

# Migration and Municipal Militancy in the Mediterranean

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**EuroMedMig**



EuroMed Research Network on Migration



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*Migration and municipal militancy in  
the Mediterranean*

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## Background Rationale and Content

- In July 2018, a Euro-Mediterranean Research Network on Migration (*EuroMedMig*) was launched during the 15<sup>th</sup> IMISCOE Annual Conference in Barcelona, with an initial composition of 18 Members in the Steering Committee. Countries covered are: Algeria, Belgium, Egypt, Europe (EUI), Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, France, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Norway, Netherlands, Tunisia and Turkey. It has initially received institutional support from The Union for the Mediterranean and academically recognized as an IMISCOE Regional Network.
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## *Abstract*

From the US to Italy, from Brazil to Japan, cities from all over the world are increasingly vocal on migration issues. Advocating for alternative approach to immigrants' welcome, their stand and policies may at times be in blunt contradiction with national approaches. This paper gives an overview of this new form of urban militancy, its recent evolution, its forms, its networks. Drawing on case studies in France, Spain and Italy, it seeks to explain why the Mediterranean has been an important setting for the politicisation of municipal involvement. The recent Palermo Platform Process shows how the combination of the support civil society organisations and the driving force of influential mayors has allowed the upscaling of such commitment at a European scale.

## *Keywords*

City networks, migration governance, France, Italy, Spain

## *Author's biographical note*



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**Filippo Furri** is PhD Candidate in Anthropology, Université de Montreal: his research focuses on migration and european reception policies. In particular, he has been working for several yearson “local/urban hospitality” and on the notion of a “refuge city”. Currently he is a researcher associated with the MECMI (UQAM-LESC 2018-2021) research program (death in a migratory context) and with the Ecos-Sud C17H01 program (2018-2021): « La construction nationale à l’épreuve de l’"étranger” ». He is member of the Euro-African Network Migreurop, which analyzes European migration policies, and since 2018 he works as consultant for the ICRC and orther organizations (as Majalat/EuromedRights).

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## Introduction

City networks involved in migration issues have mushroomed over the world. Some gather a few cities from a local or a national area, others spread their connections at continental or even global scales; some nurture a political agenda challenging migration policies, others provide guidance in immigrant integration; some are spontaneous initiatives of like-minded mayors, others are sponsored by national and international organisations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe or the High Commission for Refugees (HCR) (Lacroix, forthcoming). The European Union has been a fertile ground for the development of such networks (Oomen 2019; Caponio 2018). Over the last two decades, the European Union and their member states have increasingly relied on cities and their groupings to support the implementation of a new generation of integration policies. A wealth of projects, institutions and forums have been funded by the EU and other international organisations to support city-level initiatives. But, with the security turn endorsed by state authorities in migration management, and more recently, the upcoming of populist leaders to official responsibilities, a new range of networks have appeared. More militant, more politicised, they express a critical voice with regard to current policies and advocate for alternative approaches to migration management.

The so-called “migration crisis” in 2015 and 2016 exacerbated the mobilisations of cities. Cities facing the emergency of the immediate needs of exiles arriving in their constituency filled the void left by the paralysis of national governments. In this context the Mediterranean area, epicentre of the tensions between national actors, police agencies, migrants, NGOs and local authorities, has been the crucible of intercity mobilisations. The rich associational landscape, the drowning of migrant boats and the criminalisation of pro-immigrant support, the surge of populist parties and counter movement of solidarity have formed the background against which city militancy in migration-related issues thrived.

This new generation of city network has received lesser scholarly scrutiny. Focusing on the Mediterranean, this paper examines the networking dynamics at play among politicised city movements. This paper is the outcome of an ongoing research programme named “Localacc” funded by the Institut Convergence Migrations. The research design combines different methodologies: a database analysis of networks around the world, participant observation of city networks in Europe, case-study analysis on municipalities involved in city partnerships, interviews with local, national and international stakeholders. This paper more specifically benefits from case studies undertaken in Spain, Italy and France, participant observation in the Sea to City campaign and interviews with actors of the Global Compact for orderly and safe migrations. It shows that these networks are primarily embedded in their national contexts. And

yet, one observes an effort to bridge current mobilisations and upscale their activism at a cross-Mediterranean level. The analysis highlights the influential role of certain mayors and civil society movements spanning borders.

Their respective role will be illustrated by the presentation of an ongoing initiative led by a group of NGOs, Open Arms and Seebrücke, with the support of two cities, Palermo and Barcelona, the Palermo Charter Platform Process (PCPP). Before presenting these different initiatives, we will give a brief overview of extant dynamics of migration-related city networking in Europe and beyond.

