2013, Angelino Alfano might forget one thing which could be a trigger of a bigger problem which was the existence of the International Organization for migration and any other humanitarian organization related to migrants and refugees as a watcher. The reason was because once after Italy was exhausted in terms of financial sources in funding OMN, a demand to continue this operation by those groups were addressing not only to Italy but also the European Union. It brought another dilemma especially for Italy. It was like Italy had failed to do their homework. Those are things that they started and could not be quickly finished or settled.

However, although Italy could ignore what those groups and even the international society's demand it would never be able to ignore the coming migrants in their coast as well as in their shore and ports. It had contributed another big dilemma for Italy. Moreover, the Triton operation which was designed to “replace” it was criticized as not equally deployed as Mare Nostrum.

C. International Context

In this part the writer will try to analyze the international influence especially the influence of the European Union's decision to not support the continuation of Mare Nostrum. Since Italy was one of EU member states it is important to consider how the EU's decision in supranational-level giving its influence towards Italy's decision to end the OMN. It is also important to take into account remembering that EU is a unique intergovernmental organization which has special characteristic in terms of its system. Its system is developing time to time seeking a better pattern to fit.

The latest multi-level governance principle was officially adopted as EU principle in 2014. Three main characteristics can be seen as lying at the heart of the multi-level governance model of the EU, those are: (Nugent, 1999)

- a. Decision making competences are deemed to lie with, and be exercised by national governments along with its institutions and actors. It is almost never only exercised by the national governments in the practice. EU level is considered as the most important levels where supranational actors- of which the most important are the commission, the EP, and the Court of Justice-as exercising an independent influence both policy processes and outcomes. Meanwhile sub-national levels along with regional and local authorities are important to engage with policy activities that are basically not (wholly) controllable by national governments.
- b. Collective decision making by states at the EU level is regarded as involving a significant loss of national sovereignty which in the end influences the significant loss of national governments.
- c. Political arenas are viewed as interconnected rather than nested. A variety of channels and interconnections between different levels of government are seen as both existing and being important.

By using this theory we might better understand that the decision to end the OMN was not a point where EU would avoid assisting the crisis. It took the responsibility to the supranational level, EU level, to decide and provide the best solution to the crisis as well as to EU member states. When discussion was needed it means that there were factors, obstacles or even problems that should be considered before deciding to end the OMN.

Mare nostrum spent more than 9 million € from Italy's budget and only got around 3 million € from the EU each month. The most expensive operation compared to any other operation which was ever held in Mediterranean Sea. Italy sustained for several months by its own money and with few aid from the union. However, states did not show their contribution in terms of any means or money when Italy called for help to the EU's member states in Brussels after those several hard months. Most of the EU's member states likely turned their back towards this problem. Let the Italy did the humanitarian mission alone. Those are things which most of states believed would not come if Italy did not open the gate. The more death in their water could possibly been denied just in case Italy stick not to open the gate. Finally, it reflected to the rejection of supporting Italy.

In this case, states rejection to support the OMN's continuation because most states had seen the impact of Italy's decision in launching this operation. It was expensive and politically poisonous. Italy's domestic and economic condition could be the best evidence of the OMN's impact. It does not mean that they were happy to just let the migrant boat people drowning nor just let Italy deal with the crisis alone. They were trying to seek for a better solution in facing this crisis together.

In multi-level governance system, as what had been explained above, discussion of the collective responsibility or the joint operation

become a priority. The concept is about to embrace or include all actors as possible in order to make decisions on specific matters of joint interest democratically at European level. However, after a tough and long discussion the best solution was, at least for the union and its members at that time, to end the OMN. Bernardino Guardino of the Centro Astalli, a Jesuit service for refugees, said that Closing Mare Nostrum meant that despite all the conventions that had been signed, they were closing their eyes to what was going on in the migrants' countries. He said in Rome on Friday as a coalition of NGOs and Save the Children Italy, urged the government to think again. (Davies and Neslen, 2014)

In conclusion, Migrant crisis has been the biggest humanity crisis since the last quarter of 2013. People from many conflicting areas in the world tend to choose for migrating themselves to other states and taking the risk to build a better life in a new place. This trend had been famous for many people from Syria (from the civil war), North Africa (especially from Eritrea which is rooted in its harsh military services), Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and many more. Their number is growing even it almost explodes day by day. In seeking asylum in the EU states, the migrants are coming with some main reasons like if they are refugees of the war it means they are seeking for a better place to live than in their state and if they are coming from a poor country most of them are coming for the economic reasons and etc.

Those desperate and persecuted people then decided to flee to Europe by boats and took the risk of a very dangerous journey through the Mediterranean Sea rather than to stay in their home land (Polleschi, 2014). For several reasons, Europe has been the most popular destination for migration. Moreover, after Italy launched the search and rescue operation called Mare Nostrum on 18 October 2013 they kept coming in huge number. However this operation was only for a year. It was closed down by Italy considering many things and had been blamed for its

decision. Most of human rights organizations and activists were disappointed since this operation had saved many lives compared to any other operation conducted by EU.

The units of the Italian Navy have engaged in 421 operations and rescued 150,810 migrants; 5 mother ships have been seized and 330 alleged smugglers have been brought to justice (UNHCR, Central Mediterranean Initiatives, 2014). These results or achievements have been achieved by 900 military engaged any single day, 32 naval units and 2 submarines taking shifts in over 45,000 hours of active operations (Ministero Della Difesa, 2013).

Italy had a hard time facing critics and at the same time should deal with the emerging problem caused by the migrants. It was the only states that responded the emergency situation in Mediterranean Sea and struggled for its continuation by calling for help to the union. However, there are factors that made Italy decide so. By using Willism D. Coplin's decision making theory it can be concluded that there were at least three reasons used as consideration by Italy which are its domestic politics, its economic capacity (relating to the decline of its economic welfare) and international context (relating to EU' member states decision not to support the continuation of OMN).

There were two sub-factors in Italy domestic politics which were the socioeconomic impact and the growing protest by anti-migrant group. By having more migrants Italian had been shocked by such created environment. The impact was quite surprising since it also should deal with migrants from EU member states, combined with the job opportunities for young Italian that were also reduced. It was proven with high number of unemployment which was around 42 per cent, prompting tens of thousands to emigrate in search of better opportunities, with Britain as the top destination. The overall jobless rate is 12 per cent. It led the

growing protest by the anti-migrant group which worsened the condition of its domestic politics.

Then, even in terms of military capacity Italy had no big problem however it lacked budget. “Mare Nostrum is closing down because it was an emergency operation”, the interior minister Angelino Alfano told a conference. He also stated that the Mare Nostrum or "Our Sea" mission would end. It would make way for a smaller European Union scheme - and to help relieve the strain on Italy's public finances amid a three-year economic slump. As it had spent 114 million € to operate the mission over the past year, the closure would reduce spending “to zero” (Scherer and Di Giorgio, 2014)

The last is by using multi-level governance theory we might better understand that the decision to end the OMN was not a point where EU would avoid assisting the crisis. It took the responsibility to the supranational level, EU level, to decide and provide the best solution to the crisis as well as to EU member states. In multi-level governance system discussion in any joint response became a priority. The concept is about to embrace or include all actors as possible in order to make decisions on specific matters of joint interest democratically at European level.

So, Italy’s decision to end the Operation Mare Nostrum was because it was the best choice to stabilize its domestic politics and economic welfare of its citizen. By willing to end the Operation Mare Nostrum it would give a way for smaller EU scheme to start any joint responsibility in facing the migrant crisis.

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