



Master's Degree in Policies and Governance in Europe

Course of Comparative Public Policies in Europe

Externalisation Policies and the Impact of  
Multi-Actor Contexts: a Comparison of UK-  
Rwanda and Italy-Albania Agreements

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## INTRODUCTION

Externalisation policies are a tool which, in recent years, has started to get more and more used by receiving countries to contain the migratory phenomenon, mostly by discouraging irregular immigration. First conceived in Australia in the early 2000s, it started to be progressively adopted also in the EU after the 2015 migratory crisis demanded new measures which could try to compensate the limits previous asylum systems proved to have in managing efficiently and sustainably a very high number of arrivals. After some years in which these tools seemed to have been abandoned by European States, they started to rise again in the aftermath of the pandemic, when the number of irregular migrants crossing their national borders started to increase again, even reaching, in some cases, the levels of 2015. However, looking at why States adopt these instruments would explain only a part of a more complex phenomenon. The controversial nature of these policies, indeed, tends to make their path towards adoption and implementation not easy at all. Rather, they meet not only a strong support, as their aim is to tackle a key issue of the present time, but also criticisms and obstructions, since their very restrictive character is often perceived as unfair. All of these considerations come from a broad series of actors whose actions affect, with varying degrees in terms of effective impact, the way in which these policies see the light and the forms in which they are actually implemented.

Looking at these actors and precisely at the mechanisms they generate, ultimately influencing the outcome of nowadays externalisation policies, will be the goal of the present analysis. The research question to be answered, therefore, will be: how does the multi-actor context of a European country affect its adoption of externalisation policies after the 2015 immigration crisis?

The approach will be qualitative and inductive. Specifically, a most similar case comparison will be carried out, having, on the one hand, the adoption and implementation of externalisation policies within two similar contexts as the object of analysis and, on the other, the action of a series of figures (public opinion, political actors, courts and civil society) as the explanatory factor for the common features and the differences these policies present. The two countries compared will be the UK and Italy, since they are both European countries whose asylum systems were in difficult conditions after the 2015 migration crisis. Moreover, they both adopted an agreement with, respectively, Rwanda and Albania, providing that they could transfer irregular migrants attempting to reach the national territory in offshore centres located on the partner country's soil. There, migrants' claims for asylum protection would have been evaluated and processed. Furthermore, the UK and Italy signed these agreements in the same time period (2022 and 2023, respectively), and they did so while having a right-wing government in charge.

The analysis will be developed following these steps. First, Chapter I will look at the history of externalisation policy. This will be done, to begin with, in academic terms, with a short literature review of some significant contributions so far given on the topic of externalisation policies and, even more specifically, on the two cases compared in this analysis. Subsequently, there will be a focus on the key precedents the UK and Italy had to look at while designing their own agreements, so to understand what objectives they could achieve and what problems they could generate. These precedents will be the Australian Pacific Solution, the 2016 EU-Turkey deal and the 2017 Italy-Libya agreement. This will allow to look not only at the origins of externalisation policies in general, but also at the origins of the two cases here analysed, as analysing these elements will reveal what aspects the British and the Italian government wanted to emulate and what they wanted to improve. Chapter II, then, will start to specifically look at the two policies to compare. Within it, the discussion will be centred on their origin and on their early developments, focusing also on the different opinions they generated, as well as on which actors already showed up in those preliminary stages. Chapter III, then, will analyse in detail the key legislative passage both countries had to make in their national parliaments to definitely adopt the policy. This will be done focusing in particular on the role of MPs and political parties and on the electoral dynamics determining their actions. Chapter IV will look at the implementation phase of the policies, analysing not only how some actors' interventions occurring during

this phase affected it, but also how actions occurred during the previous steps ultimately produced an effect during the implementation of the agreements. Finally, the last section will conclude.

## CHAPTER I

### HISTORY OF EXTERNALISATION POLICIES: THE KEY PRECEDENTS

Despite having capillary entered the mainstream public discourse only in the last couple of years, mostly because of the very same agreements between UK-Rwanda and Italy-Albania here analysed, externalisation policies are not a new phenomenon. They, indeed, have already been discussed quite a lot at the academic level, with several scholars producing significant contributions both regarding the policy in general and some more specific case studies. In that sense, a lot of attention has been dedicated to the two deals object of the present discussion. Another relevant element to be noted, in order to assess how the policies adopted by the UK and Italy are not a novelty, is the existence of some historical precedents. Among them, the most significant ones are the so-called Australian Pacific Solution, a policy which dates back to the early 2000s, the 2016 EU-Turkey and the 2017 Italy-Libya agreements, all of which generated significant debates. Discussing more in detail these elements will help trace the background of externalisation policies, both in historical and academic terms.

