The Mediterranean Dimension of Irregular Migration 2014–2017 and Its Implications for the Perception of European Security

Śródziemnomorski wymiar nieregularnej migracji w latach 2014–2017 i jego implikacje dla percepcji bezpieczeństwa europejskiego

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Abstract: The problem of irregular migration to the European Union (EU) via the Mediterranean Sea is a phenomenon that has been with the European Community (EC) for many years. The migration crisis that began in 2014 has shown the entire international community that the challenge for the EU is not only uncontrolled migration but also what causes it. In the context of the EU's close neighborhood with the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), the priority of EC members should be both to provide assistance to those in need and to effectively support the countries of the region facing internal problems, which in the near future can only increase this migration. The MENA region, home to more than 40 million migrants and 14 million internally displaced persons, has experienced numerous natural disasters, crises (man-made or currently caused by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic) and conflicts (some of the longest-running in the world). The aim of the article is to determine the causes of the migration crisis of 2014–2017 and to show the scale of irregular migration along with the results of scientific research. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the identification of the importance of the Mediterranean Sea for migration and the determination of the EU's response to the problem of uncontrolled migration by sea.

Keywords: migration, European Union, refugees, migrants, Mediterranean, international security, MENA region

Streszczenie: Problem nieregularnej migracji do Unii Europejskiej (UE) przez Morze Śródziemne to zjawisko, które towarzyszy Wspólnocie Europejskiej (WE) od wielu lat. Kryzys migracyjny, który rozpoczął się w 2014 r., ukazał całej społeczności międzynarodowej,

iż wyzwaniem dla UE jest nie tylko niekontrolowana migracja, ale również to, co stanowi jej przyczynę. W związku z bliskim sąsiedztwem UE z regionem Bliskiego Wschodu i Afryki Północnej (ang. *Middle East and North Africa* – MENA) priorytetem członków WE powinno być zarówno udzielanie pomocy osobom potrzebującym, jak i skuteczne wspieranie państw regionu, borykających się z problemami wewnętrznymi, które w niedalekiej przyszłości mogą tylko tę migrację nasilić. W regionie MENA, zamieszkałym przez ponad 40 mln migrantów i 14 mln wewnętrznych przesiedleńców, mają miejsce liczne klęski żywiołowe, kryzysy (spowodowane przez człowieka czy aktualnie wywołane skutkami pandemii COVID-19) oraz konflikty (są to jedne z najdłużej trwających na świecie). Celem artykułu jest określenie przyczyn kryzysu migracyjnego z lat 2014–2017 oraz ukazanie skali nieregularnej migracji wraz z wynikami prowadzonych badań naukowych. Na szczególną uwagę w tym zakresie zasługuje określenie znaczenia Morza Śródziemnego dla migracji oraz wskazanie odpowiedzi UE na problem niekontrolowanej migracji drogą morską.

Słowa kluczowe: migracja, Unia Europejska, uchodźcy, migranci, Morze Śródziemne, bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe, region MENA

Irregular migration to the European Union (EU) is not a new phenomenon. Since the '90s of the 20th century, the EU and its member states have been a constant destination for many migrant groups, e.g. for economic or political reasons. The authors of this article understand irregular migration as migration without authorization to cross the border, that is, illegal. Irregular, unauthorised or undocumented migration is the practice of crossing an international border without official permission. However, the context of the irregular migrant must be considered in two ways. Firstly, in the global aspect – an irregular migrant is a person who, due to illegal entry, violation of the conditions of entry, or the expiry of the legal basis for entry and stay, does not have legal status in the transit or host country; secondly, in the EU aspect – is a third-country national present on the territory of the Schengen area, who does not meet or no longer meets the entry conditions set out in the EU Council Regulation (Rozporządzenie 2016/399, Schengen borders code) or other conditions of entry (Migration and Home Affairs 2008).