### **1. City networking and migration: from policy support to political activism**

In Europe, the spread of city networks is embedded into the building of the European Union. Supported by the European authorities, cities have played an important role in the structuration of a European political space (Van der Knaap 1994). The Assembly of the European Region and the Committee for European Municipalities and Region were incorporated in the institutional architecture of the Commission in the early nineties to establish a communication channel between Brussels and subnational governments. In parallel, Eurocities, a grouping of “secondary cities” such as Barcelona, Birmingham or Lyon (mostly large European cities which are not state capitals), was founded in 1989. It has gradually been incorporated in the European institutional framework as a key partner for policy implementation. It now counts 190 members across EU countries and beyond. During the last two decades, local authorities have gradually been granted a larger portfolio of responsibilities in the economic, social or cultural domains. Against this background, the European Union increasingly relies on cities and their networks to support the implementation of integration policies (Caponio & Borkert 2010). In 2002, the European Union launched its new urban cooperation programme named “URBACT”. Endowed with lesser financial means than its predecessor “URBAN”, this new programme primarily aims at favouring knowledge sharing and networking (Russeil & Healy, 2015). Since the early 2000s, a flurry of new networks and institutions have been created (Arrival cities, Open cities, Integrating Cities, Solidarity cities, CLIP, Intercultural Cities, etc.), while migration and integration issues became high on the agenda of older organisations. These networks also share similar purposes, such as supporting project-building endeavours and the dissemination of best practices. They have largely contributed to promoting the concept of diversity in the integration agenda of European cities.

More recently, the security turn taken by the European management of migrant populations spurred the emergence of a new generation of city networks. The history of this form

of urban militancy can be traced back in the eighties in the United States (Lippert & Rehaag, 2012; Ridgley, 2008). In the early eighties, in the Reagan organisations refused to acknowledge the status of refugee to immigrants fleeing conflicts in Central America (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador). In reaction, church organisations called for “civil disobedience”, advocating for the reception and support of exiles in defiance of the national policy. San Francisco, in 1985, became the first “sanctuary city” by refusing to support immigration enforcement in its constituency. The movement spread over the US in the following years, before becoming dormant with the end of the refugee wave in the early nineties. It gained momentum once again in the early 2000s with the surge of undocumented population. The Clinton laws following the Oklahoma bombings and the Patriot act following the World Trade Centre bombing triggered an increase of undocumented people by putting an end to the residence permit of people who had committed an infraction (Boe, 2020). In this context, the sanctuary city movement reactivated to prevent the identification and deportation of people with no legal permit of residence. It now includes nearly 200 members in the US and eleven in Canada.

The City of Sanctuary network in the United Kingdom is, in that regard, a forerunner in Europe. Although their names are similar, the UK movement is not an offshoot of its US counterpart. It was launched in 2005 in the wake of the reform of the asylum policy undertaken by the Cameron government. The reform led to the scattering of refugees and asylum seekers over the British territory, thereby leading to the formation of refugee communities in places which had never hosted such a population before. This scattering triggered a mobilisation first of civil society organisations and then of municipalities willing to undertake welcoming policies towards refugees. The network now boasts 110 cities in the UK and Ireland (Darling, Barnett, & Eldridge 2010). This type of network spawned from 2015 onward, with the surge of asylum seekers coming from Africa and the Middle East: the Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants in France, the Communes hospitalières in Belgium, the Fearless cities or Solidarity cities in Europe and beyond, etc.

The European movement differs from the North American one in their primary target: asylum seekers, on the one hand, undocumented people on the other. But, together, they form a body of militant organisations that differ greatly from the co-opted networks created with the support of European and international institutions. While co-opted networks benefit from public funding since their foundation, militant ones are grassroots endeavours. While the former tends to be grounded in partnerships with international and European institutions, the latter tend to collaborate with civil society organisations. While the former have been part and parcel of a reform of migration policies, the latter were triggered by the consequences of migration policies.



While the former are trans-european, the latter have, more often than not, a national scope. While the former focus on integration and diversity at large, the latter focus on more contentious issues: the welcoming policies of recently arrived or in transit migrants (in Europe); the provision of services to undocumented people (mostly in the US). Their claims encroach on domains usually reserved to national authorities: the attribution of visas and immigrants' rights in a variety of domains (welfare, education, housing, etc.). This distinction between the two categories of networks may be, at times, difficult: as will be seen in the Spanish case, city networks with public funding may also target the welcoming of asylum seekers and organisations such as Eurocities are vocal advocates for a more open approach to immigration. And conversely, one may find examples of grassroots networks seeking to pragmatically fill a void in the national policy agenda without politicised aims. Militant and co-opted networks are two poles of a gradient of militancy from the most to the less confrontational ones. And yet, understanding the respective dynamics of both kinds of networks is key to comprehend how policy agendas are shaped, circulate and transform in the realm of migration governance.

The “firewall” policy is a case in point. First implemented in the US, this policy aims at avoiding any provision of support and information to immigration enforcement authorities that might lead to deportation. This includes the absence of request of any proof of residency or the absence of automatic transfer of any relevant information (Crépeau & Hastie, 2015). A few cities such as New York have been as far as providing a municipal ID card enabling undocumented people to have access to the range of local welfare services (De Graauw, 2014). In Europe, the notion of firewall was spread in policy circles by organisations such as the European Council of Refugees and Exile or NGOs such as C-MISE or the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants. But it never really took hold in European cities. By contrast, thanks to an active lobbying of cities such as New York or Bristol, this notion largely informed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Legal Migration (GCM) signed in Marrakech in 2018. The document mentions “local authorities” fourteen times, making clear that the latter are key partners for its implementation. Even if the term firewall does not appear in the document, it did in preliminary versions and was part of the discussion process that predated its signature. The goal 15, for which the imprint of local authorities has been the most decisive (Thouez, forthcoming), introduces the principle of a “non-discriminatory access” (meaning whatever the legal status) to health services and education. As stated by the objective 15(e): “Incorporate the health needs of migrants into national and local health-care policies and plans, such as by strengthening capacities for service provision, facilitating affordable and non-discriminatory access (...) and 15 (f): “Provide inclusive and equitable quality education to migrant children

and youth, as well as facilitate access to lifelong learning opportunities, including by strengthening the capacities of education systems and by facilitating non-discriminatory access to early childhood development”.