#### *1.1 Literature Review*

Externalisation policies, defined as “*extraterritorial state actions to prevent migrants, including asylum seekers, from entering the legal jurisdictions or territories of*

*destination countries or regions or making them legally inadmissible without individually considering the merits of their protection claims”* (Frelick et al., 2016), have been the object of quite a big number of academic pieces. As they progressively become a more common solution adopted by governments all over the world, they started to get the attention of several scholars, which looked at them under many different perspectives. A good compendium of all these works is provided by Cobarrubias et al. (2023). In their literature review, the authors reflect on the content and nature of most studies on externalisation policies, underlining especially how most of these are grounded in state-centric, Eurocentric and presentist approaches. Conversely, they provide some inputs for future studies. Specifically, they suggest that externalisation studies will need to adopt different perspectives to tackle all these limitations<sup>1</sup>. The piece correctly points out several lacks within current literature on externalisation. What is particularly relevant for the present analysis is that most pieces still have a state-centric approach, looking at States as the independent variable and as the minimum unit of analysis. States behaviour itself is, however, determined by other, smaller actors within them. For example, little has been said, at the academic level, about the role of the courts or about political parties and individual MPs and how their relationship, characterised by mechanisms of political interest, determined the adoption of externalisation policies. Trying to address the issue under a more comprehensive perspective, taking into account the role of several actors, will be the goal of the present analysis. Another significant contribution comes from Pastore & Roman (2020), who attempt to determine what are the causes behind the decision of States to adopt these policies. In their work, besides underlining that strong position African countries have, and exploit, with respect to European countries, as they present

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<sup>1</sup> The authors indicate four main lines of investigation. First of all, they stress the importance historical, and specifically colonial, records could have had in shaping the present dynamics of the externalisation phenomenon. Secondly, they express the need for a new set of studies having a non-Eurocentric focus. This is meant not only in geographical terms, but also in ethnographic ones, as they claim that scholars must analyse externalisation fully taking into account the perspectives of the non-western countries involved. That is, not only their actions and policies, but also how they understand and define the concepts revolving around the matter. Thirdly, they suggest addressing the complexity of borders management, an issue which, they claim, is no longer exclusive competence of the states, but rather involves a broad array of actors which can either cooperate with the State or being an obstacle for it. The complex interaction among all of these figures needs to be studied in order to better comprehend the phenomenon. Finally, they use all these previous insights to bring the reasoning to a deeper level, ultimately questioning the implicit paradigm for which externalisation concerns only an “inside” and an “outside” dimension. Conversely, they claim, in order to fully grasp the extent of the interactions of all actors and all the dynamics involved in the process, scholars should start conceptualising other complementary terms that could be used to discuss the phenomenon in its entirety. See Cobarrubias, S., Cuttitta, T., Casas-Cortés, M., Lemberg-Pedersen, M., El Qadim, N., İşleyen, B., Fine, S., Giusa, C., & Heller, C. (2023), Interventions on the concept of externalisation in migration and border studies, *Political Geography*, 105, p. 102911. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.102911>.

themselves as fundamental actors whose help is needed in order to limit emigration from their territories, the authors provide an interesting explanation as to why European countries rely so much and so urgently on externalisation practices. This, according to them, occurs because this solution is seen as a response to the failures of previous mechanisms of burden sharing for reception and protection of migrants.

Besides broader considerations, specific case studies have also been investigated by scholars, including those which are being considered here. Specifically, a lot of pieces have been written focusing on the agreement between UK and Rwanda, and they mostly stress the following aspects. On the one hand, there is an attention to how the externalisation dynamics between these two States resemble those relations of dominance and exploitation of a country's human and material capital, which were proper of the colonial era. Also, it is noted how these same dynamics contribute to reinforce global inequalities and hierarchies among countries (Collyer & Shahani, 2023)<sup>2</sup>. On the other, a different feature of the agreement is highlighted, namely how it is in contrast with other policy goals of the British government, specifically environmental and humanitarian ones (McQuinn, 2024). If taken together, the two pieces show how much of the literature is focused on the nature and the content of the agreement itself, while a little space has so far been dedicated to the many and multi-faceted causes and mechanisms behind it. Again, trying to partially fill this gap will be the goal of the present analysis.

The agreement between Italy and Albania has been observed, too. Most of the studies carried out attempt to reflect on the content of the agreement under the legal point of view, thus focusing, once again, on the content and nature of the policy, rather than on the causes behind it. A lot of attention has been devoted particularly to the interactions this agreement has with International and EU Law. What has emerged is that there is the potential for EU Law to be applied even to extraterritorial administrative procedures as those foreseen in the agreement, as well as the potential to undermine the effectiveness of the Common European Asylum System and to violate the ECHR (De Leo & Celoria,

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<sup>2</sup> The paper makes also a brief reflection under a policy-learning lens, highlighting how UK took inspiration from the Australian "Pacific Solution" in the creation of this policy. See Collyer, M., & Shahani, U. (2023), Offshoring refugees: Colonial echoes of the UK-Rwanda migration and economic development partnership, *Social Sciences (Basel)*, 12(8), pp. 455-56. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12080451>.

2024)<sup>3</sup>. Another strand of analysis, instead, focuses more on the domestic dimension of the policy. It is, indeed, argued that, although the deal presents itself as an international agreement and an instrument of cooperation, it is de facto an Italian domestic policy tool to discourage immigration (Muharremaj & Cami, 2024)<sup>4</sup>. Finally, a completely different approach has emerged, too. Discourse analysis showed clear-cut positions among Italian right-wing and left-wing parties over the agreement with Albania, although stressing how this division was not so marked back in 2017, when a left-wing government signed a different externalisation agreement with Libya. What is claimed is that this happened because in 2017 a migration crisis was occurring (or so was perceived) and therefore led all parties to show equal concern for the security issue and for the migrants' rights issue (Griffini & Rosina, 2025).