The migration crisis, which began in 2014 and is considered by many experts to be the EU's greatest challenge, has been caused by a number of transformations taking place in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). The reasons for Migration vary: people move in search of work and economic opportunities or to join their families, others for educational purposes, others to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, or human

rights violations, some migrate in response to the negative effects of climate change, natural disasters, cataclysms or other environmental factors. When looking at the complexity of events in the MENA region, the legacy of the 2003 military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Arab revolutions of 2011 that began in North Africa and then spread to the East, the activities of terrorist organizations, and the rise of the Daesh caliphate in 2015 in Syria and Iraq certainly deserve attention. And the 2022 war in Ukraine has added another layer of complexity to normal functioning in the region.

Irregular migration has become an important socio-political phenomenon, associated with the expansion of globalization and trade between nations. Over the decades the social and economic scene in many continents, regions and countries of the world has been shaped and then transformed. The people of the MENA region have many reasons for wanting to emigrate – they are economic, political, security factors and educational opportunities. These reasons seem to correlate more with the political climate in individual countries than they do with recurring issues across the region.

In view of the fact that scientific research can not be limited to identifying one cause of the situation, it becomes necessary to undertake a deeper analysis that takes into account the multifaceted nature of the problem. From the point of view of the effectiveness of EU actions, the most important – in the course of the conducted research – are the implications for the perception of European security. The research problem undertaken within the framework of this article is to identify the causes of the migration crisis that has arisen and to show the scale of irregular migration. The authors deliberately chose the time span of 2014–2017 because it reveals a significant moment in migration processes to Europe. The historical, three-year perspective of migration and the events in the period under review are – in the opinion of the authors – an important starting point for the debate on the specifics of migration to Europe, migration routes and political events. In view of the above, the research team developed the following specific research objectives, which were formulated by:

1. Identify the importance of the Mediterranean Sea for migratory movements and identify the main maritime migratory routes through the Mediterranean.
2. Presentation and evaluation of EU actions taken in response to the analysed problem.

3. Identification of countries in the Mediterranean region whose internal situation in the future may increase uncontrolled migration.

In view of this accepted research problem, the authors decided to introduce restrictions:

a) spatial – research will address the problem of irregular migration by sea migration routes only in the Mediterranean;

b) temporal – the analysis of the migration phenomenon will cover the years 2014–2017, while the EU policy implications will be analysed by 2022.

It should be noted that the above considerations have become an inspiration and research intention. This intention, in the course of preliminary research, was transformed into the main research problem, which is expressed in the following question: What was the scale of irregular migration to the EU by sea at that time? The research Problem was decomposed into the form of specific problems constituting It: What were the causes of irregular migration to the EU? What is the role of the Mediterranean in irregular migration?

1. Causes of irregular migration to the European Union

The analysis highlights the fact that the security dynamics of the Middle East and North Africa have changed radically over the past decade, moreover – it will continue to change for the foreseeable future (World Bank 2018). At the beginning of 2011, most of the MENA countries were at peace and appeared to be relatively stable, despite the fact that many countries were ruled in an authoritarian manner, with dictatorial governments in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, among others. The countries of North Africa were at peace under authoritarian leaders (Borderon, Sakdapolrak, Muttarak, Kebede, Pagogna, Sporer 2019). Arab-Israeli conflicts were limited to low-level clashes between Israel and Palestine. Egypt has acted as a stable major regional power. Iran was seen as a weak military power dependent on low-quality and dated weapons. Islamic extremists in Iraq appeared to have been defeated. Other Gulf Arab states appeared to be united in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Yemen was a poor country and could not meet the needs of many of its citizens, but it still seemed stable. Military spending and arms purchases were high by world standards but placed only a limited or moderate burden on local economies (World Development Report 2021).

The factors that determine the scale and direction of migration can be divided into two groups, i.e. pushing and pulling (Rhodes 2018). Within the first group, economic and educational factors will play an important role. Within the second group, it is also necessary to distinguish those factors that will force migration, such as natural disasters, armed conflicts or civil wars. The group of attracting factors will be correlated with the group of pushing factors, since countries with a high degree of economic development, a stable internal situation, and respect for Human Rights will always be desirable destinations for migrant groups (Borderon et al. 2019).