This appearance of the notion of firewall in the GCM is a rare of example of grassroots militant mobilisation whose outcome has been upscaled at the global level. Most remain confined at the national level. In addition, these mobilisations have been restricted to the support of migrants’ rights already settled in the arrival cities. International City of Refuge Network is an interesting exception. This network of cities was launched after an initiative of the International Parliament of Writers (IPW) in 1993, with the aim to host artists whose life is at threat in their country of origin. The initiative was spurred by Jacques Derrida, Vaclav Havel and other writers in the wake of the Salman Rushdie affair. It is, to our knowledge, the only network facilitating the migration of individuals and not their settlement only.

The following section presents the emergence and evolution of militant city networks in three countries: Spain, France and Italy. It examines the conditions of their initiation and upscaling, the role of civil society organisations, the issues driving their involvement and their positioning with regard to state authorities.

## **2. Urban militancy: France, Spain, Italy**

In the second part of this paper, the reader will find a descriptive account of municipal militancy in three Mediterranean states. Its aim is to elicit a reflection on the emergence of this phenomenon and the key factors that underpin their development. As mentioned in the introduction, this study is part and parcel of a wider research programme on welcoming policies undertaken by cities and city networks in Europe and North America. The case studies are still under way at the times these words are being written. They mostly draw on Internet search and interviews with stakeholders (leaders of associations and representatives of cities and city networks). The section on the Palermo Process is informed by participant observation in the Sea-to-city campaign. Authors have attended the online preparatory meetings and launch of the campaign. It was complemented by interviews with NGOs representatives (Open Arms and Seebrücke) and city networks (ANVITA, ReCoSol).

### ***2.1 France: the ANVITA***

There is a long history of involvement of French cities on migration issues. The “politique de la ville” launched in the eighties, granted to cities a larger role in the management of poverty in working-class neighbourhoods, with a specific salience on immigrant integration (Epstein et

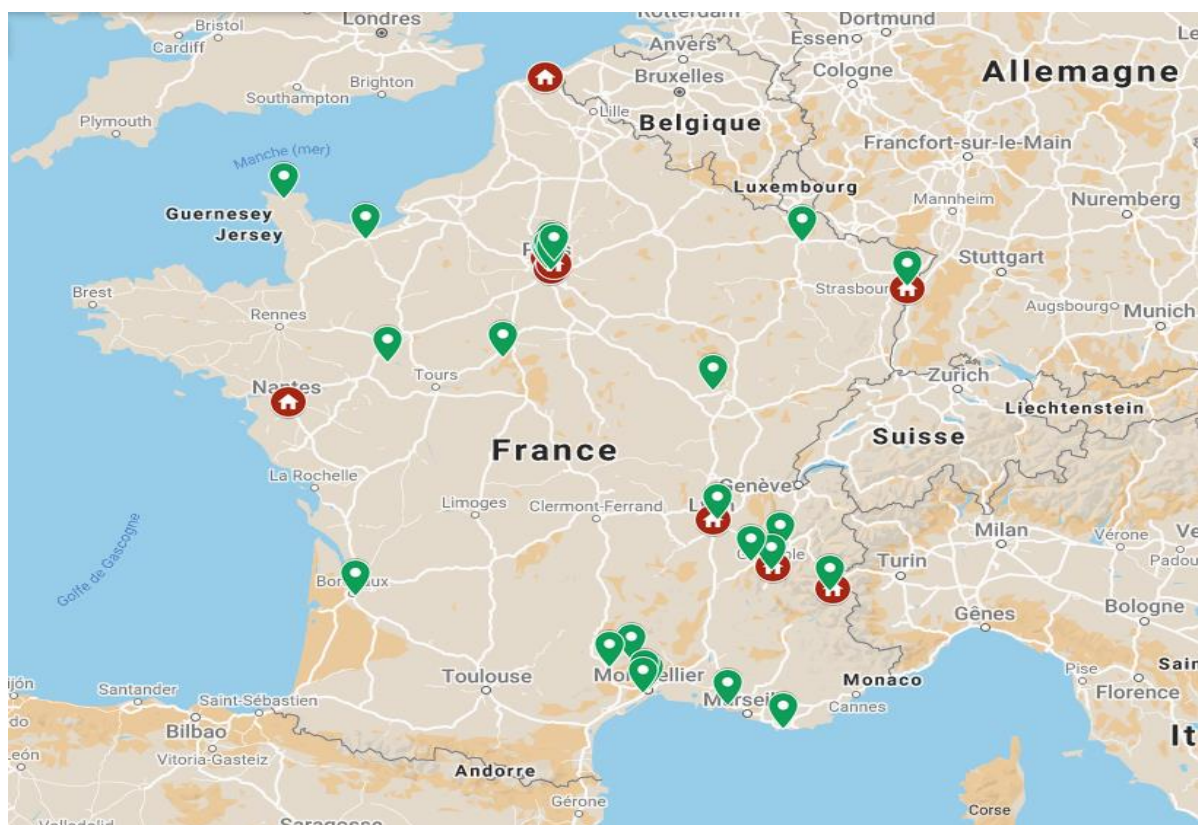
Kirszbaum 2019). Large French cities such as Lyon, Nantes, Strasbourg or Lille have been relatively involved in European city networks such as Eurocities (Flamant 2014). But a more militant stance is observed since 2015. A case in point is the creation of the *Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants* (ANVITA) in France. A turning point was the decision to open a humanitarian camp in the city of Grande-Synthes. In March 2016, taking an opposite stance to Calais, the mayor of Grande-Synthes chose to open a reception camp for transit immigrants in accordance with the UNHCR standard. A second camp was opened in Paris few months later. The aim was not only to respond to pressing needs regarding the dire situation of immigrants, but also to propose a counter humanitarian model to the security-oriented management that prevailed in Calais. The camps crystallised the media attention: it was the first time that mayors were asserting such a stand against the grain of current immigration policies. A second step was taken after the dismantling of the Calais “Jungle” in October 2016. The disbanding of the camp was followed by the resettlement of the immigrant population in other parts of France, including in smaller cities and villages that had not been concerned by the inflows of refugees until then. This triggered a demand for more resources, skills and guidance. The reception of immigrants was done on a voluntary basis. It brought to the light that a sizeable proportion of local authorities (and their population) was actually willing to receive immigrants. Finally, in December 2017, a petition was published in the newspaper *Le Monde*, signed by mayors of large cities in France (including Bordeaux, Lille and Strasbourg<sup>1</sup>). The petition asked for more financial support to enable local authorities to cater for the needs of vulnerable immigrants in wintertime. But the text also asked to relax the police pressure on immigrants. The petition was signed by mayors belonging to both right and left parties. It revealed that the opposition to the state policy did not follow the right/left cleavage. This mobilisation prefigured the creation of the ANVITA in September 2018. At its core stands the group of municipal leaders from the Green Party led by Damien Carême, the mayor of Grande-Synthe. Beyond this municipality, the founding members include Grenoble (green), the 1<sup>st</sup> arrondissement of Lyon (PS), Ivry s/Seine (communist), Montreuil (communist), Briançon (socialist), Nantes (socialist), Strasbourg (socialist), Saint-Denis (communist). The aim of the network is to promote a policy and practices articulated around the principle of unconditional welcoming (*accueil inconditionnel*). Since its creation, the context of emergency urged the involvement of new cities less for ideological reasons than for pragmatic reasons: the immediate needs for support and