## *1.2 Genesis of the Externalisation Policies*

At the origin of externalisation policies lies a major concern for migration in general. Despite being a human phenomenon as old as history, it has not been a prominent topic within the political discourse up until the latest decades. It, indeed, started to progressively gather importance in western public debates and political agendas from the 1960s onwards, both as regards immigration (Dancygier & Margalit, 2019) and emigration, with a focus on the brain drain phenomenon (Breinbauer, 2007; Hasselbach, 2017). It must be noted, in this regard, how the latter is actually not a particularly hot debate, as the issue

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<sup>3</sup> The authors make the point that the peculiarity of the agreement raises doubts as regards the applicability of EU Law for an administrative procedure which, however carried out by Italy, will take part, at least to some extent, in Albania, that is, outside EU. They underline that, if it does, it may contrast the goal of the CEAS to have uniformity across the different national systems, while, if it does not, it would still be in contrast with ECHR, as that would generate unfair discrimination between applicants whose claims are processed within the EU and those detained in Albania. See De Leo, A., & Celoria, E. (2024), The Italy–Albania protocol: A new model of border-shifting within the EU and its compatibility with union law, *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law*, 31(5), pp. 595-618. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1023263X241309601>.

<sup>4</sup> The authors do so through a comparative legal analysis of the agreement's conformity with human rights enshrined in international, EU and national law. They ultimately conclude that the deal serves more as tool for the two governments to show at their domestic electorate that they are tackling migration, rather than as a concrete solution for the problem itself. See Muharremaj, E., & Cami, G. (2024), The 'Externalization' of the European Union Migration and Asylum Policy: A Case Study of the Italy-Albania Agreement, *International Organisations Research Journal*, 19 (4), pp. 40–60. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/data/2025/02/20/1915303299/3%20%20%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B8%2040-60%20OF.pdf>.

is perceived in the same way across different political forces<sup>5</sup>. The former, conversely, has been generating huge conflicts between different views among the European public opinion. Particularly after the huge rise in arrivals at the European borders registered from 2015 onwards, most western countries started to have their population split up in three groups. There are those who are very welcoming towards migrants and in favour of immigration, those against it and, finally, an in-between group, with mixed and often contrasting views over the topic (Torres, 2019). Although the first two are the most active and engaged with the topic, fuelling a lot the public debate, the last group appears to be the majoritarian one. Not only, but the composition of these groups has varied over the course of years. As migration became a progressively more central theme in the public debate, people changed their opinions on it, even multiple times as events occurred and contexts changed. There is evidence, in this sense, that over the long term the percentage of Europeans who believed immigrants improved their countries raised from 24% in 2002 up to 36% in 2022, although with fluctuations and with significant differences from country to country (Frattini & Pulito, 2025).

There are multiple reasons as for why the theme of migration (and specifically immigration in developed countries) generates so many contrasting opinions. These are mostly related to the effects it produces in the receiving State, particularly as regards population size and growth rates, labour force and social composition (Lundquist et al.,

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<sup>5</sup> To this regard, it must be noted that the perception of the phenomenon is not the same for all countries. Within the EU, this is generally perceived as a major cause for the current and future demographic crisis, with some countries, mostly in the Balkans, seeing it as the most relevant factor, in this sense (see Eurobarometer (2023), Flash Eurobarometer 534 - Demographic change in Europe, *Eurobarometer*, pp. 10-13. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/io/Downloads/fl\\_534\\_Demographic\\_change\\_in\\_Europe\\_report\\_en.pdf](file:///C:/Users/io/Downloads/fl_534_Demographic_change_in_Europe_report_en.pdf)). Italy follows this alignment, as confirmed also by the latest electoral manifestos of right-wing, moderate and left-wing parties which all depict brain drain as an emergency to be dealt with (see Lega – Salvini Premier (2022), Elezioni Politiche 2022 - Programma di Governo, *Pagella Politica*, pp. 199-200. Available at: [https://cdn.pagellapolitica.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Programma\\_Lega\\_2022.pdf](https://cdn.pagellapolitica.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Programma_Lega_2022.pdf); Azione - Italia Viva – Calenda – Renew Europe (2022), Programma elettorale Azione - Italia Viva - Calenda per l'elezione della Camera dei Deputati e del Senato della Repubblica del 25 settembre 2022, *Pagella Politica*, p. 29. Available at: [https://cdn.pagellapolitica.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Programma\\_Azione\\_ItaliaViva.pdf](https://cdn.pagellapolitica.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Programma_Azione_ItaliaViva.pdf); Verdi-Sinistra (2022), Programma Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, *Verdi-Sinistra*. Available at: <https://verdisinistra.it/programma-alleanza-verdi-e-sinistra/>). The situation in the UK, instead, is slightly different. Although the phenomenon is quite known, as it is talked about in mainstream media (as an example, see Helm T. (2020), Brexit fuels brain drain as skilled Britons head to the EU, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/02/brexit-fuels-brain-drain-as-skilled-britons-head-to-the-eu>), it did not enter the political debate in the last years, as confirmed by the fact that it is never mentioned neither in the Conservatives' nor in the Labours' 2024 manifestos (see Conservatives (2024), The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2024, *Conservatives*. Available at: <https://public.conservatives.com/publicweb/GE2024/Accessible-Manifesto/Accessible-PDF-Conservative-Manifesto-2024.pdf>; Labour (2024), Change – Labour Party Manifesto, *Labour*. Available at: <https://labour.org.uk/change/>). Therefore, whatever the extent to which this theme enters politics, what is common for all these situations is that it does not constitute an element of conflict between political parties.