The problem of uncontrolled migration to the EU appeared already in the 1990s of the 20th century, as a result of geopolitical changes, which contributed, e.g., to the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or the wars in the Balkans, which led to an increase in irregular migration to the member states of the European Community.

The growth of migration movements in the 21st century was linked to the enlargement of the EU member states in 2004 and the Schengen area in 2007. Although in these cases migration was mostly legal, it is worth noting that more than 100 million people, i.e. citizens of participating states, have been given the opportunity to move freely (Nowotnik 2011).

With regard to this issue, the primary cause of the migration crisis that has accompanied the EU since 2014 is the lack of employment for Africans belonging to the first generation of the demographic explosion of the 1980s of the 20th century (Martin, Davis, Benton, Waliany 2019). In this analysis, this factor is very important because it contributed to the deepening poverty of Africans (Dimsdale, Mabey 2018). Studies show that about 12% of the population of this continent are people of working age, which confirmed that for the majority of residents the main problem was the lack of work, which motivated them to seek it, e.g., on the European continent (Mickiewicz 2017). The primary causes of the migration crisis, which were presented in this way, were superimposed by pushing factors, i.e. political crises and internal conflicts, among which it is necessary to distinguish:

a) the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 and their consequences in the form of the overthrow of governments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya or the creeping/hybrid civil war in Syria;

b) the failed attempt to democratize Iraq, which, as a result of the withdrawal of U.S. troops, enabled extremist organisations to function

freely, including the creation of a terrorist organisation (Dimsdale, Mabey 2018; El Ghamari 2021);

c) the concentration of military activities in Afghanistan since 2003 as a result of the crisis response operation (El Ghamari 2015; Rhodes 2018);

d) regimes, e.g. in Eritrea, or unstable states targeted by the activities of terrorist organisations; among others Nigeria (Boko Haram), Somalia (al-Shabab; Hanne, Flichy de La Neuville 2015).

After more than a decade of change and perturbation in the region, none of these issues are currently true. Regional rivalries, extremism, and a series of political uprisings and conflicts once dubbed the "Arab Spring" have turned the MENA region into an arena of clashes between local factions, power struggles, corruption, and social frustration. What before the political upheaval that began in 2011 seemed to be a relatively stable pattern for the development of national security and external support is now the scene of internal conflicts, new battles with extremist movements, and major civil wars in Iran, Libya, Syria, and Yemen (Naufal, Genc 2015). Civil wars, international involvement and instability have become as serious a challenge to the security and stability of the MENA region as military threats, extremism and terrorism. Efforts to reform the system of government and the economy have failed to meet the needs of most countries (Faath, Mattes 2014). The COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated social and economic problems. Many regimes began a serious arms race (at a time when this became even more unattainable), while their citizens showed greater needs for effective governance, pointing to problems such as: corruption-free power, poverty reduction, economic development, decent jobs and income.

Military threats and extremism have also increased. Iran has emerged as a much more serious military threat in the Persian Gulf. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as the struggle to defeat extremists and end factional fighting in Iraq (which seemed to end in 2011), led to two decades of direct U.S. involvement in active combat (with combat support from partner forces). While this has led to the dismantling of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) "caliphate" in Iraq, it has left significant ISIS fighters in place, while strengthening the pro-Iranian Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and creating serious uncertainty as to whether Iraq will end up as a strategic partner of the United States or fall under the influence of Iran. And non-state actors such as Hezbollah, the Iraqi PMF and the Houthi, among others, have become a significant threat (while the U.S. has used security assistance – and the newly formed Security Forces Support Brigades – to create its own non-state

actors in Syria). Other powers, including Russia among others, have provided support, combat troops and mercenaries to support non-state actors in Libya and Syria. More broadly, Iran, Bashar al-Assad's forces in Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah, the pro-Iranian PMF in Iraq, and the Houthi in Yemen have formed a coalition of hostile forces that threaten both U.S. interests and U.S. strategic partners.