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<sup>1</sup> «Face aux flux migratoires, nous, les maires, sommes au pied du mur» *Le Monde*, 2017/12/16



advice accelerated the networking process. The situation widened the recruitment of cities beyond the core of actors that had shown interest in migration and integration issues for ideological reasons. It now includes 31 members. One also observes a greater engagement with civil society organisations. In October 2019, the ANVITA organised jointly with the Organisation pour une Citoyenneté Universelle (OCU), a conference gathering a range of local authorities and organisations from around the world, including representatives on the New York and Ouagadougou mayors' office. So far, the activities of the ANVITA have been focusing on the sharing of experiences and good practice. It published in 2019 guidelines for welcoming policies, "Comment accueillir (how to welcome)". More recently, the ANVITA released an op-ed in favour of the regularisation of undocumented people during the Covid-19 lockdown<sup>2</sup>.

### Members of the ANVITA (2020)



Source: <https://villes-territoires-accueillants.fr/>  
Thomas Lacroix, 2020

Legend:

-  Founding members
-  Adherent local authorities

<sup>2</sup> <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/les-invites-de-mediapart/blog/070520/pour-une-re-gularisation-inconditionnelle-et-pe-renne-des-personnes-sans-papiers>

## 2.2 Italy: the anti-Salvini decree movement

The question of the reception of refugees and vulnerable immigrants is relatively recent in Italy. Local authorities have been stakeholders of the reception of policy of asylum seekers within the SPRAR programme in the early 2000s (Accorinti & Wislocki, 2016; Bini & Gambazza, 2019; Gois et al., 2017). Launched in 2002, the SPRAR programme gathers most of cities supporting reception projects in Italy. This early municipal engagement has informed two types of mobilisations: the RE.CO.SOL network and the Anti-Salvini Campaign. Below, we focus on the role of mayors in these dynamics.

### a) *RECOSOL and the Anti-Salvini decree campaign*

At the same time (2003) a network of “solidary communes” (RE.CO.SOL) was created<sup>3</sup>. It counted, at the time of its foundation, around a hundred members and now boasts around 300. Recosol was initially created to support international solidarity projects: the network promotes collaborations in Italy and abroad with other stakeholders engaged in “domains such as peace, solidarity, environment, responsible consumption, civil rights, immigration”. The network’s activities include the exchange of “good practices”, and a model of decentralised cooperation between small and medium-sized municipalities, around developing projects and practices compatible with the limited budget capacities. The network has set up projects in Algeria, Mali, Niger, Palestine, Peru, Moldova and Romania.