2015). Not only, but these effects are often perceived as contrasting, and citizens therefore evaluate the phenomenon either positively or negatively depending on which consequence they regard as the most important. The increase in population size and labour force, for instance, is considered to be a positive consequence, particularly because of the increasingly ageing population of western countries. Immigrants can indeed benefit the receiving country by both paying taxes, thus contributing to increase the resources for public welfare, and by compensating shortages in specific working sectors (Freidenfelde, 2011). At the same time, the growing number of immigrants within the receiving population also generates a sense of threat, and quite a high number of people begin to develop either an ethno-nationalist or an anti-capitalist stance for which they see migrants as detrimental for their national identity, their culture and the resources their communities have at their disposal, also including concerns for the sustainability of the welfare state and for job security (Lenos & Kuijper, 2024).

Because of these dynamics, a rapid increase in the number of immigrants often generates some forms of reaction, usually aimed at containing the phenomenon, by receiving States. Australia was not an exception to that. Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, they experienced a huge number of boat arrivals, with a peak of 5516 people entering the country illegally in 2001, whereas three years earlier these were only 200<sup>6</sup>. In particular, the famous Tampa incident, which occurred on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2001, marked a significant moment for the Australian government and public opinion. On that occasion, 438 people coming from Afghanistan and Iraq were rescued by the Norwegian container Tampa while trying to reach Australia. Despite the rescuing crew sent several emergency medical messages, the government kept rejecting their landing requests for eight days, until migrants were transferred on an Australian Navy vessel and moved to Nauru (Pérez, 2003). Following this event, the Australian government rapidly introduced a series of legislative measures tackling what the then Prime Minister defined as “an uncontrollable number of illegal arrivals in this country”<sup>7</sup>. First, it passed the Border Protection Bill, authorizing national authorities to board vessels, remove and arrest people. Secondly, asylum

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<sup>6</sup> See Refugee Council of Australia (2025), Statistics on boat arrivals and boat turnbacks, *Refugee Council of Australia*. Available at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/asylum-boats-statistics/> [Accessed: 09/09/2025].

<sup>7</sup> See Parliament House (2001), Chapter 1 - Border Protection: A New Regime, *Parliament of Australia*. Available at: [https://www.aph.gov.au/%20Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Former\\_Committees/%20maritimeincident/report/c01](https://www.aph.gov.au/%20Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/%20maritimeincident/report/c01).

protections on Christmas Island were suspended. This excision effectively converted parts of Australian territory into offshore processing locations, where domestic and international obligations not to turn back asylum seekers no longer applied, and boats could therefore be denied entrance. Thirdly, Australian authorities launched “Operation Relex,” with which its naval forces turned back boats transporting migrants, and did that often in international waters (Boochani, 2025). Finally, the last step was to set up the policy which effectively become known as the Pacific Solution, under which the country signed a series of formal agreements with Cambodia, Nauru and Papua New Guinea providing that asylum seekers arriving via sea had to be transferred to offshore processing centres located in the partner countries (Zamir, 2015). Although the policy was repealed in 2008, as it was regarded as inhumane, it was re-established in 2012, following another peak in boat arrivals, with even stricter measures. The offshore centres were, indeed, re-opened, pursuing the “no-advantage” policy, which tried to meet the request of a significant part of the population perceiving irregular migrants as “queue jumpers” who were unfairly attempting to enter and permanently stay in Australia overriding regular migrants who, conversely, did everything according to the rules. Interestingly, this narration was common to both the 2001 and the 2012 governments who adopted the policy. What changed in their discourse justifying the policy, however, was that, whereas the former also stressed heavily the element of security and the need to protect national borders, the latter put more emphasis on the effort to save human lives in the first place by discouraging departures (Billings, 2013). This does not mean that they entirely abandoned the security concern at all. Conversely, the Operation Sovereign Border set up in 2013, a military-led border security operation with the task to make unauthorised boats return to their departure points, included both elements<sup>8</sup>. The last relevant element strengthening the policy was the adoption, in 2015, of the Australian Border Force Act, whose goal was to maintain secrecy on government policies concerning boat arrivals<sup>9</sup>.

Although the Australian Pacific Solution represents the most relevant precedent which the UK and Italy could look at in designing their agreements with Rwanda and

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<sup>8</sup> See Australian Government (n.d.), Operation Sovereign Borders, *Australian Government*. Available at: <https://osb.homeaffairs.gov.au/home>.

<sup>9</sup> See Federal Register of Legislation (2024), Australian Border Force Act 2015, *Federal Register of Legislation*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2015A00040/latest/text> [Accessed: 09/09/2025].

