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CHANGES IN THE MIGRATION TRENDS FROM WEST AFRICA TO EUROPE

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ABSTRACT: For a long time, the Central Mediterranean migration route was the most popular among those which went to the European Union from Africa. However, data from 2018 show that the trend is about to turn, and the Western Mediterranean route to Spain is about to become the most popular. Changes in Italy, the entering point to Europe presumably means changes in the African internal routes as well. This article intends to track the reasons which could affect the migratory pattern to the EU. The research focuses on the condition changes along the Central Mediterranean route, from Italy, to Mali. The article aims to sum up both the political and security domains, including the CSDP missions and operation from the southern border of the EU to the heart of West Africa.

KEYWORDS: international migration, Central Mediterranean route, Italy, Libya, Mali, Niger, West African route

INTRODUCTION

In 2018 the whole European Union turned its eyes towards Italy. The reason: the parliamentary elections. As in one of the biggest migration transit and receiving countries, internal political changes in Italy are expected to influence the migration flows of the Central Mediterranean route. The rising popularity of the League and the Five Star Movement (M5S) foreshadowed radical changes in Italy's migration policies. New approaches on the European side are likely to influence changes in the migration patterns in Africa as well. The biggest North-African transit country, Libya is experiencing years-long fight for national power, which took another violent turn in April 2019. The events in Libya possibly affect the migration flows, discouraging people to choose the Central Mediterranean route. As a result of growing insecurity and jeopardy during the travel, migratory routes can change to directions which are assessed to be cheaper or safer. Additionally, in 2017 the former Italian government also managed to secure a deal with Libyan tribal leaders to seal the borders, which also affected migration routes.¹ The possible consequence is a change in the migratory pattern between Africa and Europe.

¹ "Italy brokers deal with Libyan tribes to curb migrant influx". <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-brokers-deal-with-libyan-tribes-to-curb-migrant-influx/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.



Map 1: *Geographical overview*

In addition to the changes in Italy and Libya, Mali is experiencing a further deterioration in the country's internal security. The ongoing conflict in the Northern part of the country and the escalation of ethnic tension in the Center, can also affect migration patterns. The political and security changes could affect the migrants' choice, on which route they prefer to use, let it be intra- or inter-African. However, these changes do not necessarily result in changing patterns. To assess what is behind the figures on the Central- and Western Mediterranean route, I will examine both the developments in the political situation in Italy, and the evolution of the security situation in Libya and Mali. I also used data analysis to examine if the change of the figures in the Central and Western Mediterranean routes means a change in the migration flow as well.

MEDITERRANEAN MAYHEM

In 2018, we could see significant changes in the migration policies of the EU's southern flank. The result of the Italian elections predestined the changes. The far-right League and the anti-establishment M5S parties formed the new government.² The parties gained popularity because of the existing economic problems, the failed growth, and the long-lasting pressure of irregular migration flows from Libya, and their dissatisfactory management. In parallel, trust decreased towards the EU and its institutions. With this background, it was not a surprise, that one of the main policy changes occurred in the field of migration. The new, more radical approach discontinued the practice of the former government in supporting the presence of the NGO boats in the Mediterranean. Instead, it insisted on the closure of the Italian ports to migrants.³ This step did not come unexpectedly, since earlier Italy heavily criticised the NGO activity in the Mediterranean. NGO vessels could use Libyan coastal

² Kirchgaessner, S. "Italy's president invites populist coalition to form government". *The Guardian*, 23 May 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/23/italys-president-invites-populist-coalition-to-form-government>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

³ Molnár, A. "Olaszország biztonsági kihívásai és stratégiai irányai" [Italian Security Challenges and Strategic Directions]. *Felderítő Szemle* 17/3. 2018. 91-111. <http://knbsz.gov.hu/hu/letoltes/fsz/2018-3.pdf>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

waters, while the EUNAVFOR MED ships could not, and were able to transport the stranded directly to Italian or Maltese ports.⁴

Because of the growing migratory pressure, and the lack of burden sharing, the South-European border countries, namely Malta and Italy closed their ports to NGO rescue ships. The most well-known case is the Aquarius, which was forced to detour to Spain with rescued asylum seekers on board. Therefore, since 26th August 2018 the rescue ships, which are operating in the Mediterranean have not had a clear guideline where to disembark with the rescued migrants.⁵ The decision of Italy and Malta to keep their ports closed to vessels which are carrying saved migrants on board also changed the attitude of cargo ships. These vessels started to neglect their duty to save people in distress because of the fear of economic loss.⁶

Italy's first attempt to gain more control over NGOs was made in 2017, when the government passed a code of conduct for NGOs, who run migrant rescue ships in the Mediterranean. The 12-point code includes limitations, such as banning NGO ships to enter Libyan territorial waters and calls for closer cooperation with the police.⁷ The code was presented to around nine NGOs which were threatened with being barred from Italian ports in case of refusal.⁸ It was, however, not the final step by Italy in restricting migration policies. On 24th September 2018, the Council of Ministers approved a decree which restricts access to asylum, protection, and increases detention.⁹ The notorious law, advocated by Interior Minister Matteo Salvini (League), was approved on 29th November 2018.¹⁰ The new legislation does now allow to give protection on humanitarian grounds. This means that those who are not eligible to asylum, but had serious reasons of humanitarian nature to flee their home countries are no longer entitled to get asylum status.¹¹ It also extended the time limitation for keeping migrants in detention centres. Besides this, the withdrawal of the already granted protection became easier. A list of various crimes, from thefts to violence to public officials, was identified, for which asylum seekers can be expelled from Italy. The new law also weakens the integration program, the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). This step will possibly lead to an

⁴ Molnár, A. "Az EUNAVFOR MED Sophia műveleti" [The EUNAVFO MED Operation Sophia]. In Molnár, A. and Komlósi, O. (eds.) *Az Európai Unió mediterrán térséggel összefüggő kapcsolata*. Budapest: Dialóg Campus, 2019. 95-121. https://akfi-dl.uni-nke.hu/pdf_kiadvanyok/Web_PDF_Az%20EU_mediterran_terseggel_osszefuggo_kapcsolata.pdf, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

⁵ Tondo, L. and McVeigh, K. "No NGO rescue boats currently in central Mediterranean, agencies warn". *The Guardian*, 12 September 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/12/migrant-rescue-ships-mediterranean>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

⁶ Schmeer, L. "Migration in the Mediterranean: between Myth and Reality". <https://eyes-on-europe.eu/migration-mediterranean/>, Accessed on 19 September 2019.