Gradually, Recosol became more and more active on local reception policies, in collaboration with ASGi (association of legal studies), the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the SPRAR programme: many municipalities in Recosol are part of SPRAR or participate in other reception project (managed by associations or NGOs). However, with the successive migration “crises” (2008; 2011; 2015) in the Mediterranean, the conditions of arrival gradually deteriorated and the various governments, instead of strengthening the capacities of SPRAR, preferred to reinforce containment and control systems. They increasingly transferred the responsibility of first reception to emergency humanitarian organisations, coordinated in 2011 by the “Protezione Civile” and from 2015 onward directly by the Prefectures. This transfer contributed to the proliferation of temporary reception structures (CAS, extraordinary reception centre) entrusted to private institutions (service cooperatives, hotels) less controlled, often failing to meet basic requirements. In 2016, the hotspot approach added a new layer to the “emergency” approach to

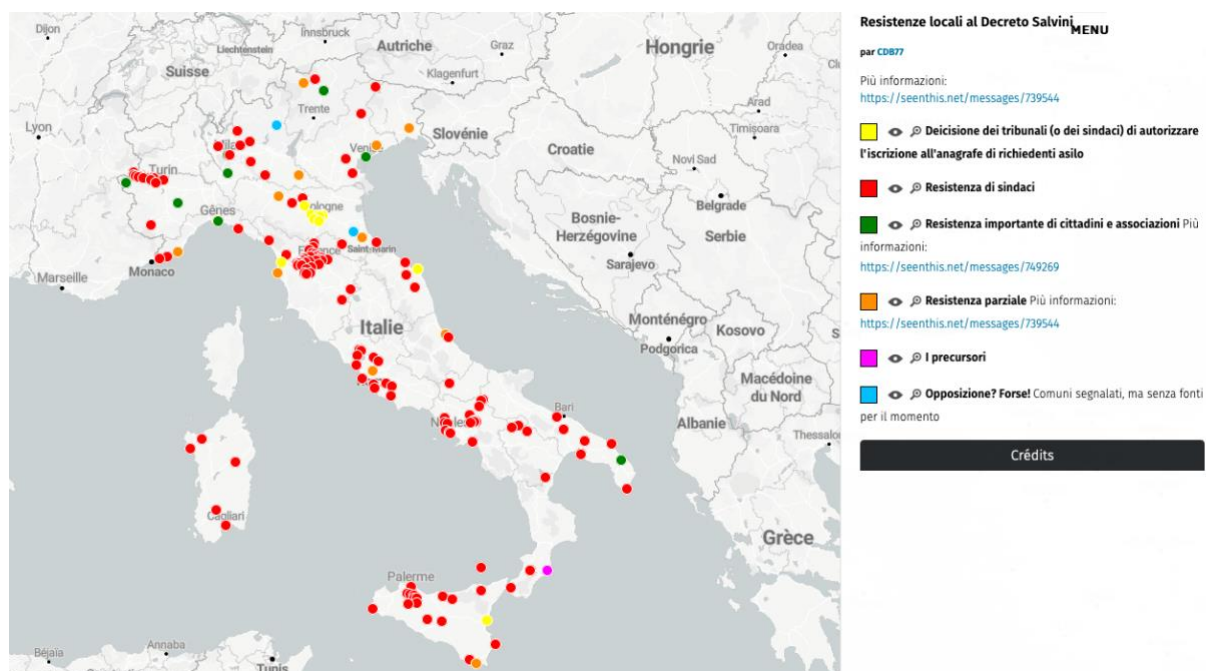
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<sup>3</sup> <https://comunisolidali.org/>

migration management. This trend was already explicit since 2011, but it reached another level in 2018 with the arrival of Matteo Salvini (Lega, extreme right populist) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the main interlocutor of SPRAR municipalities). The Salvini decree, which came into force in October 2018, limited the remit of the SPRAR system (renamed SIPROIMI) to the management of migrants with statutory international protection, while asylum seekers would be taken in charge by centres for extraordinary hospitality. The 877 SPRAR projects in place, facing this measure and its corollaries (the suppression of humanitarian protection, replaced by a much more limited extraordinary protection, etc.), were seriously affected.

In June 2018, against the background of the preparation of the reform planned by Salvini and of a strain put on the European reception system, in particular with regard to search and rescue operations at sea, Recosol and other civil society actors convened an international meeting in Bardonecchia. The aim was to raise awareness about the dire situation of migrants and ask European countries and the EU to streamline reception and asylum procedures. The forum prefigured the mobilisation triggered by the enforcement of the so-called Salvini decree. The latter, among other things, removed the possibility for asylum seekers to register in their city of residence, thereby banning access to a local civil status and services attached (access to education, health services, etc.). This entailed the casualisation of a very high number of people. Many municipalities expressed their disagreement on the ground that, it destabilises the cohabitation between migrants and local populations and impedes integration processes, with potentially very negative repercussions, in economic, social and security terms, on the community at large. Among the municipalities which have openly positioned themselves against Matteo Salvini most are part of Recosol. The map below, compiled by Cristina del Biaggio, shows the extent of the movement over the Italian territory. The map shows the variety of stance taken against the decree amongst local authorities: some expressed their disagreement while others maintained the registration of asylum seekers in direct contradiction with the decree. Interestingly, the opposition to Matteo Salvini included from right-hand municipalities, which perceived these measures as disruptive and restricting their capacity of control they exert over the migrant population, noticeably thanks to and through the web of accommodation they maintain to circumscribe and locate people. In parallel to the mobilisation, legal procedures were launched to assess the constitutional validity of certain aspects of the decree, notably the measure which removes entitlement for registration and local civil status.

