

# LIMEN

Journal of the Hungarian Migration Research Institute

3 (2021/1)



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**Migration Research Institute**

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Limen is a semiannual International Journal  
published by the Hungarian Migration Research Institute

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## **Frontispiece:**

The Ugandan army patrolling the refugee settlement in Rwamwanja, January  
2020, photo: Sándor Jászberényi.

ISSN: 2732-0200

## **Founders:**



## Table of Contents

Johan LUNDBERG Swedish clans, criminal networks and the failure of postmodern theory	4
Gordon OCHIENG' OGUTU Refugee Host Community Development in Kenya: Approaches and Challenges	22
Márk VARGHA Before the judges. The journey of anti-immigration Matteo Salvini to the courtrooms	38
Szabolcs JANIK How EU citizens see the issue of migration – results of an EU-wide representative research	53
Péter KÖVECSI-OLÁH Muslim refugees in the process of state and society building – Turkish examples from the 19-20 <sup>th</sup> century	68
Interview with International Jurist José Luis BAZÁN Ph.D., on Christian persecution in Africa	81
Pope FRANCIS Let Us Dream: The path to a Better Future. Simon & Schuster, 2020. (160 pages) Review by Márk Vargha	89
Strategies of Resilience – Conference on Climate Change, Migration and Adaptation. Report by Kristóf György VERES	94
About the authors	96

## Before the judges. The journey of anti-immigration Matteo Salvini to the courtrooms

Márk Vargha

### Abstract

In the eyes of one half of the European press and public opinion, he is a far-right pariah, and in the eyes of the other half, a saviour of „old-fashioned Christian democracy”. Either way: Matteo Salvini is now an inescapable figure in Italian politics with a realistic chance of becoming prime minister in 2022. It also seems certain that if he moves into the Chigi Palace in Rome, he, his cabinet and his programme will come under fierce attack, as he will fight immigration not only in rhetoric but also in action, as he has already demonstrated during his short stint as interior minister. In this essay, we set out to present his anti-immigration policy activities, which cannot fail to include details of the two cases in which Salvini has fought his opponents not only on the communication and political level, but also on the legal level.

**Keywords:** Matteo Salvini, Italy, anti-immigration policy

### 1. Introduction

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In mid-2021, it looks as if, unless trends change drastically, the Italian right-wing alliance of four parties, which will run as a single party, will win 49.5% of the vote, while the left-wing alliance of three parties – whose unity is highly questionable – will win 46% in the 2022 parliamentary elections.<sup>1</sup> In the event of a right-wing victory, if the parties’ strengths remain unchanged, Matteo Salvini will become Prime Minister of Italy and will have a major influence on the political process in the European Union (EU) as a member of the European Council representing a founding member state of 60 million inhabitants.

The election victory could be a further catalyst in the process that began with the meeting of Viktor Orbán, Mateusz Morawiecki and Matteo Salvini in Budapest on 1 April 2021. It is the creation of a European right-wing force capable of providing a political home for tens of millions of voters who seek a new one, as the European People’s Party, leading the EU together with the Social Democrats and Liberals,

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<sup>1</sup> COLLUZZI 2021.

has moved towards the centre. Although the organisational implementation of this merger is still under consideration – although Salvini has more concrete plans: the merger of the European Conservatives and Reformists and the Identity and Democracy groups<sup>2</sup> – it seems certain that one of the common pillars will be the rejection of migration, and that the 'brand' of the League, one of the largest members of the alliance to be formed, has been strongly built on this in recent years, and it was also responsible for its popularity peak in the spring of 2019, when it won the European Parliament elections in Italy by a landslide.

It is therefore useful to present the party's charismatic leader's anti-migration activities, which have been marred by criminal prosecutions recently. However, it should be stressed that the League is far from being a 'one-issue' party, making its voice heard on a number of other important policy issues and confronting its current (forced) allies in Mario Draghi's government, for example on the management of epidemics.