Albania, it was not the only one. Ever since immigration started to become an increasingly occurring phenomenon (the peak being reached in 2015 with more than a million people entering the EU irregularly<sup>10</sup>), European countries attempted to establish legislative and administrative measures to deal with it efficiently. Aside from national policies, there was also an attempt to set a joint coordination at the EU level, framed within the 2013 Dublin Regulation. However, all of these solutions presented shortcomings. Not only the rules (and particularly the rule of first entry) agreed in Dublin created a situation which put EU border countries (especially mediterranean ones) under huge difficulties in managing an excessive number of arrivals and asylum requests, but the differences between member countries as regards immigration laws and administrative procedures also played a role, as they resulted in the EU not having a harmonised system, ultimately making it even harder to re-distribute burden sharing in a smoother way (Mitchell, 2016; Niemann & Speyer, 2018).

To tackle this situation, European States decided to pursue the path of externalisation policies. Among the most relevant examples, here it is worth mentioning the 2016 agreement with Turkey promoted by the EU itself and the 2017 deal between Italy and Libya. They both aimed at reducing irregular migration, possibly preventing departures in the first place, by cooperating with two countries where migrants transit before entering European borders, as well as making the return procedure smoother<sup>11</sup>. Similarly to what occurred in Australia, the main motivations given by the EU and Italy for the decision to adopt these agreements were the will to contrast irregular immigration, the will to stop the criminal business derived from smuggling and the attempt to avoid having migrants putting their lives at risk<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> See European Council, Council of the European Union (2025), Irregular arrivals to the EU - 2008-2025, *Consilium.europa.eu*. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/irregular-arrivals-since-2008/>.

<sup>11</sup> To consult more detailed provisions of the agreements, see European Commission (2016), EU-Turkey Statement: Questions and Answers, *European Commission*. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/memo\\_16\\_963](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/memo_16_963) [Accessed: 07/08/2025]; Governo Italiano - Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2017), Memorandum d'intesa sulla cooperazione nel campo dello sviluppo, del contrasto all'immigrazione illegale, al traffico di esseri umani, al contrabbando e sul rafforzamento della sicurezza delle frontiere tra lo Stato della Libia e la Repubblica Italiana, *governo.it*. Available at: <https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Libia.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> See European Council (2016), EU-Turkey Statement, 18 March 2016, *consilium.europa.eu*. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>; Università degli Studi di Torino (n. d.), Memorandum d'intesa, *Università degli Studi di Torino*. Available at: <https://www.migrationtreaties.unito.it/libia/memorandum-dintesa.html>.

Externalisation agreements, therefore, had some relevant historical precedents, the Australian case being the most relevant one because of the novelty it presented as a policy, and they all had some common features in their origins. On the one hand, they were adopted in order to face an increase in the phenomenon of irregular immigration, highlighted by the steady growth in the number of irregular arrivals, which was perceived as critical. On the other, they were presented as tools which met concerns for both security and humanitarian issues, thus confirming once more how their deep and longer origin is to be found in a more general attention devoted to phenomenon of migration, whose management often generates bi-partisan discontent, although for very different reasons, and contrasting views.

### *1.3 Debates generated by the first externalisation policies*

The key precedents above illustrated share a common pattern also in terms of reactions and debates they generated. These are, inevitably, heavily influenced by the most relevant elements emerged before the adoption of externalisation policies. Consequently, the different opinions they raised at the time of their introduction resume, for the most part, previously existing positions and arguments.

Starting off with the Australian case, the Pacific Solution received support for three main reasons. First of all, it has been claimed, mostly by the government, that Australia's help towards refugees in need of protection is very generous, since asylum seekers who arrived regularly on the country and have complied with the national health and character requirements are offered resettlement, thus respecting the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provisions. At the same time, it has been argued that, precisely because there is an important effort on the country's side to respect international obligations, it is among the government's duties to adopt a very restrictive posture towards, on the one hand, illegal immigrants who try to avoid the correct formal procedure, thus being unfair towards regular asylum seekers, and, on the other, the criminals who help them (McKay, 2013). Secondly, and connected to that, there has always been a strong argument defending the sovereign right each country has to determine who

is allowed to enter its territory and who is not. This kind of claim echoes broader concerns for security, which were also referred to justify the specific provisions of the policy, according to which illegal migrants had to be detained. In the words of the then Australian Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs Philip Ruddock, it was done so to avoid having a massive number of irregular immigrants disappearing into the country (Wood, 2002). Thirdly, also the stability of the greater social order in the country was taken into account. It has been argued, indeed, that, had the country accepted more than a tiny fraction of asylum seekers, social disruption might have been a concrete risk (Holmes, 2016). The adoption of a policy as stringent as the Pacific Solution was, therefore, justified because it was seen as a way to avoid social tensions determined by economic and cultural shocks (whose likelihood to occur was expected to increase as it increased immigrant population in the country). Not only, in fact, the job market would have not been saturated by an excessive supply, but the Australian national identity and the values connected to it would have not been altered by getting in close contact with communities coming from a completely different and distant background in ideological terms.