During the period under review, Russia, like Turkey, has established itself as a major power and competitor, playing an important role in security in Libya and Syria, as well as increasing its share in regional arms transfers. At the same time, the military and security forces of every country in the Middle East and North Africa continue to change in size, structure and posture, with mixed results at best. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa that have large military and internal security budgets – and that make huge arms purchases – have limited real-world combat and internal security capabilities. They are poorly prepared to deal with the changing nature of military threats in the region and are heavily dependent on external forces.

The war in Ukraine deserves special attention, which has added another layer of complexity to the normal functioning of the region. The conflict in Ukraine has a significant impact on global food security due to the significant role that Russia and Ukraine play in international agricultural markets. Currently, around 33% of global wheat exports, 80% of sunflower oil exports, and 19% of maize exports are disrupted by the paralysis of production and transport in the Black Sea (Bonesh 26.04.2022). Most countries in the MENA region are particularly vulnerable to food price shocks. They are structurally dependent on international markets, partly because of their agricultural capabilities, which are inherently limited by geographical and climatic factors, as well as by demographic growth. The MENA Region makes around 33% of the world's cereal purchases, even though the region represents only 4% of the world's population. Ukraine exports almost half of its wheat and around 33% of its corn and sunflower oil to MENA countries. In comparison, countries such as Morocco, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Jordan import 10–15% of their wheat from Ukraine. In addition, Egypt, Tunisia, Oman, and Yemen also import 25–35% of their wheat from Kiev, while the figure for Libya is 50% and Lebanon 65% (Dene, Labow, Silber 4.03.2022). Moreover, the war in Ukraine affects the availability of humanitarian funds, e.g., for Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, and Syria. Most countries have already experienced a decline in funding due to this armed conflict. It can therefore be concluded that this negative trend

in the financing of humanitarian aid will continue in the coming months due to the ongoing fighting. MENA countries can also be described by crisis categories – critical (Syria, Yemen, Libya), chronic (Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq) and overrun (Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Iran). The conflict in Ukraine is sure to put several countries in the MENA region at the bottom of the list of priorities of donor governments, international institutions and the world media. For the millions of Palestinians, Lebanese, Yemenis, Syrians, and others who live in countries experiencing conflict, hunger, catastrophic economic collapses, and growing humanitarian needs, this will be tantamount to the exclusion of "critical life support." Even before the conflict in Ukraine, funding shortfalls led to curtailment of programmes and reduced rations of aid (OCHA Services 20.05.2022).

2. Irregular migration to the European Union by sea

As mentioned, the increase in migration movements to the EU occurred after 2004 and was mainly related to labour migration (Tausch 2019). The post-2014 migration crisis was caused by a wide range of factors, which have only been signalled above. The authors of this article assume that the causes of irregular migration correspond to each other and result from the complexity of the problems of local states and foreign interference of countries interested in influencing the given region. By the sum of these factors, one can describe a number of reasons that could become the leaven for the next scientific publication or a series of works devoted to each of the aspects presented above. It is also certainly not possible to distinguish all the factors that influence migration, as it is a dynamic phenomenon and is constantly changing, which must be considered from a broader historical perspective.

    In the analysed case, forced migrants chose not only land routes, but also sea routes. The scale of migration using individual migration routes is presented in Table 1. For the purposes of this study, the authors decided to use the term migrants, which should be understood as both refugees and immigrants.

Table 1. Scale of irregular migration to the EU in 2014,
taking into account the migration routes used

Migration routes	2014
Central Mediterranean	159 581
East Mediterranean	46 639
Western Balkan	40 017
Albanian-Greek	7 466
West Mediterranean	6 007
Eastern	1 086
Black Sea	422
West African	237
Other	10
Total	**261 494**

Source: own development based on Frontex 2015.

The scale of irregular migration in 2014 was 261 494 people (Table 1). It is worth noting that the most burdened with migratory pressure were the routes leading through the Mediterranean Sea, i.e. the central, eastern, and western Mediterranean. In 2014, a total of 212 227 people reached the EU by sea and 49 267 by land (Table 2), which also confirmed that migrants were the most likely to choose maritime migration routes.