⁷ Zalan, E. "NGOs divided by Italy's new rescue code". <https://euobserver.com/migration/138656>, Accessed on 19 September 2019.

⁸ Balmer, C. "Italy drafts contested code of conduct for NGO migrant boats". <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-ngos/italy-drafts-contested-code-of-conduct-for-ngo-migrant-boats-idUSKBN19X2U1>, Accessed on 19. September 2019.

⁹ Sunderland, J. "New Low for Italian Migration Policies". <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/26/new-low-italian-migration-policies>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

¹⁰ Scherer, S. "Italy's Salvini gets win with new asylum and security rules". Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-politics-immigration-security/italys-salvini-gets-win-with-new-asylum-and-security-rules-idUSKCN1NY1JN>, Accessed on 11 May 2019.

¹¹ Torrisi, C. "The Italian government has approved a new bill targeting migrants". <https://openmigration.org/en/analyses/the-italian-government-has-approved-a-new-bill-targeting-migrants/>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

increase in the number of those who are in an irregular situation. In parallel with this, the legislation strengthens the police through increasing funds.¹²

Meanwhile Malta, with no EU agreement on search and rescue cooperation, follows the migration policy, which has the widest support throughout the EU, namely the fortification and externalisation of Europe's border control. Besides this, Malta is an active participant in training the Libyan Coast Guard, and views the North African country as a partner in the EU's external border management.¹³

However important, these Member State responses cannot influence migration flows in the Mediterranean in themselves. The EU has a mission and an operation under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in the Mediterranean. The mission is the European Union Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya), which is a civilian mission. Its task is to "support the Libyan authorities in contributing to efforts to disrupt organised criminal networks involved notably in smuggling migrants, human trafficking and terrorism." It started in 2013, and "supports the Libyan authorities in the areas of border management, law enforcement and criminal justice."¹⁴ The EUBAM Libya has always had a difficulty to conduct its tasks. The deterioration of the security situation drove the mission out of the country in July 2014, and for the second time in 2019. Mainly because of these negative circumstances the mission reduced its activities in Libya.¹⁵

The operation, the EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia, is more interesting. The first phase of the operation was launched on 22nd June 2015, with a focus on "surveillance and assessment of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean. The second stage of the operation provided search and, if necessary, seizure of suspicious vessels."¹⁶ In 2017 the Council extended the mandate of the operation with two additional tasks, "with the training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy, and with the contribution to the implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya."¹⁷

As the operation is part of the EU's comprehensive approach to migration, and its headquarters is located in Rome, the expiration of its mandate on 31st December 2018, provided Italy with an opportunity. Italy had enough of receiving migrants in the shape of letting NGO vessels into its ports and having the EUNAVFOR MED ships rescuing the stranded as well. Therefore, the newly elected government, pushed for changing the rules to be able to redistribute rescued migrants in November 2018. Interior Minister Matteo Salvini even threatened with closing up the operation, if there is no consensus on the proposed relocation system, which would ease the pressure on Rome. Other options emerged, one of them to shut

¹² Matamoros, C. A. "Italy's new security decree clamps down on immigration". <https://www.euronews.com/2018/11/29/italy-s-new-security-decree-clamps-down-on-immigration>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

¹³ "Cherry-picking Europe: Migration and economic management in Malta". European Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_cherry_picking_europe_migration_and_economic_management_in_malta, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

¹⁴ "EU Integrated Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya)". https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20190319_eubam_libya_factsheet_march_2019_en.pdf, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

¹⁵ EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia Official. Personal interview. 17 June 2019.

¹⁶ "Council launches EU naval operation to disrupt human smugglers and traffickers in the Mediterranean". <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/22/fac-naval-operation/>, Accessed on 04 May 2019.

¹⁷ "Story". <https://www.operationsophia.eu/about-us/#story>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

down Operation Sophia, and another is to launch a new mission in Tunisia, with the focus on training the Libyan Coast Guard.¹⁸

Meanwhile it does not serve entirely the Italian interests to close Operation Sophia. It is an operation led by Italy, with an HQ located in Rome, and it gives prestige to the country.¹⁹ It would also put more responsibility and financial burden on Italy if Operation Sophia ends. Rome would have to handle migration in the Central Mediterranean alone, if the migration flows from Libya increase.²⁰ Not to mention Italian ties with Libya, which would further erode with finishing up the operation. Keeping these in mind, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte proposed a three months technical elongation to the operation. During this timeframe Italy aimed to achieve its originally proposed conditions.²¹

The new timeframe was not enough for successful negotiations and reaching consensus in the EU. Moreover, Italy's decision to close its ports, and refuse to allow EUNAVFOR MED ships to disembark rescued migrants can easily lead to further conflicts within the EU. The first sign of it was when Germany decided to withdraw its naval units from Operation Sophia.²²

Because of the lack of consensus, in March 2019, the Political Security Committee of the EU agreed on a six-month-long elongation of the operation, with a rather interesting solution. France proposed to temporarily suspend the deployment of naval assets of the EU-NAVFOR MED, allowing only the air component to conduct surveillance tasks. In parallel with this, the EU reinforced the support to the Libyan Coast Guard.²³