## 2. A stable background: the League<sup>3</sup>

Matteo Salvini is known to the European public as the anti-immigration Interior Minister. However, it was not his first stint in the Conte government that gave a decisive boost to his hitherto highly successful political career. Rather, it was his earlier role as general secretary that made the Northern League, a party deeply embedded and highly organised in a section of Italian society, Italy's second political force after its historic low performance in 2012.

In February 1979, at the University of Pavia, Umberto Bossi, 38, listened to a lecture by Bruno Salvadori, the main ideologist of the still active party, the Union of the Aosta Valley (UV), who spoke about the importance of federalism in the context of the forthcoming (for the first time direct) European elections. The young Bossi was captivated by the idea and soon began his long political career as a local man in the UV-led coalition of 19 regionalist movements, which won 0.47% of the vote in the EP elections. (The career is still on-going, as the politician is still a senator.)

As he, himself saw that the deepening of European integration could jeopardise the regional specificities of Italy, which, historically, are far more important than the national, Bossi decided to put his skills, as an author and editor - although he

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<sup>2</sup> KOHÁN 2021.

<sup>3</sup> The content of this section is a summary of BALOCCO – MAGGIORA 2021.

had trained as an electronics technician - at the service of the regional movements in the north. After a brief stint in the North West, he was responsible for the newspaper *Autonomista Lombardia*. In 1983, he stood, for the first time, in elections in Lombardy for the List of Trieste. Even though the Friulian city is closer to Lake Balaton than to Lake Varese, around which the founder grew up, Bossi and his comrades-in-arms still received more than 8,000 votes in the four Lombardy constituencies in which they stood. Meanwhile, in the neighbouring province, the League of Veneto did particularly well, with two of its members entering the Roman parliament.

Buoyed by their relative successes, the time had come to form their own formation: the Lombard Autonomist League was born on 12 April 1984. Together with several 'neighbouring' regionalist parties, it stood in the forthcoming EP elections, but failed to win a seat. However, some of them were elected to local councils. On 21 March 1986, the party changed its name to the Lombard League and its internal processes became more democratic, although Bossi's role as general secretary remained unquestioned. They 'exploded' into public consciousness during the parliamentary elections held the following summer, when Bossi was elected senator. Two years later, he could have become a Member of the European Parliament, but he decided not to swap his seat in Rome for the one in Strasbourg.

From then on, the party found itself in the throes of history. On the one hand, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Cold War ended and the Iron Curtain fell. This also affected the Italian (almost) two-party system: the Communist Party (PCI) was drawn towards the centre and became more electable for a wider section of the population, while the Christian Democratic Party (DC), which had been the sole party on the right since the end of the Second World War and had been forced to govern, at best occasionally, in conjunction with various small parties, collapsed under the weight of the Tangentopoli corruption scandal and was torn apart. Voters needed clean hands and fresh ideas. This development undoubtedly put Bossi's party in the driving seat: in the 1990 municipal elections they were already third in Lombardy behind the DC and the PCI. Two weeks later, in Pontida, a small town near Bergamo, the Northern League (LN) unfurled its flag at a historic site (it was here that the Lombard army defeated Frederick Barbarossa in 1167). At that time, its main agenda was federalisation, i.e. the independence of the economically developed northern provinces from the rest of Italy. They sharply criticised 'thieving Rome' (*Roma ladrona*) for using the resources from the

economic growth generated by the north to develop the poor southern provinces without spectacular results. The president of the republic and the Roman Catholic Church were also critical of 'Legizm', but the non-establishment party was increasingly successful in elections at various levels. In 1993, the League candidate won the mayoral elections in Milan with an outstanding 57% of the vote. From then on, the party was seen as a stable player in Italian politics, a position it has maintained ever since.