As for the negative views on the policy, these were based almost exclusively on the idea that the externalisation approach constituted a violation of both migrants' individual human rights and Australia's international obligations. That would have been the case not only because of the procedural aspects set up, involving the forced transfer and detention of asylum seekers outside the national territory, but also because of the detention conditions within the offshore centres themselves. Regarding the first claim, the agreements have been heavily criticised for drafting a scheme violating a series of human rights. This included, but were not limited to, the right to seek and enjoy asylum, the principle of non-refoulement, the right to liberty and the right to a remedy (Amnesty International, 2017). The established externalisation procedure, it was argued, did not allow migrants to seek asylum in Australia, as they were transferred and detained in other States, thus limiting also their personal liberty. Not only, but this transfer would have occurred without the Australian authorities having verified whether asylum seekers would have been at risk of serious human rights violations in the offshore centres, or whether they might have been sent onwards to another country where they could have still faced this risk. As such this provision would have configured as a violation of the non-refoulement principle. Ultimately, the previously mentioned Australian Border Force Act generated some doubts

over the government's transparency over the policy, which made people question the capacity for asylum seekers to effectively be able to get a proper remedy, in case of unfair treatment. As regards, instead, the violation of human rights occurring within the centres, these have been certified by multiple evidence. For instance, lots of incidents occurring within centres have been reported, with many refugees being killed or severely harmed for many different causes, ranging from poor medical care to personnel's violence, up to riots sparked by local Manus's inhabitants after the detention centre on the island rapidly increased its number of detainees<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, there is evidence that other violations took place, such as pressuring people to return to their home countries, lengthy delays in refugee processing, asylums seekers suffering mental health problems due to prolonged and indefinite detention or mistreatment of gay immigrants by other detainees (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Subsequent externalisation agreements went along a similar path, as the very first clash of opinions over them tended to mirror pre-existing divisions between people in favour or against immigration. The different context in which these were developed (Europe), however, made it possible to also have some new claims made up by those against them. Both the EU-Turkey and the Italy-Libya deal, indeed, were praised for their pragmatic stance, able to conciliate the demands for security and for openness, achieving the goal to stem irregular migration to Europe and preventing, in turn, the loss of control over external borders and the consequent implications for political and social stability<sup>14</sup>. However, they also received some critical remarks. The EU-Turkey deal was accused of producing, again, severe violations of human dignity and fundamental rights, as well as a lack of transparency on behalf of the Commission regarding the execution of the agreement in compliance with EU Law<sup>15</sup>. The Italy-Libya agreement, on the other hand, was not

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<sup>13</sup> For more details regarding the incidents and violations occurred, see BBC News (2017), Manus: Timeline of controversial Australian detention centre, BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-41813219>.

<sup>14</sup> See European Parliament (2016), Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 17 and 18 March 2016 and outcome of the EU-Turkey summit (debate), *European Parliament*. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-04-13-ITM-005\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-04-13-ITM-005_EN.html); Pasciuti, M. (2017), Torture sui migranti in Libia, Minniti non fa dietrofront sulle scelte italiane: "L'Onu ha visitato i campi grazie a noi", *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Available at: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/11/15/torture-sui-migranti-libia-minniti-non-fa-dietrofront-sulle-scelte-italiane-lonu-ha-visitato-campi-grazie-noi/3979977/>.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, see European Ombudsman (2017), Decision of the European Ombudsman in the joint inquiry into complaints 506-509-674-784-927-1381/2016/MHZ against the European Commission concerning a human rights impact assessment in the context of the EU-Turkey Agreement, *European Ombudsman*. Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/decision/en/75160>.

limited to these kinds of accusations, but was also attacked for making Italy waste money by providing ships, logistic and communicative support to Libya, so that the north-African country could respect its duties foreseen in the Memorandum of Understanding (Gennari & Crescini, 2025).

What these facts tell us is that debates generated by externalisation policies at the time of their adoption tend to mirror previous divisions over the broader theme of immigration. When they are introduced, they usually split the public opinion and, consequently, political actors, in two camps. These are, pretty logically, in favour or against the agreements. Equally, the arguments brought either to support them or not match previously existing concerns dividing the two groups, with people on one side making claims related to security and national stability, both in economic and in social terms, and people on the other being more careful towards the humanitarian aspects of the matter. Interestingly enough, these do not seem to have changed particularly after the implementation phase, possibly because when issues receive a high ideological and polarising connotation, as it has occurred for immigration, affecting massively the public opinion, people begin to be highly conditioned over their evaluation, ultimately showing a lower tendency to abandon their original stances, as it occurs almost anytime an ideologically engaged mass has to express itself over a given theme (Jewitt & Goren, 2015).

#### *1.4 Outcomes of the first externalisation policies*

When it comes to the actual implementation of the policy, the early cases so far seen presented quite some differences, mostly because of the very different contexts in which the agreements were adopted. These differences had to be carefully looked at by British and Italian policymakers when deciding to come up with their deals with Rwanda and Albania, respectively, as they could provide an interesting overall view of the possible goals these could achieve, but also of their shortcomings.

As regards the Australian Pacific Solution, the first figure that must be looked at is the number of boat arrivals, since the key short-term goal of the policy was to reduce them. As the graph below shows, over its 20 years of enforcement (interrupted between 2008 and 2012), this policy was indeed able to do so.