The current Italian struggles to reduce the number of migrants arriving in the Central Mediterranean are, however, not the first attempts to reduce migration flows. After the EU-Turkey deal in 2016, the EU was keen to reach agreement with Libya as well, securing the community's southern borders. Thus, negotiations started in early 2017 between EU and North-African representatives.²⁴ Italy took the leading role in the negotiations soon. Then Interior Minister Marco Minniti announced on 02nd April 2017, that after three days of negotiations behind closed doors, 60 tribal leaders from Libya agreed to secure the country's vast southern borders. The deal included the deployment of a Libyan border patrol unit to the 5,000 kms long southern border area. Besides this, various tribes agreed to monitor different sections of the border. The deal not just aims to reduce migration flows, but also to reduce criminal activity in the region: people, drugs, weapons smuggling. It also calls for job training programmes, in order to provide young people with other options than joining criminal groups.²⁵

¹⁸ Barigazzi, J. "EU diplomats tentatively agree to extend Operation Sophia". <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-ropemigration-refugees-diplomats-agree-to-extend-operation-sophia/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

¹⁹ Taylor, P. "Salvini's Sophia soapbox". *Politico*, 12 March 2019. <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-matteo-salvini-sophia-soapbox/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

²⁰ Barigazzi, J. "EU diplomats tentatively agree to extend Operation Sophia". <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-ropemigration-refugees-diplomats-agree-to-extend-operation-sophia/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

²¹ "Italy extends Operation Sophia for three months". <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/13824/italy-extends-operation-sophia-for-three-months>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

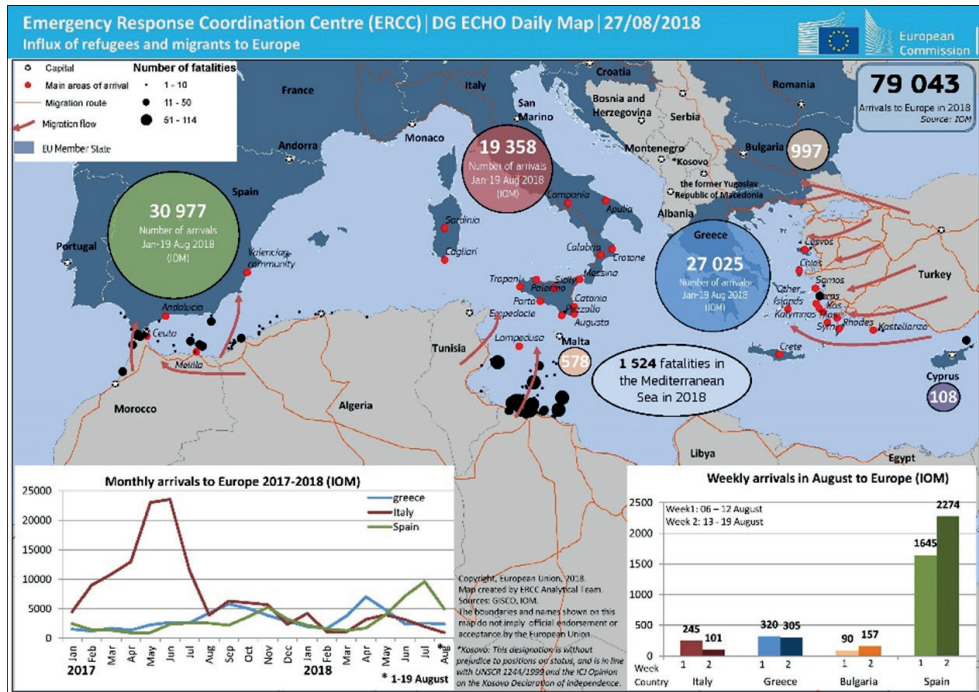
²² "German Navy drops out of Mediterranean Sea operation Sophia". <https://navaltoday.com/2019/01/23/german-navy-drops-out-of-mediterranean-sea-operation-sophia/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

²³ Barigazzi, J. "EU diplomats tentatively agree to extend Operation Sophia". <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-ropemigration-refugees-diplomats-agree-to-extend-operation-sophia/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

²⁴ "European, North Africa ministers seek to curb Libya migrant flows". <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/european-north-africa-ministers-seek-to-curb-libya-migrant-flows/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

²⁵ "Italy brokers deal with Libyan tribes to curb migrant influx". <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-brokers-deal-with-libyan-tribes-to-curb-migrant-influx/>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

The deal, agreed with the help of Italian Interior Minister Minniti, proved to be successful in reducing the migration flows. By September 2017, the figures decreased dramatically on the Central Mediterranean route. However, rumours started, that Italy induced Libyan tribes and militias to end their illicit activities, especially people smuggling and human trafficking. Paired with the Libyan Coast Guard playing more active role in rescuing migrants.²⁶