The second era in the history of the LN thus began with the rally on the field of Pontida<sup>4</sup> and continued with their entry into the first Berlusconi government (11 May 1994 – 17 January 1995). The LN was given a number of important portfolios and Irene Pivetti became the second woman in the history of the country to chair the Chamber of Deputies. However, in addition to Forza Italia (FI), the cabinet also included the post-fascist party (MSI), popular in the South (from which grew the Fratelli d'Italia [FdI] a.k.a. Brothers of Italy, the League's current rival on the Italian right). In the wake of mounting tensions, the government collapsed and a caretaker government of experts was set up, supported by the LN. This put the LN on the same platform as the left, whose then leader did not rule out the possibility of including the LN in the government if it was formed, because „it is the largest Labour party in the North, like it or not.” Berlusconi interpreted this rapprochement as a betrayal, and Bossi and Berlusconi had harsh words for each other. After the elections, a socialist-liberal-centrist coalition government was formed, but the LN was not needed for a majority.

The secretary general then concentrated on building the party and strengthening the identity of northern Italy. He now set his sights on the complete secession of Padania (*secessione*), formed his own police force under the name of the Padanian National Guard, designed a flag, adopted an anthem, ran a parallel parliament, and later founded his own television and radio channels, a daily newspaper and even a bank. But as elections approached, Bossi realised that the only way the LN would be able to get into government was to move closer to Berlusconi again and to tune down its separatist rhetoric. Thus, the party's goal in the campaign was simply to give the country's regions (not just the north) as much autonomy as possible, i.e. as many powers as possible, while the central government had as little as possible (*devolution* is the English word the Liga use to describe their desire).

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<sup>4</sup>In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a league was formed by the northern Italian cities (Mantua, Brescia, Bergamo and other communes, city-states) in the north of Italy that protested against the rule and policies of Frederick Barbarossa.

They have been in government with Berlusconi twice since. The first was between 11 June 2001 – the third chapter in the party’s history – and 17 May 2006, when the LN had a major success and a major failure. The success: the first anti-illegal immigration law (the so-called Bossi-Fini law) was passed. The failure: a referendum on constitutional change on devolution, which was valid but 61.3% of those who took part rejected the idea. Italians apparently did not want, for example, 20 different healthcare systems. It was also a personal failure for Bossi, who for the first time in his career held a ministerial post, and the one responsible for devolution.

The second time was between 8 May 2008 and 16 November 2011, when the joint government ended with Berlusconi’s resignation. The failure was due, in no small part, to the fact that, like his left-wing predecessors, he was unable to implement far-reaching reforms to boost productivity. The uncompetitive economy could not cope with the effects of the global financial crisis on Italy. And after the government, Bossi also flopped: the corruption scandals that erupted in 2012 were traced back to him, and even members of his family caused deep disappointment not only among party members – €49 million in party subsidies had to be paid back to the treasury – but also among the electorate. The most striking evidence of the latter was the loss of the contest for the mayoralty of Milan. The Northern League, in the doldrums, needed to be cleansed of the shadows of the past, a task that, after a transitional period, was now awaiting Matteo Salvini. He ushered in the party’s fourth era, which continues today.

Salvini joined the Northern League in 1990, at the age of 17, and became a municipal councillor in the northern Italian metropolis at the age of 20, when he conquered Milan. In addition to his political activities, he worked for the party newspaper *La Padania*, and later for *Radio Padania*. He was a Member of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2006, before returning home after the 2006 municipal elections to become leader of the LN parliamentary group in Milan. In 2008 he was elected to the lower house of the Parliament, but in 2009 he returned to Strasbourg to work as a MEP. Under his leadership, the party, in alliance with *Forza Italia* and the *Brothers of Italy*, won two important victories in the 2015 regional elections: in Veneto, Luca Zaia of the League, while in Liguria, Giovanni Toti of *Forza Italia* became regional governor. In 2018, as the silver medallist in the parliamentary

elections, the League, after lengthy negotiations, formed a coalition with the gold medallist anti-establishment outfit, the Five Star Movement. Salvini reached the peak of his career, becoming interior minister and deputy prime minister in Giuseppe Conte's first government. The League's record in government has been a clear political success: in 2019, it won the European Parliament elections with a record 34% of the vote. After leaving government, this support began to decline, but in 2020, with two natural allies on the right, they were able to win new regions from the left, now in opposition: Jole Santelli (FI) in Calabria and Francesco Aquaroli (FdI) in Marche were helped to power by the League voters, while Toti and Zaia secured themselves another five-year term with much higher margins of victory than before (53.13% and 76.79% respectively).