Table 2. Scale of irregular migration to the EU in 2014,
taking into account the sea and land route

Uncontrolled migration routes	2014
Sea route	**212 227**
Land route	49 267
Total	**261 494**

Source: own development based on Frontex 2015.

In 2015, irregular migration to the EU has increased significantly to 1 046 599 (Table 3; Frontex 2016). Compared to the previous year, this figure was four times higher (261 494 people). Research shows that in 2015, 34 887 people arrived by land and 1 011 712 by sea, which only confirmed the key importance of the Mediterranean for migration. The analysis also made it possible to identify the countries of "first entry," i.e. those to which migrants

were directed in the first place: Greece (853 650 people), Italy (153 842 people) and Spain (3 845 people). The migrants reached these three countries mainly by sea. For Greece and Italy, the eastern and central Mediterranean routes were the most frequently used, while for travel to Spain the western Mediterranean route was used (Table 3; Frontex 2014–2017).

Table 3. Scale of irregular migration to the EU in 2015, taking into account sea and land routes and "first entry" countries (in alphabetical order)

"First entry" countries	Sea route	Land route	Total
Bulgaria	–	31 174	31 174
Cyprus	269	–	269
Greece	853 650	3 713	857 363
Spain	3 845	–	3 845
Malta	106	–	106
Italy	153 842	–	153 842
Total	**1 011 7121**	**34 887**	**1 046 599**

Source: own development based on IOM 2015: 4.

In 2016, undocumented migration decreased to 387 739 (Table 4). Such a significant change was also discernible for the countries that were most burdened by it until 2015. For example, Greece in 2015 recorded "entries" of 857 363 people, followed a year later by 176 906 people, a decrease of 79% (Daniiloudi, Gúsior 2015).

Table 4. Scale of irregular migration to the EU in 2016, taking into account sea and land routes and "first entry" countries (in alphabetical order)

"First entry" countries	Sea route	Land route	Total
Bulgaria	–	15 962	15 962
Cyprus	189	–	189
Greece	173 614	3 292	176 906
Spain	8 162	5 084	13 246
Italy	181 436	–	181 436
Total	**363 401**	**24 338**	**387 739**

Source: own development based on IOM 2016: 6.

In 2017, the diminishing scale of migratory movements was still visible. A total of 146 287 people reached the EU at that time, including 137 771 by sea and 8 516 by land (IOM 2017). As in 2014–2015, countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain, Bulgaria, and Cyprus were under migratory pressure (Table 5).

Table 5. Scale of irregular migration to the EU in 2017, taking into account sea and land routes and "first entry" countries (in alphabetical order)

"First entry" countries	Sea route	Land route	Total
Bulgaria	–	545	545
Cyprus	818	–	818
Greece	19 674	3 659	23 333
Spain	11 861	4 312	16 173
Italy	105,418	–	105,418
Total	**137 771**	**8 516**	**146 287**

Source: own development based on IOM 2017: 4.

The research shows that the significant change in the scale of undocumented migration in 2016 and 2017 was dictated by several factors, among which are:

a) agreement between the EU and Turkey;
b) changes in border crossing legislation introduced by European countries;
c) the ever-increasing number of migrant drownings in the Mediterranean.

Under the existing Turkish-EU agreement of June 2016, all migrants who illegally reached Greece via Turkey were returned to Greece, from where they were successively resettled in the EU Member States. The additional benefits that resulted from this agreement for Turkey meant that the country scrupulously controlled its borders, which could reopen EU–Turkey accession talks or decisions on the abolition of EU visas for Turkish citizens. During the period considered, the main objective of the EU was to provide financial support to Turkey in providing assistance to Syrians on its territory.