Map 2: Influx of refugees and migrants to Europe

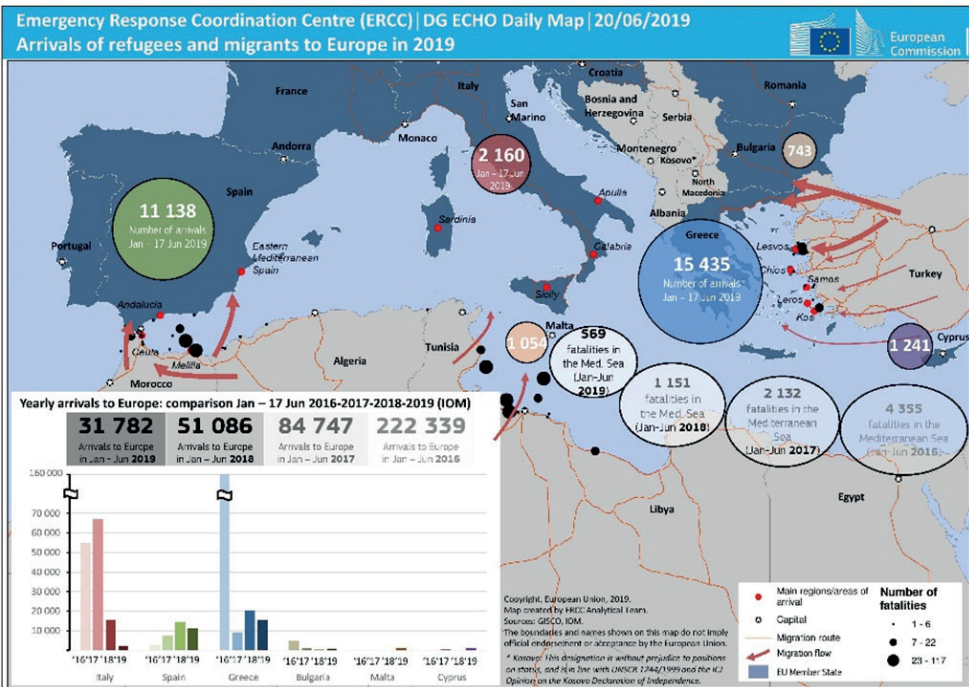
Source: <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/getdailymap/docId/2707>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

According to Map 2, the decline in the migratory figures started in mid-June 2017, continued throughout 2018, and the decrease sustained steadily in 2019 as well, as it is clear from Map 3. Translating it to numbers, around 24,000 migrants arrived in Italy in June 2017, which dropped back to less than 5,000 monthly arrivals in 2018,²⁷ and less than 300 in the first two months of 2019.²⁸

²⁶ Wintour, P. "Italian minister defends methods that led to 87% drop in migrants from Libya". *The Guardian*, 7 September 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/07/italian-minister-migrants-libya-marco-minniti>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

²⁷ "Influx of refugees and migrants to Europe". <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/getdailymap/docId/2707>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

²⁸ "Influx of refugees and migrants to Europe in 2019". <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/getdailymap/docId/2839>, Accessed on 04 May 2019.



Map 3: Influx of refugees and migrants to Europe in 2019: map

Source: <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/getdailymap/docId/2955>, Accessed on 18 July 2019.

However, the conflict in Libya did not continue as peacefully as it was expected in 2019. To follow up the rather peaceful period of 2017-2018, when different armed groups secured their territorial gains, in the end of 2018 General Khalifa Haftar started his southern campaign with the Libyan National Army (LNA).²⁹ His aim was to secure oil fields and fight terrorist groups. The operation, which lasted for almost seven weeks, ended on 02nd March 2019.³⁰ With this step, General Haftar gained control over the key oilfields in Libya. Besides the oilfields, General Haftar went into a territory, which was involved in the EU's external border control, therefore the Italian deal, made in 2017, possibly fell victim of General Haftar's southern campaign. The Tobruk based LNA gained control just over the oil, but not the revenues. The Libyan oil should be sold by the National Oil Corporation (NOC), and the payments are received by the Central Bank of Libya. These institutions, besides they both are headquartered in Tripoli, are declared as neutral. However, NOC condemned the LNA's militarisation of two facilities. The move resulted in the open support of LNA from the eastern NOC subsidiaries. Thus, General Haftar still needs to control Tripoli to influence the revenue allocation.³¹ Economic considerations, years-long intent to take Tripoli, and possibly

²⁹ Marsai, V. "Elemző tanulmány a 2019. március 14. és 23. közötti Líbia migrációs kutatásához". <http://kozerhetotudas.hu/2019/04/11/marsai-viktor-elemzo-tanulmany-a-2019-marcius-14-es-23-kozotti-libiai-migracios-kutatashoz/>, Accessed on 19 September 2019.

³⁰ Binnie, J. "LNA advances across southwest Libya". *Jane's Defence Weekly* 56/11. 2019. 16.

³¹ Smith, R. and Pack, J. "Oil revenue access drives conflict". <https://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/politics-economics/middle-east/2019/oil-revenue-access-drives-conflict>, Accessed on 19 September 2019.

some international suggestions led to General Haftar's next step, the offensive against Tripoli. On 03rd April the LNA started its advancement towards the country's capital.³² It became obvious soon, that capturing Tripoli will not be an easy task for the LNA, and by the end of April a house-to-house fight was unfolding.³³ The protracted battle for Tripoli will soon affect migration as well. When the fights started there were approximately 140,000 migrants in Tripoli, who were in need for protection.³⁴ According to IOM, Libya has a migrant stock of about 820,000 people, mainly from Syria and sub-Saharan Africa.³⁵ The Libyan Ministry of Interior, however, estimates the number of irregular migrants in the country around 1.5 million, but we have to take in consideration, that there is no reliable data from Cyrenaica or Fezzan.³⁶ The population in Tripoli, local and migrant, are both in a volatile situation, and will likely seek the opportunity to flee Libya to safer countries if the situation does not change in the short-term. With Libya becoming an unsafe country to reach, the protracted situation can affect migration patterns in the mid-term from the sub-Saharan region, to adapt to the new situation. The second part of the article investigates the possibility of Mali becoming a migration hub due to the changes in the situation in Libya and the Mediterranean.