### 3. Immigration in the party's 2018 election manifesto

The League prepared a 71-page manifesto<sup>5</sup> for the parliamentary elections on 4 March 2018. It covered 27 topics, with *Immigration* coming third right after *Taxes* and *Pensions*, demonstrating how important the party considers the issue to be in this day and age. The three-page chapter is divided into four sections, preceded by a basic premise: „No one should feel forced to leave their country and their roots for economic reasons. We can help the disadvantaged countries of the planet by supporting local projects, not by welcoming everyone. Italy will not become Africa!”

The first part is entitled: *Immigration regulation and repatriations*. It talks about changing the rules of reception centres and the need to conclude bilateral agreements on readmission with countries of origin. The second part is entitled: *International protection*. It proposes that reception centres be set up in countries bordering Libya under the auspices of the United Nations, with Italy playing a role in their maintenance. Furthermore: the docking of NGO vessels should be banned, the refugee status of criminals should be withdrawn, the conditions for granting humanitarian protection should be tightened, a list of safe third countries should be drawn up and the daily allowance of an immigrant should not be more than that of an invalidity pensioner. The text stresses that the focus should be on helping Italians living in poverty and that, in particular, families with three or more children should be supported in order to bring about a positive demographic change. In the third section, entitled *The perpetrators of irregular migration*, the party calls for a fight against people smugglers. The fourth and fifth sections deal

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<sup>5</sup> LEGA 2018.

with issues of residence and citizenship, while the fifth, entitled *Relations with Islam*, would, among other things, ban polygamy, public prayer, the prospect of the expulsion of students who disobey their female teachers on religious grounds. The document also raises funding problems and stresses the need to create financial transparency for Islam in Italy.

## **4. Salvini as the Minister of the Interior: actions against illegal migration<sup>6</sup>**

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### **4.1 The approach to immigration of the first Conte Government**

In June 2018, as a result of lengthy bargaining, Gentiloni's left-wing government was replaced by a coalition of the mixed-ideology proto-party, the Five Star Movement led by Luigi Di Maio, and the radical right-wing League, led by Matteo Salvini, which had been a regional minor party but had become a centre party with a strong national base; Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, a law professor, nominated by the Five Stars, and deputised by the party presidents Di Maio as Minister of Social Affairs and Labour and Salvini as Minister of the Interior.

Point 13 of the 57-page government programme deals with migration. It states that the current migration situation is unsustainable for Italy. Migration is a serious business, sustained by funds that are less transparent and linked to organised crime. The failure of the asylum system raises the need to rethink the Schengen system. Italy, given its merits, must play a leading role at the European negotiating table. The pressure on the external borders must be reduced as well as the disproportionate burden on the Italian coastguard, which other European states are not willing to share, must be reviewed (it should be noted that the Visegrad Four offered €35 million in aid for Italian maritime border protection at the end of last year). It proposed to speed up the processing of asylum applications, designate safe countries of origin and transit, provide protection in the countries of origin and harmonise the quality of current protection with international standards, while respecting constitutional rights.