Following the compromise, 800 migrants were deported from Greece to Turkey, and by the end of 2016, 8389 Syrians were resettled from Turkey to EU Member States (IOM 2017). Moreover, the 2002 readmission agreement, which allowed for the return of persons not entitled to international protection from Greece to Turkey, became an additional tool (IOM 2017).

Changes in border crossing legislation introduced by some member states have also become an important element. In this case, it is worth mentioning the actions taken by Hungary. Under the July 5, 2016 agreement,

Hungarian services escorted all irregular migrants who were apprehended within 8 km of the border to the nearest transit zone, where they could apply for asylum. The Hungarian side also introduced restrictions on the number of border crossings to 20 per day, divided into 2 transit zones Horgos and Kelebija (IOM 2017).

3. "Mediterranean highway" – the importance of the Mediterranean for irregular migration. Analysis of research results

The authors of this article sought to analyse the causes of migration and examine the routes, both sea and land, used by determined migrants to reach Europe. As the journey by land routes was very difficult, not least because of the need to travel thousands of kilometres and to operate under difficult sanitary conditions, many people chose to travel by sea. These circumstances led to the active work of people smuggling groups.

Uncontrolled migration took place in parts of the western, central, and eastern Mediterranean. Migration in the western part involved crossing from Morocco and Algeria to Spain, through two enclaves, i.e. Ceuta and Melilla. This maritime border was most often crossed by citizens of Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria, Cameroon and Senegal. Undocumented migration in this part of the sea was also supported by smuggling groups operating in Mali and Nigeria.

Migration in the eastern Mediterranean involved crossings from Turkey to Greece and the migrant groups were dominated by Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis. It was the most used route in 2015 The sealing of borders by Greece has led to an increase in the frequency of use of the central and western Mediterranean routes (Daniiloudi-Zielińska, El Ghamari 2022).

For these two North African countries, Libyan ports recorded the highest exit rates. On the coast of this country crossed two migration routes, i.e. east African, leading from the Horn of Africa to the east of Libya, and central Mediterranean, leading from Libya to Italy. People smuggling usually started in three ports: Tripoli, Zuwara and Misrata. The direction of migration was invariably Italy and the Island of Lampedusa (EUNAVFOR MED – Operation SOPHIA 29.01.2016).

It should be stressed here that the internal situation of Libya has been a factor in the concentration of maritime migratory routes off the coast of Libya. As a result of the Arab Spring and the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's dictatorship, Libya was plagued by internal conflicts and plunged into political crisis

following the 2014 elections (El Ghamari 2016). In addition, in 2015, a significant strip of the coast of the Gulf of Great Sirte was controlled by militants of the so-called Islamic State, launching attacks on the oil fields (Bartoszewicz, El Ghamari 2020). As a result of internal destabilization and the achievement of a rather disturbing degree of dysfunction (The Fund for Peace n.d.) the law enforcement services were in no way able to control the internal situation and enforce non-compliance with the law, which encouraged smuggling groups to become more active (Minda, Sasnal 10.03.2016).

Numerous cases of drowning have also been linked to migration across the Mediterranean. Research shows that the scale of this phenomenon has steadily increased between 2014–2016, reaching 5082 victims in 2016 (International Organization for Migration n.d.).

Although the eastern Mediterranean route was the most heavily migratory, the central part had the highest number of drownings. The analysis shows that the main reason for this situation was the dramatic conditions of transport of migrants. Smuggling groups, with a view to profit, organized exits on overcrowded boats, as a result of which people transported often fell overboard or died of suffocation. There have been numerous reports of shipwrecks due to overcrowding, most often in the central Mediterranean (IOM 2015). The scale of drownings in the Mediterranean is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The scale of drownings in the Mediterranean in 2014–2017

Mediterranean Region	2014	2015	2016	2017
Western part	59	102	69	161
Central part	3189	2869	4579	1646
Eastern part	35	806	434	61
Total	**3283**	**3777**	**5082**	**2993**

Source: own development based on IOM reports 2015; IOM 2016.