MALI MISFORTUNE

To be able to place Mali and assess its status on the West African migration route, the security situation in the country must be analysed. In 2012, a Tuareg insurgency started in the northern region of the country, aiming to liberate Azawad, a Tuareg state. Bamako could not handle the situation in the north, and a coup d'état, led by military officers, made the situation more complex in the country. The *coup de grâce* came in April 2012, with the Islamist groups taking the lead in the Tuareg insurgency. In 2013, an international intervention started in the country, and in 2015 the insurgency was supposed to end when a peace agreement was signed between the warring parties, namely the Mali government, the Platform, and the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA).³⁷ However, the conflict de-escalated, it has not ceased but remained at low-middle intensity.³⁸ After the Peace Agreement was signed, despite the heavy international presence in the country, the government was not able to consolidate the situation. Jihadist attacks remained a problem throughout the years, not just in the northern region of Mali, but in the whole country. The presence of multiple groups even threatens with the possibility of the regionalisation of the conflict, with a spill-over to Niger and Burkina Faso. Now, in 2019, besides the radical Islamism, Bamako has to face escalating ethnic tensions in the central region of the

³² "Eastern Libyan commander orders forces to move on Tripoli". Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/eastern-libyan-commander-orders-forces-to-move-on-tripoli-idUSKCN1RG0RT>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

³³ "Libyan forces push back against Haftar in house-to-house battles". Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/libyan-forces-push-back-against-haftar-in-house-to-house-battles-idUSKCN1S40Q8>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

³⁴ Peyton, N. "Migrant women, children denied shelter in Libya's battleground". Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-migrants/migrant-women-children-denied-shelter-in-libyas-battleground-idUSKCN1SG1PV>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

³⁵ "Migration Data Portal". IOM. https://migrationdataportal.org/?i=stock_abs_&t=2019&cm49=434, Accessed on 19 September 2019.

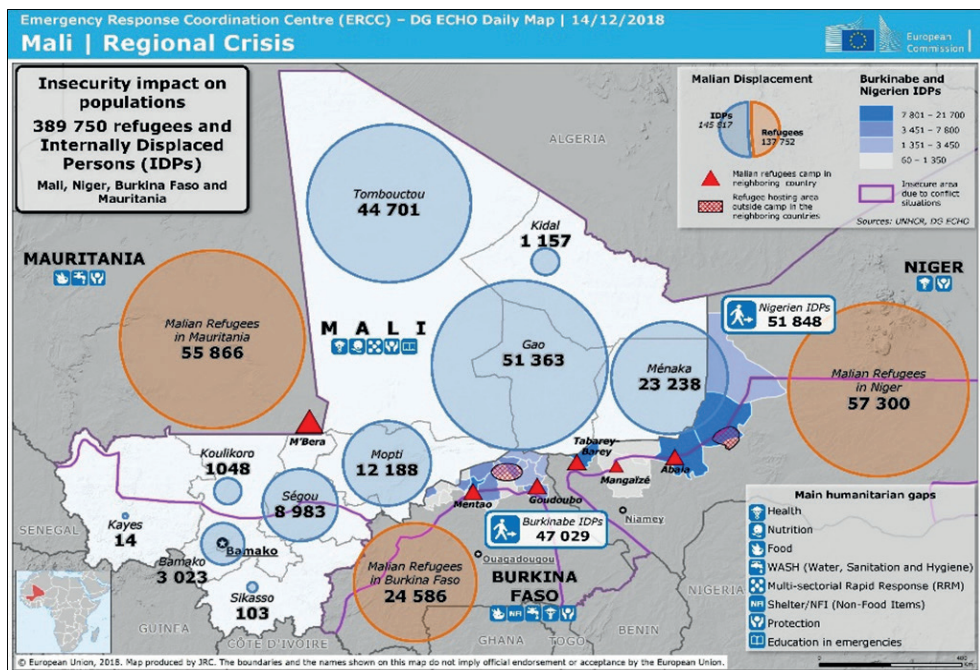
³⁶ Marsai. "Elemző tanulmány a 2019. március 14. és 23. közötti Líbia migrációs kutatásához".

³⁷ Vecsey, M. "Maliból jelentik" [Reported from Mali]. In Kaló, J. (ed.) *Napjaink biztonsági kihívásai, veszélyei és fenyvetései*. Budapest, NKE Szolgáltató Nonprofit Kft., 2016. 129-143.

³⁸ "Conflict Barometer 2016". Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. 76. <https://hiik.de/conflict-barometer/bisherige-ausgaben/?lang=en>, Accessed on 1 October 2017.

country. With such a background it is a rightful question to ask how Mali could possibly apply for the position of a migration hub. The answer can lie in the local patterns. Mali is already the part of a rather busy regional migration system, specifically the West African one. Migration within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region is mainly labour migration of various kinds: seasonal, temporary or permanent. Mali and Niger, the well-known migration hub, are both countries of origin and destination in this complex. Mobility within the ECOWAS is easy, since it is a visa-free movement area. Therefore, changes in the migration routes would not demand further documentation, other than a passport. However, the use of smugglers is common, especially when the aim is to exit the free movement area.³⁹

In 2017, Mali hosted about 384,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees.⁴⁰ The number changed during 2018. By the middle of the year only 238,000 IDPs and refugees were officially reported from Mali.⁴¹ In March 2019 this figure reached 372,000 again.⁴² As these data show, the migration stock can change drastically in Mali during a couple of months' time. But in a country marred with insurgencies, violent extremism, and ethnic tensions, migration stock and flows are rather fluid, and changing rapidly, depending on the situation.



Map 4: Mali Regional Crisis

Source: <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/getdailymap/docId/2771>, Accessed on 4 May 2019.

³⁹ “World Migration Report 2018”. IOM. http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_en.pdf, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

⁴⁰ “International Migration Report 2017: Highlights”. 26. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

⁴¹ “Mid-Year Trends 2018”. UNHCR. 38. <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5c52ea084/mid-year-trends-2018.html>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

⁴² “Mali Humanitarian Crisis”. <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/getdailymap/docId/2918>, Accessed on 13 May 2019.