The section on migration also identifies, as a serious problem, the opaque and confusing management of NGOs providing services to asylum seekers in the country, which makes it impossible to monitor the proper use of public funds allocated to them (in particular, the failure to ensure that the mafia is excluded from these funds

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<sup>6</sup> The content of this section is a summary of JANIK – TÓTH – VARGHA 2019.

is a matter of concern). The need for agreements with third countries, the policy of „local aid” and the fight against human trafficking groups (all of which are in line with the Hungarian government’s position) are mentioned. The document also makes clear the heavy burden that migration management places on public administrations and budgets. The final section draws attention to the lack of state regulation of the conditions of Islamic religious life, the exposure of mosque-going communities to radical ideas and the lack of embeddedness in local societies.

#### **4.2 The first package of Salvini (Decreto di Sicurezza)**

The Interior Minister himself, who is responsible for drafting the migration legislation, has repeatedly stated that if Europe does not fulfil its duty of solidarity in terms of distribution, it will turn back the boats rescuing migrants towards Africa, i.e. not allow them to dock. (See the case of Gregoretti and Open Arms below, in sections 5.2 and 5.3.) This happened regularly during Salvini’s time as interior minister. Each case has been met with strong protests from rights organisations and with increased media attention. At the same time, the Italian government has also taken humanitarian concerns into account, with sick people, minors and pregnant women being taken off the ships.

The Diciotti rescue boat case in August 2018, when Salvini allowed the boat to dock in Catania, Sicily, but refused to allow the adult migrants, 150 in total, to disembark, also caused domestic political tensions. The decision was strongly criticised not only by the left-liberal opposition but also by coalition partners, such as the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Roberto Fico. Prime Minister Conte called Salvini on the phone and told him that, although he was of course on his side, he had to resolve this issue, i.e. allow the migrants to leave. In response, the Interior Minister indicated that he would not budge an inch, and that if Conte or the President of the Republic wanted to take action, they should. However, he added that the long-term solution was to adopt the strict Australian model, whereby no one would be allowed to enter Europe without official papers. In an interview, Salvini said he was fed up with migrants doing nothing all day in cities, costing the country €5 billion per year. He also added that he feels a responsibility towards others: the 5 million Italians living in poverty, the 1 million people living on a 278 euro salary who are mentally handicapped or disabled, children with autism, teachers, farmers, small businessmen, lorry drivers. It has taken the moral condemnation of a Europe that has only managed to take in 12,000 migrants instead of 35,000 – a reference to the failed implementation of the 2015 quota decision.

In autumn 2018, the Italian Parliament adopted a law on migration and security, known as the „first Salvini package”. It included:

1. Humanitarian protection (since 1998) was extended - in the form of a different type of residence permit – to those who would be subject to persecution in their home country or would be victims of forced labour or trafficking in human beings. The majority of asylum applications submitted in 2017 were rejected. The distribution of positive decisions among all applicants was as follows: 25% were granted humanitarian protection, 8% refugee status and 8% protection status. It was therefore likely, as argued by the Home Secretary, that many economic migrants who did not qualify for refugee or protection status were residing legally in the country by abusing this legal status.
2. Raising the 90-day maximum limit for asylum detention in repatriation centres to 180 days.
3. Creating the possibility to detain migrants after entry by allowing asylum seekers to be held in hotspots for 30 days. The aim is to clarify their identity and nationality. They will then be transferred to repatriation centres, but may be kept in hotspots longer at the request of the notary, with the authorisation of the competent public authority, if there is insufficient space in the repatriation centres.
4. Provide more resources for repatriations: half a million more for 2018, one and a half million more for 2019 and half a million more for 2020.
5. The list of offences on the basis of which asylum applications may be rejected will include sexual violence, production, possession and trafficking of drugs, robbery and extortion, theft, burglary, threatening or assaulting a public official. The examination of an application may be suspended if the applicant is being prosecuted for an offence punishable by refusal of asylum while the application is being examined. Furthermore, if a refugee or a protected person returns, even temporarily, to his/her country of origin, he/she loses his/her status.
6. Only persons who have refugee or asylum status or unaccompanied minors may stay in accommodation in the municipalities.
7. Asylum seekers cannot be registered in the civil registry.
8. The amendment to the law on citizenship has made it possible to refuse to register a marriage to an Italian citizen. The application fee has been increased from €200 to €250 and the time limit for approval has been set at 48 months. Citizenship may be refused and citizenship already granted may

be withdrawn from a person who has been convicted by a final judgment of a criminal offence related to terrorist activities. (In addition, there are measures in the Regulation not related to migration but aimed at increasing citizens' sense of security.)