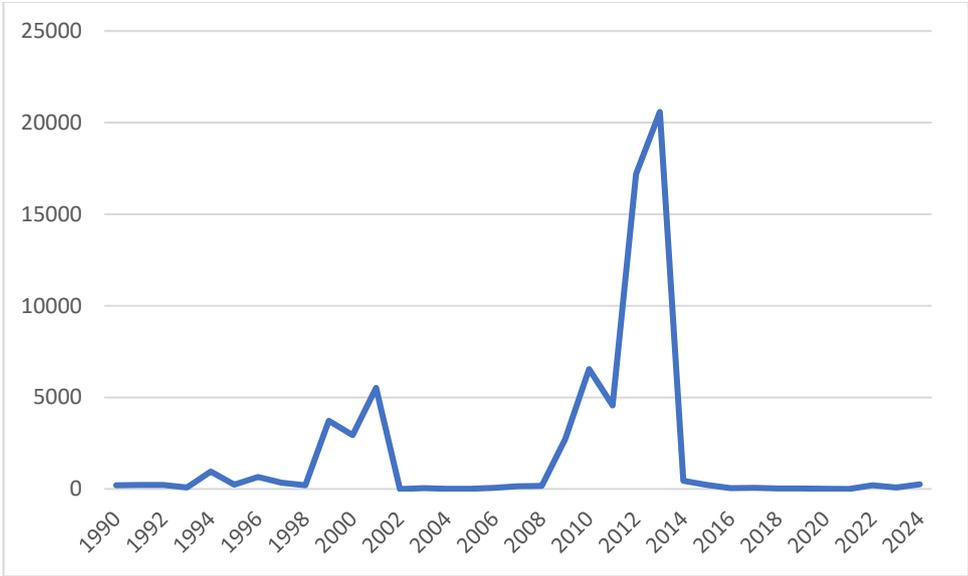


Figure 1 - Number of People Arriving in Australia by Boat (1990-2024) - Elaborated from Refugee Council of Australia (2025), Statistics on boat arrivals and boat turnbacks

As soon as the policy was implemented in 2001, indeed, boat arrivals almost dropped to zero. During its first cycle, which lasted until 2008, more than 2000 asylum seekers have been subject to it, with slightly more than half of them having obtained, in the end, some forms of protection by the Australian government (Rummery, 2008). The policy was at first terminated because of the humanitarian concerns it raised and because of the high costs it required to be sustained, as confirmed by Australian authorities stating that more than A\$ 300 had been wasted<sup>16</sup>. However, immediately after the policy was suspended, boat arrivals started to steadily increase once again, which led Australia to re-establish the policy. During its second enforcement, two main cohorts of asylum seekers have been transferred, for a total of more than 4000 people until 2021<sup>17</sup>. People in the first cohort, who arrived during the first year of this second cycle, after being initially

<sup>16</sup> See Al Jazeera (2008), Australia ends ‘Pacific Solution’, *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2008/2/8/australia-ends-pacific-solution>.

<sup>17</sup> See Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law (2021), Offshore Processing: an Overview, *UNSW*. Available at: [https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/uns-w-adobe-websites/kaldor-centre/2023-09-factsheet/2023-09-factsheet\\_offshore\\_processing\\_overview.pdf](https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/uns-w-adobe-websites/kaldor-centre/2023-09-factsheet/2023-09-factsheet_offshore_processing_overview.pdf).

transferred to the offshore centres, were returned to Australia and asked to start a new asylum request, to be evaluated with a fast-track procedure. Conversely, people in the second cohort, who arrived after 19<sup>th</sup> July 2013, were subject not only to an offshore processing, but also to a permanent ban on settlement in Australia, in case they would have actually been recognised some forms of protection.

Still, despite these numbers, the implementation, especially during the second cycle, faced some obstacles. Among the most relevant, here it is worth mentioning judicial impediments in the first place and, secondly, the discredit received by both international organizations and national control bodies (Bakshi, 2020). Regarding the former, the first significant episode came from Papua New Guinea, where the Supreme Court in 2013 ruled that the detention centres in Manus violated art. 42 of its Constitution (guaranteeing the right to personal liberty), besides expressing concerns for the possible lack of compliance with the 1951 Refugee Convention, particularly because the policy might have been in breach of the rights to education and freedom of movement, as well as in violation of the standard of non-penalization of refugees for illegal entry. The International Criminal Court, then, ruled in 2020 that the Pacific Solution not only put at risk the right to protection from arbitrary and indefinite detention, but also set up a regime which could be regarded as a cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Moving to the latter, UNHCR stressed that Papua New Guinea is in violation of the non-refoulement principle, since, under the Australian scheme, access to refugee status determination procedures is limited. Furthermore, it, too, noted that detention standards do not conform to international guidelines and that the conditions for being detained break the balance of principles of proportionality and necessity, thus contravening Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Significant problems, ultimately, came also from the emergence of some forms of violations occurring within detention centres. For instance, the 2016 leak of the so-called “Nauru Files” revealed approximately 2,000 reports of the sexual abuse of children in Nauru detention centres. Along that line, the Australian Human Rights Commission observed that children in the centres were also more likely to suffer mental disorders and psychological or developmental distress, and that almost all of them presented some kind of chronic illness.