## Map of the local resistance to the Salvini decree



Cristina Del Biaggio, 2019

### b) *The role of mayors*

One of the particularly vocal mayors opposed to Matteo Salvini was the one of Palermo. Leoluca Orlando decided to personally register asylum seekers with the civil status, refusing to implement the decree with a view to mark that his city was and wanted to appear as "open", hospitable and welcoming. The positioning of Orlando was not trivial: mayor of the city since 2012, and already mayor between 1985 and 1990, and between 1993 and 2000, he maintains very close relationships with a constellation of national institutions and civil society actors. He has been at the forefront on reception and integration issues for several years. The municipality participates in a variety of networks and programmes which advocate for migration, open borders, and cohesive societies: EUROCITIES, ECCAR (European Coalition of Cities against Racism), the UNICEF programme UPSHIFT, Solidarity Cities, amongst others. The mayor is famous for the writing of the "Palermo Charter", which aims at promoting international mobility as an unconditional human right through the suppression of residence permits<sup>4</sup>. The municipality is also known for the multiple initiatives taken in favour of the reception of immigrants in its port. This positioning, his political contacts with actors in Spain and Germany

<sup>4</sup> <http://leolucaorlando.it/palermo-la-citta-dellaccoglienza/>

and his embedding on the international scene make him one of the mayors most involved in defending the rights of migrants, in supporting NGOs at sea.

Leoluca Orlando is not the only Italian mayor with an international stature being influential in the European and international debate on alternative approaches to welcoming and integrating migrants. One can mention the forerunning experience of Venice's mayor Massimo Cacciari, involved in several international solidarity networks in the 1990s; the outstanding experiences of the village of Riace and its mayor Domenico Lucano (2004-2014), as well as the city of Lampedusa headed by Giusi Nicolini (2012-2017). The latter took part in 2015 with Ada Colau (Barcelona), Anne Hidalgo (Paris) and the mayor of the island of Lesbos, Spyros Galinos, in the creation of a network of refuge cities, with a connection between border islands and welcoming metropolises. This project itself failed, but it prefigured a new initiative developed around the Barcelona-Palermo connection (see below).

### **2.3 Spanish Cities' mobilisations**

Like in France and Italy, Spanish cities have a track record of presence and involvement in European city networks. This particularly so for Barcelona, the city which, according to our track record of migration-related city networks around the world, is the municipality which displays the largest number of memberships (Lacroix forthcoming). It hosts the headquarters of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the United Nations organisation representing local governments. It is also a founding member of Eurocities and is an active member of a range of EU funded networks involved in migration issues. The other major player is Madrid with an equally large range of experience in city-led initiatives. The particularly high level of involvement on the international scene is to be understood in the specific political context of the competition between Catalunya and the central government: Catalan municipalities have found in such area a way of developing their own international agenda distinct from the governmental one (Zapata-Barrero 2006; Ostergaard Nielsen 2006).

The so-called "migrant crisis" staged the tensions between the Catalan and Spanish governments. As Mariano Rajoy's government (Partido Popular) had not been proactive in European discussions on the migrants' reception, the Barcelona City Council decided to take the lead in autumn 2015 by proposing a local reception policy and called on other cities to join them in this dynamic, by creating a network of "*Ciudades Refugio*". Two years later, the network counted around 25 cities, including Madrid, Valencia, Pamplona, Zaragoza, Cordoba and Malaga. As in the French case of ANVITA, this city network corresponds to a model of



interurban militancy, bringing forward strong political demands and criticism to national governments' and European institutions' actions. In autumn 2017, in a speech at the Spanish Parliament (*Congreso de los Diputados*), the *Ciudades Refugio* network denounced the "immobility" of Mariano Rajoy's government in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees on Spanish territory. At that time, Spain had in fact received only 13.7% of the quota of migrants that it had committed to welcome as part of the relocation process negotiated two years earlier between European leaders (Amnesty International, 2017). A second criticism targeted the allocation of European funds assigned to Spain for immigration management on its territory, and particularly for the management of the country's southern border, which constitutes an external border of Europe. For the period 2014-2020, Spain has received 691.7 million euros under the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund. This is in addition to €29.6 million emergency aid released by the European Commission in 2018 to help Spain deploy additional staff along Spain's southern borders, organise repatriations and transfers from Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, and develop reception infrastructure (European Commission (2018). In 2017, through the voice of one of its spokespersons, Jaume Asens<sup>5</sup>, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona, the *Ciudades Refugio* network already deplored the security orientation and the lack of transparency in the use of these funds by the Spanish government, leaving the cities finance part of the reception at the local level with their own funds: Madrid City Council allocated around €4.5 million to refugee aid programmes between 2016 and 2017, while Barcelona City Council had assigned €1.5 million to emergency accommodation during the same period. Not complying to the management of migrants' reception carried out by the Spanish government, the network's cities therefore call either for a change in practice, towards a more humanist and supportive reception, or for a transfer of competences and resources - including European funding - to the local level, so that they can have the capacity to take in charge migrants and refugees' reception as they conceive fit.