#### **4.3 The second package of Salvini (Decreto di Sicurezza bis)**

In the summer of 2019, the Parliament adopted the second package of Salvini's toughening legislation. These focus on maritime rescue can be summarised as follows:

1. The Minister of the Interior may restrict or prohibit the passage of vessels through Italian territorial waters or the docking of vessels in Italian ports for reasons of public order or security. It may do the same if the crew of the vessel is suspected of committing an offence of facilitating illegal immigration.
2. The captain may also be immediately arrested for disobeying naval orders or committing an act of violence.
3. If the lawfulness of the seizure of the vessel is confirmed, it shall become the property of the State, which may use it, sell it or destroy it two years after its confiscation.
4. The other provisions deal with procedural and financial matters. The additional resources foreseen for repatriation in 2020 are increased fourfold to €2 million.

In 2018, there were 5 615 repatriations for every 27 070 rejected applications, which in percentage terms (24%) was a significant improvement compared to the previous year (19.4%).

#### **4.4 Result: significant reduction in maritime migration**

Salvini's heavy-handed policy, which focused on the protection of maritime borders and which was criticised by the European mainstream as inhumane and a „trampling on European values”, has found sympathy in Italian society and among politicians opposed to the European mainstream. If we consider the possibilities and capabilities of Libya's border protection largely unchanged under the first Conte and Gentiloni governments, it can be said that this policy, coupled with a particularly hostile and blame-based communication towards Germany and France, proved to

be more effective than the previous ones. While arrivals from Lybia (Africa) fell by 34% year-on-year in 2017, in 2018 they were down by 80% on the previous year. And this trend was not broken for a long time: in the first half of 2019, arrivals were 79% down compared to the same period in 2018. However, the estimated number of drownings at sea is also on a downward trend: 37% fewer people died in the 2016/2017 and 54% fewer in the 2017/2018 crossings.

## 5. Criminal proceedings against Salvini

### 5.1 The Diciotti case

The first case in which Salvini was prosecuted was that of the Diciotti ship. On 16 August 2018, this Coast Guard vessel rescued 190 migrants, including 37 minors, from the sea off the coast of Malta. Although the migrants' boat had been berthed for two days, Malta, which is not party to the rescue conventions to which Italy is, did not carry out a rescue operation. So the Italian boat took on board the people in distress, put thirteen of them ashore on Lampedusa for urgent medical reasons and took the others to Catania, where it docked. A long-running dispute then ensued between the Italian and Maltese sides over whose duty it was to rescue the passengers, and the captain was refused permission to disembark by the Ministry of the Interior on 20 May. He was only allowed to do so on the 26th.<sup>7</sup>

The case never reached the pre-trial stage. First the Palermo prosecutor's office proposed that Salvini be charged with a serious case of kidnapping, then the case was referred to the Catania prosecutor's office, which did not recommend that the case be prosecuted. The decision to proceed was taken by the Catania Ministerial Court, sitting in a three-member chamber, which refused to dismiss the case. This court could request the waiver of immunity, which was granted.<sup>8</sup> However, as Salvini's League was still in government with the Five Star Movement at the time, the ruling majority in parliament came together against the waiver of immunity, and many opposition votes were also cast. On 20 March 2019, 237 senators voted against the waiver of immunity and only 61 voted in favour.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> CAMILLI 2019.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO 2019.