The research also analyses the national structure of migrants (Table 7). In 2015, among the migrant groups, Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis accounted for the highest percentage, which only confirms that the highest rates of flight were in countries plagued by internal conflicts. In 2016, this structure was already presented differently due to the greater share of residents of Sub-Saharan Africa (Kłosowicz 2014). This trend also continued in 2017, indicating that citizens of the poorest countries were also taking advantage of opportunities to reach Europe (UNHCR 2017).

Table 7. The national structure of migrants in 2015–2017 (in alphabetical order)

The country of origin of the migrants	2015	2016	2017
Afghanistan	20.2%	12.5%	–
Bangladesh	–	2.2%	10.3%
Eritrea	4.2%	5.9%	–
Gambia	–	3.2%	6.3%
Guinea	–	3.4%	9.3%
Iraq	7.1%	7.9%	–
Iran	2.1%	–	–
Mali	–	2.6%	2.2%
Morocco	–	–	5.4%
Nigeria	2.2%	10.4%	11.7%
Pakistan	2.7%	2.4%	–
Senegal	–	–	5.7%
Somalia	1.6%	2.1%	–
Sudan	–	2.8%	–
Syria	50.2%	24.1%	7.7%
Ivory Coast	–	3.2%	8.7%

Source: own development based on IOM 2015; IOM 2016; UNHCR 2017.

The European Union's response to irregular migration by sea

The migration crisis that emerged on such a large scale in the EU in 2014 required the members of the European community to take a number of measures to both eliminate its causes and minimize its effects. In the case of the analysed problem, the authors would like to draw attention to the operational activities undertaken in the Mediterranean region, which concerned the activities of the European border and Coast Guard Agency (hereinafter: Frontex) and activities under the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

In 2014, in the Mediterranean, Frontex conducted several maritime operations:

a) Aenas and Triton in the central part of the sea;
b) Hera, Minerva and Indalo in the western part of the sea;
c) Poseidon in the eastern part of the sea.

For each of them, the agency's main task was to support coastal states in controlling their external borders and to save lives at sea. According to

Mariusz Zieliński (2005), these operations have continued since 2015, but under the joint operations formula. In the same year, Frontex also took advantage of the opportunity to launch the so-called rapid intervention forces in the form of *Poseidon Rapid Intrvention* (Council of the EU and the European Council 2017). Only in 2016, the Aenas and Triton operations saved 38 750 lives. Rescue operations were carried out in Italian waters and in the Italian SAR – Search and Rescue. Operations Aenas and Triton involved 523 officers, 9 vessels, 3 aircraft, and 2 helicopters (Council of the EU and the European Council 2017). Under operations Hera, Indalo and Minerva, Frontex forces were tasked with assisting Spain in controlling illegal border crossings, including the detection of fraudulent documents. Only in two months of 2016, 1140 people were rescued and 105 officers, 3 vessels and 2 aircraft were involved in the operation (Council of the EU and the European Council 2017). As part of Operation Poseidon, EU forces supported Greece in controlling the undocumented crossing of its borders, including the registration of migrants and the organisation of their return. Frontex patrolled and controlled Greece's maritime borders in the vicinity of Turkey, as well as the Greek islands. In total, 37 479 people were rescued in 2016. To carry out this operation in 2016, 667 officers, 19 vessels, 1 aircraft, and 2 helicopters were involved.

Frontex's activities have also been complemented by a military operation codenamed EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA (hereinafter: SOPHIA; Decyzja Rady 2015/972). Launched back in 2015, the operation was designed to disrupt the operating pattern of human smugglers in the southern central Mediterranean. Given that EU forces could only operate on the high seas, their presence in the central Mediterranean was limited to saving lives at sea and monitoring and controlling suspected people smugglers. In June 1991, the Council of the EU decided to extend the mandate of the operation to include the following tasks: training of the Libyan coastguard and naval forces and enforcement of the United Nations (UN) arms embargo on Libya. In addition, the duration of the operation was extended until December 31, 2018 (Council of the EU and the European Council 2017). Support for EU forces in the region was also provided by the operation led by the North Atlantic alliance under the code name Sea Guardian, which was a continuation of operation Active Endeavour carried out in the Mediterranean.