A second network of Spanish host municipalities was created in spring 2016: the "Red de Municipios de Acogida de Refugiados". More precisely, this network is in fact a sub-network specialised on issues of migrant populations' reception, within the mayors' association of the Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias (FEMP). Less critical and militant than the *Ciudades Refugio* network, this network was nonetheless born out of the observation that the EU and national governments were unable to properly welcome people seeking refuge in Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> La Vanguardia (2017), "Ciudades refugio" piden que se les traspasen las competencias en materia de acogida ante el "inmovilismo" de Rajoy", 26th September 2017, consulted on line on April 21st 2020. Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/local/madrid/20170926/431581829147/ciudades-refugio-piden-que-se-les-traspasen-las-competencias-en-materia-de-acogida-ante-el-inmovilismo-de-rajoy.html>

The FEMP president, Abel Caballero, thus declared that the municipalities could no longer tolerate "Europe's indecency in the lack of refugees' reception" and that they were then ready to implement this welcoming that "the EU and its governments were not doing" (Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias, 2016). This network has many objectives, such as the development of a "protocol for the reception of refugees" common to the member cities, improving access to social services and empadronamiento<sup>6</sup> for refugees, raising awareness among the local population of the plight of migrants, or simply the sharing of information and experience between municipalities and local governments. One of its specificities is to maintain an intense collaboration with organisations specialised in migration and social issues, such as the Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR), ACCEM, the Spanish Red Cross, the UNHCR and Amnesty International. The network, and more generally the FEMP, wishes in particular to position itself as an intermediary between the Spanish government, on the one hand, and local governments and municipalities on the other, as it was the case when the Aquarius arrived in the port of Valencia in 2018: the organisation has thus gathered the proposals of volunteer cities (more than 300) to receive the 629 survivors on the boat.

Finally, it is worth noting the existence of interurban networks and initiatives at a subnational level, such as the Red Valenciana de Ciudades de Acogida or the Catalan coastal towns self-declared as « safe harbours » (puertos seguros). The first one is a municipalities' network in the Valencia region, most of the members already belonging to the national network Red de Municipios de Acogida de Refugiados. As stated by the Federación Valenciana de Municipios y Provincias (FVMP), which stands behind this local network, the aim of the latter is to « promote the objectives of the FEMP's Red de Ciudades Acogedoras network in order to disseminate them among the mayors of the Valencia Community" (Federación Valenciana de Municipios y Provincias, 2018). As for the second, the so-called Catalan "safe harbours", it is less a network than a local interurban initiative, promoted by the Generalitat de Catalunya<sup>7</sup>. In spring 2018, when lifeboats regularly struggled to find open harbours to receive migrants rescued at sea, the Generalitat took the decision to declare all ports in Catalan coastal cities as "safe harbours" where ships could come ashore without hindrance. In April 2018, the Interdepartmental Commission on Safe Ports (Comissió Interdepartamental de Ports segurs) was created to work on the development of a reception programme in these municipalities, bringing together Generalitat

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<sup>6</sup> The *padrón municipal* is the register in which all the inhabitants of a municipality have been registered since 1858. Registering in the *padrón* - the *empadronamiento* - allows access to the health system, schooling and even regularisation.

<sup>7</sup> The Generalitat de Catalunya is the political institution representing the autonomous community of Catalonia.

departments as well as the Catalan Federation of Municipalities (Federació Catalana de Municipis) or the Catalan Association of Municipalities (Associació Catalana de Municipis). In both cases, these are local and inter-municipal organisations that are trying to provide a dignified reception for migrants, a reception they do not believe the Spanish government is providing.

### **3. The birth of a Mediterranean-wide movement: the Palermo Charter Platform Process**

In May 2017, Italy and the European Union started to devolve to Libyan coastguard the management of Search-and-Rescue operations in the Mediterranean<sup>8</sup>. This gradual transfer was confirmed in June 2018, when Libya delineated a large Search-and-Rescue area in international waters over which the UN International Maritime Organization acknowledged its capacity to intervene. In parallel, the arrival to power of the Five Star government and Matteo Salvini as the Ministry of Interior spurred the criminalisation of NGO activities in the Mediterranean. The SOS Méditerranée/MSF ship “Aquarius” was forced to divert to Valencia after it was refused to dock in Italy and Malta. The disembarking in Valencia of the 600 immigrants onboard was allowed by the mobilisation of local authorities. As seen above, after having received the green light from the central government, the “Red Valenciana de ciudades de acogida” and the city of Valencia mobilised to welcome the boat<sup>9</sup>.