The European Union deployed two missions to Mali, to help Bamako to consolidate the situation in the country. The EUTM Mali started in 2013, with the aim to provide training to the Malian Armed Forces (MAF), and to advice on “command and control, logistical chain, and human resources” together with educating MAF on human rights, and protection of civilians as well. The mission also got a task to conduct its tasks in close coordination with other actors in the country, UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA, and ECOWAS.⁴³ The original mandate only changed in 2016, when it had to add another coordinating partner, the G5 Sahel.⁴⁴ Supporting G5 Sahel Joint Task Force means that the EU is supporting a home-grown African solution to the regional crisis in the Sahel.

The EUCAP Sahel Mali started in 2014. The main tasks of this civilian mission were to help Malian authorities to “restore and maintain constitutional and democratic order and the conditions for lasting peace, state authority and legitimacy in the territory of Mali.” Most importantly, the mandate of the mission includes the obligation to establish contacts among the EU missions from Mali to Libya.⁴⁵ The following mandate extensions reinforced these tasks and obligations. In this way, Mali served as an incubator of the use of the EU’s comprehensive and integrated approach in practice.

The EU missions in Mali are supporting the interests of the European community. With the help of the EU to consolidate the situation in Mali, strengthen state legitimacy and training the security forces, a stable democratic country can emerge. Stable countries are generally not countries of origin of the migration process, so the stabilisation of the country is in line with the EU’s Global Strategy to build resilient states in the south down to Central Africa.⁴⁶

However, the situation is not favourable to achieve these optimistic goals. As the situation in the northern region has remained practically the same since the summer of 2013, and inter-ethnic tensions have escalated in central Mali, stability has remained a dream. Because of this, migration flows can be expected to change. Instead of becoming a major transit country, Mali can be again a country of origin.

Data, collected in the first half of 2019 testify, that outgoing flows were more significant than the incoming migration flows. Nearly half of the outgoing migration flows are Malians, but Guineans, Ivoreans, Senegalese, Nigeriens, and Gambians were also observed to cross Mali. The collected information also shows, that Spain is the most popular European target country, followed by Italy and France. Since the second half of 2018, Spain has replaced Italy as the most popular destination.^{47, 48, 49} This new popularity resulted in a steep increase

⁴³ “Council Decision 2013/34/CFSP”. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013D0034>, Accessed on 04 May 2019.

⁴⁴ “Council Decision (CFSP) 2016/446”. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f521b2e0-f18c-11e5-8529-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>, Accessed on 04 May 2019.

⁴⁵ “Council Decision 2014/219/CFSP”. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014D0219&from=PT>, Accessed on 04 May 2019.

⁴⁶ “Shared Vision, Common Action: a Stronger Europe, a Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy”. 9. http://ec.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf, Accessed on 25 September 2017.

⁴⁷ “Mali: Flow Monitoring Report 36: January 2019”. IOM. <https://migration.iom.int/reports/mali-%E2%80%94-flow-monitoring-report-36-january-2019>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

⁴⁸ “Mali: Flow Monitoring Report 37: 1-28 February 2019”. IOM. <https://migration.iom.int/reports/mali-%E2%80%94-flow-monitoring-report-37-1-%E2%80%94-28-february-2019>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

⁴⁹ “Mali: Flow Monitoring Report 38: 1-31 March 2019”. IOM. <https://migration.iom.int/reports/mali-%E2%80%94-flow-monitoring-report-38-1-%E2%80%94-31-march-2019>, Accessed on 12 May 2019.

in the migration flows towards Spain from Africa. However, this number did not exceed or even reach the figures which have been observed in the Central Mediterranean route just two years ago, in 2017.⁵⁰ In the first two months of 2017 roughly 14,000 migrants arrived in Italy from Libya, and 5,000 in Spain.⁵¹ In the following year, the same reporting period Italy received 5,200 migrants, while Spain 3,200. 2019 was the first year which started with visible differences in the favour of Spain. 11,138 people used the West-Mediterranean route to get to Europe, while only 2,160 choose the Central Mediterranean.⁵² To assess if this change in the figures means a shift in the migration pattern, I followed the method which had been used in an earlier research on the shift of the migration patterns. According to this research, the arrivals of those nationalities who used the Central Mediterranean route most commonly must be analysed.⁵³

I used data collected by FRONTEX on ‘illegal border-crossings statistics’ to show data on the number of arrivals by nationality, using data from 2015 to May 2019⁵⁴ To reveal the possible differences between the figures of detected arrivals and asylum applicants I used EUROSTAT data from 2017 to June 2019.

Data on detected border-crossing show that the main countries of origin changed over time regarding the Central Mediterranean route (*Table 1*) on a larger scale than on the Western Mediterranean route (*Table 3*). In 2015, Eritrea, Gambia, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan were the top 5 source countries of the Central Mediterranean route, while by 2019, seven more countries had been added to the list at least temporarily. In the first months of 2019, the main nationalities who used the Central Mediterranean route, were mainly from the Middle East and North-Africa (MENA) region, however, Eritrea and Nigeria remained among the top sending countries over the examined period. Besides the changes in the main nationalities, data show a sharp decrease in the use of this route, from 90,570 people in 2015 from the top 5 sending nations to 1,209 in the first 5 months of 2019. In parallel with the detected arrivals, EUROSTAT collects data which show how many people want to legalise their situation in the host countries. *Table 2* shows the main nationalities who applied for asylum in Italy from 2017 to June 2019.⁵⁵ The data comparison of the two tables shows gaps both in the number of applicants and their nationalities. Most of the countries present here as main senders appear in the FRONTEX dataset as well. Bangladesh, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Mali and Nigeria are present in both tables. Senegal and Morocco, however, are not considered as main countries of origin, according to FRONTEX data. It is also visible that some nationals are not keen to legalise their situations in Italy. Among them we can find Eritreans and Guineans. I assume, that the difference between the figures can be interpreted as a delay between the time of the detected arrival and the actual time of the application, which possibly means months-long delays.