## 5.2 The Gregoretti case

On 25 July 2019, after two separate operations by the Finance Police and the Coast Guard to rescue migrants, the Gregoretti boat picked them up and brought them to Lampedusa. It was then given permission to dock first in Catania and then in Augusta on the 27th, but the Ministry of the Interior did not allow most of the migrants to disembark until the 31st. The total number of passengers was 131, but only a 29-year-old woman, eight months pregnant, and fifteen minors were allowed to disembark.

Several NGOs have initiated criminal proceedings against Salvini for the crime of kidnapping. His immunity was suspended by both houses of parliament, and during the proceedings Salvini defended himself by claiming that he had acted in collusion with other members of the government. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and other ministers were also heard.<sup>10</sup>

The preliminary proceedings, at the end of which the court, acting as a single judge, would decide whether to proceed to trial, ended with a negative decision on 14 May 2021. On the proposal of the Catania Public Prosecutor's Office (*procura*), Judge Nunzio Sarpietro's decision was based on the grounds that Salvini had not violated international law, that the government had decided the matter collectively and that the minister's behaviour was not that of a kidnapper.<sup>11</sup>

## 5.3 The Open Arms case

On 1 August 2019, the NGO ship Open Arms took 161 migrants, including 32 Kiksiris, on board in Libyan waters during two rescue operations. The Interior Ministry allowed only three people in a medical crisis to disembark. On the 10th, another 39 people were rescued from the sea by the crew. The ship remained at sea for 19 days, during which time several people were allowed to disembark to receive medical treatment. The case ended with Agrigento's prosecutor boarding the vessel, where he seized it on suspicion of abuse of authority and ordered the passengers to be taken ashore. On the 20th, in Lampedusa, 83 passengers were affected.

It should be noted that Open Arms' lawyers have also challenged the legal basis itself, the Decreto di Sicurezza Bis, in the administrative court in Lazio.

<sup>10</sup> CAMILLI 2020a.

<sup>11</sup> DE LUCA 2021.

In November 2019, the prosecutor's office in Agrigento opened an investigation on suspicion of kidnapping and continued abuse of office, and the case was continued by the prosecutor's office in Palermo, which requested a ruling from the Ministerial Court on 29 November. In February 2020, the judiciary decided to request the waiver of immunity, which was granted by the Senate on 30 July 2020, with 147 votes in favour and 141 against.<sup>12</sup>

During the preliminary proceedings, Salvini defended himself in a similar way as in the Gregoretti case, but while the Gregoretti was a state vessel, which he could directly control as a state leader, the Spanish Open Arms is a civilian rescue vessel. Moreover, Giuseppe Conte has denied that he collaborated with Salvini in the Open Arms case, backing away from his former minister in his pleas. Judge Lorenzo Janelli decided that a trial was in order and set the first hearing for 15 September 2021.<sup>13</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

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Above, we have reviewed how Matteo Salvini became one of the best known of Europe's leading anti-migration politicians. We can see that he needed a strong political organisation with a long history, free from conflict, and therefore united. He needed the political talent to take up an issue on which he could distinguish himself from the mainstream in the Italian and European political space. He needed a coalition agreement in which he could secure a portfolio in line with his tangible agenda on migration. And finally, he needed a consistently implemented, high-profile ministerial deal and the procedures that followed to help him stay in the limelight.

There is no getting away from the fact that, however important a position he has put his like-minded party colleague in the current unity government<sup>14</sup> led by Mario Draghi, the second Conte government's lenient migration policy is apparently not going to change.

It is impossible to predict the outcome of the Open Arms case, which has reached the trial stage, but it is certain that Salvini will be a hero in the eyes of his supporters if he is acquitted, and a martyr if he is convicted. Then comes the next dilemma: if he will be the next prime minister of Italy, in the midst of solving Italy's economic and social problems, how long can any political advantage he gains in the prosecution last?

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<sup>12</sup> CAMILLI 2020b.

<sup>13</sup> RAINNEWS 2021.

<sup>14</sup> VARGHA 2021.

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