Only in 2016, operation SOPHIA saved 179 475 lives. Thanks to its operational involvement, EU forces have managed to apprehend 101 people suspected of smuggling activities and destroyed 358 people smuggling vessels.

Following this, the mandate of the operation was expanded to include the training of officers from the Libyan Coast Guard (*Raport AI: Rządy UE zamieszane w przerażające nadużycia wobec uchodźców* 16.12.2017) and the Navy, 78 people took part (Frontex 2017).

In the opinion of the authors of this article, the EU's operational involvement at sea is undeniably to be welcomed, but the fact of the force itself – unfortunately – does not solve the problem. Most analysts agree on one thing: despite saving lives at sea, operations in the Mediterranean are supporting people smugglers. This is mainly due to the fact that the smuggling business is developing on land. Certainly, the assistance provided to migrants on the high seas is nothing more than a response to the effects of the activities of criminal groups (*Europol* n.d.). A common and solidarity-based migration and integration policy, but also action to stabilise the situation in regions affected by conflict and poverty, is therefore a major challenge, both for the EU and for the international community as a whole. Improving the situation in countries facing a number of internal economic and social problems could significantly reduce the risks associated with undocumented migration to the member states of the European Community. However, this is a long-term process, which requires joint initiatives of European countries and individual UN agendas. Therefore, EU action should also focus on internal migration and integration policies. The intra-Community experience of recent years shows us, on the one hand, the dynamics of change in this area (e.g. asylum reforms, the European Border and Coast Guard in strengthening border security or integration programmes) and, on the other hand, the problems in establishing solidarity-based refugee protection systems.

Conclusions

The problem of irregular migration by sea to the EU for political reasons was the biggest challenge facing the European Community. In less than four years, 1 659 676 people have reached Europe by sea, waiting for help from European countries. Unfortunately, around 14 000 individuals are also victims of people smuggling who have not managed to reach the Old Continent.

The situation that arose provided the impetus for a multiplicity of actions, as could be seen, e.g., in the ongoing operations in the Mediterranean. In addition to saving lives at sea, the EU has also tried to address the

problems of member states that have been most affected by migratory pressure, e.g. by introducing a mandatory quota relocation of undocumented migrants from Greek and Turkish centres for all members of the European Community. Another example is the discussion on the need to review migration policy.

The internal stabilisation of Libya, Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan, among others, will be a major support for the EU's response to the migration crisis. Stability in the region of these countries will not only make it possible to stop migration by sea and fight smugglers, but will also become the basis for long-term cooperation with the EU.

Given the EU's neighbourhood with the MENA region, it is vital to respond to emerging crises and to monitor the situation in the region and in selected countries on an ongoing basis. Too much focus on the current problems of Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan can lead to the omission of the problems of other countries, such as Algeria or Egypt, the consequences of which will again affect the treaty area. An analytical approach is very important here. It is difficult to get guarantees that countries that are now stable will not be torn apart by civil war in a few years. Sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Central African Republic are good examples. Adequate knowledge of the internal situation of selected countries and the changes taking place in them can in some way facilitate the response to emerging crises.

Analysing the statements of some representatives of European countries, the authors cannot agree with the statement that the presented scale of migration is the largest that the EU has faced. Being able to compare data on the contemporary migration crisis and the migration that affected Europe in the 1990s suggests that the scale of these phenomena is very similar. The main difference – which should be pointed out – is the concentration of migration pressure on a few EU Member States, e.g. Greece, Italy, or Bulgaria.

The analysis also found divergent views among member states on proposed responses to the crisis. These differences were due, among other things, to the fact that the migration issue was "tinged" with religious and cultural themes, which was the biggest obstacle to the search for compromises. Referring to the problems of selected countries in the MENA region and African countries, it can be concluded that, in the long term, the problem of migration can be permanently embedded in the EU's catalogue of challenges, which is why it is so important that the European community develops appropriate solutions collectively in the current situation.

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