⁵⁰ “Europe Monthly Report”. UNHCR. March 2019. 1-2. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/68983>, Accessed on 04 May 2019.

⁵¹ “Influx of refugees and migrants to Europe”.

⁵² “Influx of refugees and migrants to Europe in 2019”.

⁵³ Brenner, Y., Forin, R. and Frouws, B. “The ‘Shift’ to the Western Mediterranean Migration Route: Myth or Reality?” <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/shift-to-the-western-mediterranean-migration-route/>, Accessed on 04 May 2019.

⁵⁴ “Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics download: updated monthly”. https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Migratory_routes/Detections_of_IBC_2019_07_05.xlsx, Accessed on 30 July 2019.

⁵⁵ “Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex, monthly data (rounded)”. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, Accessed on 14 May 2019.

Table 1: *Detected arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route by nationality*
(Data collected from FRONTEX)

Detected arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route by nationality					
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Eritrea	38,791	20,721		3,529	
Nigeria	21,914	37,554	18,163	1,262	
Somalia	12,430				
Sudan	8,916			2,037	229
Gambia	8,519	11,929			
Guinea		13,550	9,714		
Côte d'Ivoire		12,399	9,509		
Bangladesh			9,009		193
Mali			7,119		
Tunisia				5,182	347
Pakistan				1,513	232
Algeria					208

* Data collected until M05

Table 2: *Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship in Italy (rounded)*
(Data collected from EUROSTAT)

Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship in Italy (rounded)			
Year	2017	2018	2019
Nigeria	25,500	6,970	1,180
Bangladesh	12,445	5,410	1,060
Gambia	8,875	2,270	320
Senegal	8,455	3,060	595
Côte d'Ivoire	8,440		
Mali		2,465	
Morocco			510

* Data collected until M06

Table 3: *Detected arrivals on the Western Mediterranean route by nationality* (Data collected from FRONTEX)

Detected arrivals on the Western Mediterranean route by nationality					
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Guinea	1,946	2,184	3,283	12,233	191
Algeria	1,193	1,698	4,293	4,349	324
Cameroon	843				
Morocco	684	722	4,704	11,881	1,970
Côte d'Ivoire	609	1,646	3,517	4,045	

Detected arrivals on the Western Mediterranean route by nationality					
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Gambia		899	2,660		
Mali				10,747	191
Senegal					117
* Data collected until M05					

The main senders regarding the Western Mediterranean route changed less over time. Here North-African and West African countries dominate among the top 5 countries of origin from 2015 to May 2019. On this route it is visible, that in 2018 the figures rose to 39,210 detected arrivals from 5,275 in 2015 regarding the top 5 senders. Therefore, we can state that this route became the more popular, but the examination of these data is not enough to verify if the migration pattern changes or not because it just shows how the top 5 senders varied over the examined timeframe. Thus, I created a list of West African countries, collecting them from the main countries of origin over time on the Central Mediterranean route, to examine the detected arrivals of their nationals from 2015 to 2018. The selected countries are Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria. To get a wider picture, I added 4 more West African countries, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger and Senegal to the examination. Senegal was added because it appeared as a main country of origin on the West African route, and I assumed that this country's nationals use traditionally the West African route. The other 3 countries were chosen, because, however they are not main sending countries, they can provide further context on the intra-African patterns.

The first result, which is visible is, of course, the significant decrease in the figures since 2018. The further examination showed, that Senegalese, whom I expected to prefer the Western route, used mainly the Central Mediterranean between 2015 and 2017, and changes occurred only in 2018. *Table 4* shows, that the selected country nationals preferred the Central Mediterranean route from 2015 to 2017. In 2018, the pattern changed significantly regarding the examined nationals. The Western Mediterranean route was preferred during 2018 in a large extent for almost all nationalities, save Nigerians. Even such nations as Niger, for whom the Central Mediterranean route is geographically closer, started to use the Western route on a greater scale.

Figures also show, that the number of detected arrivals by nationality on the Western Mediterranean route exceeds the figures in the Central Mediterranean route on such a scale, which means the change of the preferred routes. For example, in 2017, 68 Ghanaians and 624 Malians used the Western route, while 3,909 of Ghanaians and 7,119 Malians the Central. However, these numbers changed to 461 Ghanaians and 10,747 Malians using the Western route in 2018, while only 218 Ghanaians and 915 Malians reached Europe via the Central Mediterranean route.

According to the scale of the difference on the figures, it is visible, that the Western Mediterranean route replaced the Central route in 2018. There are nationalities, which still prefer to use the Central Mediterranean route despite the emerged difficulties along it. To assess its causes, another research is needed on the available migrant stock of those nationalities in the main African transit countries.