In a context of mounting pressure against their activities, European NGOs involved in Search-and-Rescue operations turned to local authorities to secure docking possibilities. Contacts had been made in May 2018 with Italian cities such as Palermo, Riace and Naples. The discussions gradually widened to include Berlin, Valencia, Zaragoza, Syracuse, Milan, Barcelona or Bologna. In February 2019 was held a meeting in Roma gathering city representatives from Spain, Germany and Italy and NGOs during which was launched the Palermo Charter Platform Process. From the NGO side, the process includes European Alternatives, Emergency, Humboldt-Viadrina Governance Platform, INURA, LasciateCIEntrare, Mediterranea Saving Humans, Open Arms Italy Office, SeeBrücke Germany, Tesseræ, Welcome to Europe/Italy, and Watch The Med Alarm Phone. Beyond the cities mentioned above, the platform includes a number of cities from Spain, Italy and Germany. On the French side the ANVITA and the NGO Migreurop are also active members of the consortium. The group recruits beyond the range of militant organisations with the presence of Eurocities and members of the European Parliament were present during preparatory meetings.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/19/eu-shifting-rescue-libya-risks-lives>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.fvmp.es/red-valenciana-de-ciudades-de-acogida/>

The Palermo process is still a work in progress. It received funding from the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation. Its first outcome is the launch of the “From Sea to City” campaign on June the 20<sup>th</sup>. The campaign is articulated around five objectives : 1) a combined effort to lobby the European Commission on the migration policy; 2) the creation of a framework of action linking Search-and-Rescue operations and city welcoming; 3) advocating for direct sources of EU funding for both cities and civil society organisations; 4) the creation of legal corridors for the mobility of asylum seekers within Europe; 5) securing the access of fundamental rights in housing, health and other welfare domains. This series of aims and demands mirror the mixed positioning of cities and NGOs in this debate. The demand for specific channels of EU funding for the benefit of cities is a central claim of a number of “co-opted” European city networks, including Eurocities. It reflects the will to gain room for manoeuvre with regard to state tutorship and to be acknowledged as legitimate players in the European policy architecture. By contrast, the provision of services and the securing of rights for asylum seekers is at the core of urban militancy since the early days of the sanctuary city movement. The three other points result from the specific alchemy between militant municipalism and Search-and-Rescue activism. As shown in this paper, collaborations between local authorities and civil society organisations are commonplace. But those are usually organisations versed into reception issues within the urban space, not immigrant rescue operations outside its limits. This explains why the “Sea to City” campaign includes three demands that have to do with migration policy rather than integration or welcoming *stricto sensu*. The creation of legal corridors within the EU to facilitate the circulation of asylum seekers between the port cities and cities of the European hinterland (especially in Germany) is, in this regard, a groundbreaking novelty. Legal corridors are for immigrant circulation what firewalls are for immigrant settlement: a legal framework enabling cities and other actors to operate without the interference of immigration enforcement institutions. For the moment, the campaign is limited to European actors. It remains to be seen if the discussion will be broadened to incorporate partners from the southern side of the Mediterranean, and beyond if legal corridors could link cities hosting refugees in the Middle East with European host cities. This would be an actual breakthrough reshaping in a radical way the design of the European migration policy.

#### **4. Conclusion: upscaling city activism**

The presentation of these four case studies provides an overview of the factors driving the emergence and upscaling of grassroots city networks involved in migration issues. The contrast

between militant and EU-supported networks supported is striking. While the former has primarily been driven by the international agenda on integration, the latter have been spurred by national political contentions. In Italy, the RECOSOL movement created an environment favouring pro-immigrant sentiments among mayors. When Matteo Salvini came to power and enforced a strongly anti-immigrant policy, it immediately triggered a mobilisation of municipalities. In France, the Calais “Jungle” and its subsequent dismantling propelled the mobilisation of cities. Finally, in Spain, the reception of refugees from the Middle East and Africa in 2015 and the Aquarius crisis in 2018 set the stage for the formation of migration-related city networks. Another common trait is the pivotal role of key mayors: Damien Carême in Grande-Synthe, Leoluca Orlando in Palermo and Ada Colau in Barcelona played a key role in mobilising their counterparts.

However, these drivers (political contentions and the personal involvement of local leaders) have concurred to the formation of national-level city activism. This contrasts with co-opted networks that have formed at a pan-European level. The last case study provided in this paper, the PCPP, offers a rare example of international networking effort with a militant agenda. This case-study points to the role of civil society actors behind the scene. The PCPP was initiated by a demand of Search-and-Rescue NGOs such as Open arms, Seebrücke and SOS Méditerranée in want of a stronger collaboration with Mediterranean local authorities. If the PCPP is conclusive, it will lead to the constitution of a cross-Mediterranean city network of safe harbours (with an extensive definition of the Mediterranean area since it includes Germany!). This role of civil society actors is not specific to the Mediterranean. Their role has been key in the expansion of the sanctuary movements in the UK and the US. In Belgium, the movement of *Communes hospitalières* is an outcome of a campaign launched in 2012 by a coalition of Belgian NGOs, the CNCD 11.11.11. However, the PCPP is, to our knowledge, the first initiative supported by both CSOs and local authorities at the international level. Moreover, the presence of Search-and-Rescue organisations rather than integration has oriented the focus of the PCPP towards migration management.

In this regard, the PCPP highlights the specific nature of the Mediterranean political space: a liminal space at the crossroads of different Nations States in which gravitates a range of public, private and civil society actors. It is a favourable environment for the emergence of such a mobilisation: a space of political tensions in which evolve civil society organisations and political personalities with an international stature. The confrontational nature of this political context may explain why the co-opted municipal networks have failed to embody a “safe harbour” voice, thereby leaving a space for the emergence of alternative and more militant groupings.

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