Detected arrivals by nationality

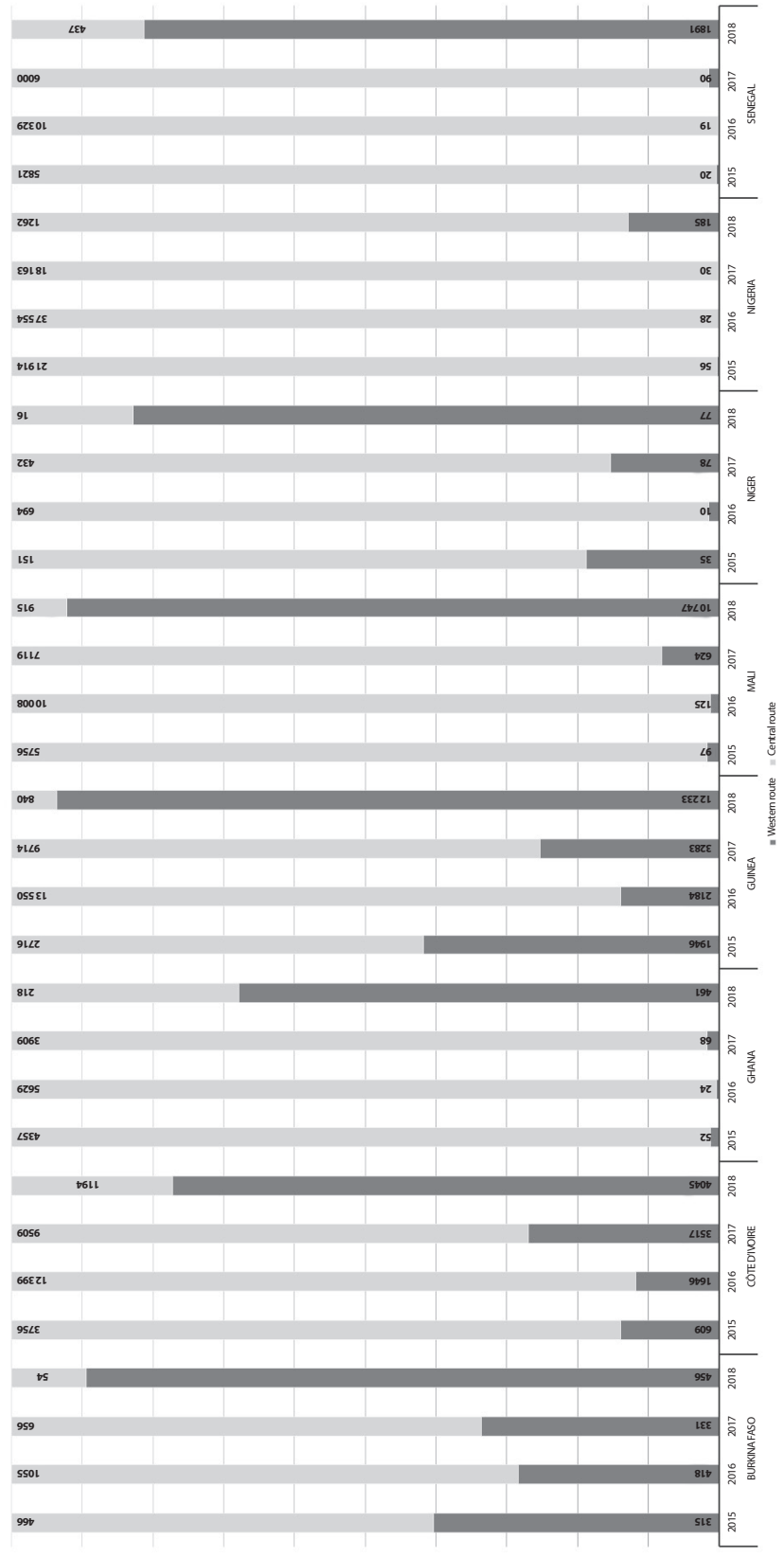


Table 4: Detected arrivals by nationality (data collected from FRONTEX)

SUMMARY

The reported numbers and visible patterns of migration flows in the Mediterranean can suggest that now we are experiencing a change in the migration routes to the European Union. Based on the results of the research it can be stated that the changes in the migration pattern are not necessarily visible if the research focuses only on the biggest sending country nationals. With including multiple countries from West Africa in the data analysis, the changes in the pattern can be detected. Although some countries, like Nigeria and Eritrea still prefer the Central Mediterranean route, most of the West African nationals have preferred to use the Western Mediterranean route since 2018. The general figures show a significant decrease of the migration flow to Italy, which is expected to continue during 2019.

The decreasing numbers of crossings on the Central Mediterranean route are originating from the agreement between Italy and the Southern-Libyan tribes, to control sub-Saharan African migration flows. Additionally, Italian political changes made the Southern European country less appealing to migrants from Africa. In 2018 Italy also restricted its asylum policy, which possibly had a further discouraging effect on migrants. Besides this, suspending the activities of naval assets of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia made the journey particularly dangerous. General Haftar's offensive against Tripoli, which proved to be a protracted situation, displaced Libya from its previous position of the biggest transit country of the North-African region. Mali also experienced the escalation of ethnic tensions in its central region, while radical groups are still present and active in the whole country.

It is also important to note, that in spite of the relatively large number of migrants, who reaches the EU, it is now visible, that most of the African migrants remain on the African continent. Additionally, there is a growing tendency among young Africans to choose Asia over Europe when deciding about the destination. An increasing number of people choose China, whose Africa policy is far more welcoming than that of the EU.⁵⁶

The use of information technology, which helped to organise the events of the Arab Spring in 2011, now supports those sub-Saharan Africans, who are planning to leave their countries of nationality. Therefore, the news on unfavourable policy changes, developing anti-immigrant attitude are getting to those, who want to reach the EU. It might be also discouraging, that the EU has still not finished the reform of the Dublin system. Potential migrants can also gather information on the rapidly changing security situation in transit countries. Thanks to the internet, all this earlier mentioned information can reach the people on the move relatively fast to discourage them to start a perilous journey to the European Union, which is ever more difficult to reach through countries which have a rather hostile environment.

The change of the migration patterns is the result of complex, interconnected events. Policy changes in one country cannot realistically influence the directions of entire migration routes, but a series of events along a formerly popular migration route can be an effect multiplier. On the Central Mediterranean route multiple changes took place, including both policy, and security changes, which was apparently enough to encourage migrants from sub-Saharan African countries to choose routes different from that of their predecessors.

⁵⁶ Tarrósy, I. "Kik és hányan kopogtatnak ajtóinkon onnan Délről?": az afrikai migráció valóságának sokszínűségéről". *Magyar Tudomány* 180/1. 2019. 79-89. DOI: [10.1556/2065.180.2019.1.7](https://doi.org/10.1556/2065.180.2019.1.7)

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