Compared to the Australian case, the agreements later made by the EU with Turkey and by Italy with Libya had a possibly even more complicated implementation. If nothing, this occurred at least because, when they were put in place, the immigration crisis had already grown so much in purely numeric terms that, despite any potential solutions to be adopted and notwithstanding the natural decrease in the number of yearly arrivals, which had not reached again the levels of 2015, the European asylum system was already compromised, both at the EU and at the national level. Some data helps to get a better picture of the situation. For instance, if one looks at the amount of non-processed asylum applications, they will easily see how it is, still to this day, quite big and indicative of a system which is overwhelmed. The most recent data, indeed, tell us that the EU has roughly 1,240,000 pending asylum applications (with Germany, Spain and Italy being the countries with the highest backlog). Furthermore, more than 50% of third-country nationals ordered to leave are not actually returned<sup>18</sup>. The situation in the UK is not good either, as in 2024 the asylum backlog amounted to 91,000 requests, although it must be noted that this number has been decreasing after it peaked in 2021 (Cuibus et al., 2025). These numbers already indicate how the agreements were not capable of producing a significant improvement in terms of efficiency. But actually, the framework is even more complicated. The EU-Turkey agreement, indeed, also produced some unintended consequences. It has, in fact, been estimated that, from April to December 2016, an increase of around 2000 migrants on the Central Mediterranean route occurred, since they tried to reach Europe in other ways, which in turn resulted in a net increase in the number of lives lost at sea (Tafari & Riccaboni, 2025). Also, even in this case the agreement was contested while being implemented (Elbert, 2023). Indeed, despite having improved migrants' living conditions in Turkey's facilities, where they had access to education, health, protection and where their basic needs were met, the deal caused many of the four million refugees detained there to be seeking resettlement outside the camps and other improved facilities, since staying there still meant being vulnerable and without access to economic possibilities. Further criticisms, finally, regarded the fact that the foreseen violation of some human rights and some principles was actually occurring, the non-discrimination and non-

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<sup>18</sup> For more details, see Eurostat (2025), Asylum applications - annual statistics, *Eurostat*. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum\\_applications\\_-\\_annual\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_applications_-_annual_statistics); Eurostat (2025), Returns of irregular migrants - quarterly statistics, *Eurostat*. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title>Returns\\_of\\_irregular\\_migrants\\_-\\_quarterly\\_statistics&stable=0](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title>Returns_of_irregular_migrants_-_quarterly_statistics&stable=0).

refoulement principles being the most affected. Of similar nature were the claims raised against the Italy-Libya agreement, which produced some significant numbers. During its first five years of implementation, indeed, almost 100,000 people trying to reach Italy were stopped and sent back to the north-African country. Also, Libyan authorities were given more than € 100 million for equipment and training, so that they could prevent departures in the first place (Amnesty International, 2022). Notwithstanding that, the centres in Libya were accused of offering terrible living conditions, ultimately violating fundamental human rights of the individuals detained there (Medici Senza Frontiere, 2022).

The implementation of an externalisation policy in Australia, therefore, has historically been characterised by some legal controversies, which constituted the main obstacles faced by the government. These, however, never caused the early termination of the policy. Contrarywise, some good operative numbers have been reached, and no critical tensions with partner countries were registered. The outcome was, instead, significantly different in the European context following the 2015 immigration crisis. Two, in particular, were the critical elements which European States willing to adopt externalisation policies needed to consider. On the one hand, the policies were constantly subject to a massive number of criticisms coming from a broad series of actors, which could potentially impact in a significant way the public opinion's perception over them. On the other, it must be noted that, in terms of efficiency of the asylum system, no significant improvements were produced.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN UK-RWANDA AND ITALY- ALBANIA

Having discussed the key precedents for externalisation policies and having therefore clarified what were the elements British and Italian politicians had at their disposal in order to make informed decisions when making the agreements with Rwanda and Albania, one must now start to look at the two cases object of the present analysis. This will be done first by looking at the national contexts as regards the theme of immigration, so to trace the causes behind the specific and particular origins of these two policies. Subsequently, some space will be devoted to the discussion of the early stages of the path towards the formal adoption of these agreements, and also to some preliminary opinions over them which emerged in the meanwhile.

#### *2.1 Origins of the UK-Rwanda Agreement*

In order to understand how and why the UK decided to adopt an externalisation agreement, it is of paramount importance to have a look at some data. In the first place, one must consider a very general, but fundamental element. That is, the attitude of the country towards the phenomenon of immigration. Nowadays, British citizens present the following division: 17% of the population thinks immigration is very bad, 16% sees it as

bad, 30% believes it is neither bad nor good, 23% claims it is good, according to 8% it is very good, while the remaining 6% does not know (Richards et al., 2025). If one wants to simplify them, these numbers could be grouped so to split up the population in three main blocks of equal magnitude. These would be people against immigration, amounting to 33%, people in favour of immigration, amounting to 31%, and people in between being 30%. Another interesting figure, then, is that of the number of irregular arrivals in the last years before the policy was announced (2022). A close look at it reveals how, after the Covid-19 pandemic, the phenomenon of illegal immigration rose again, particularly boosted by arrivals on small boats.

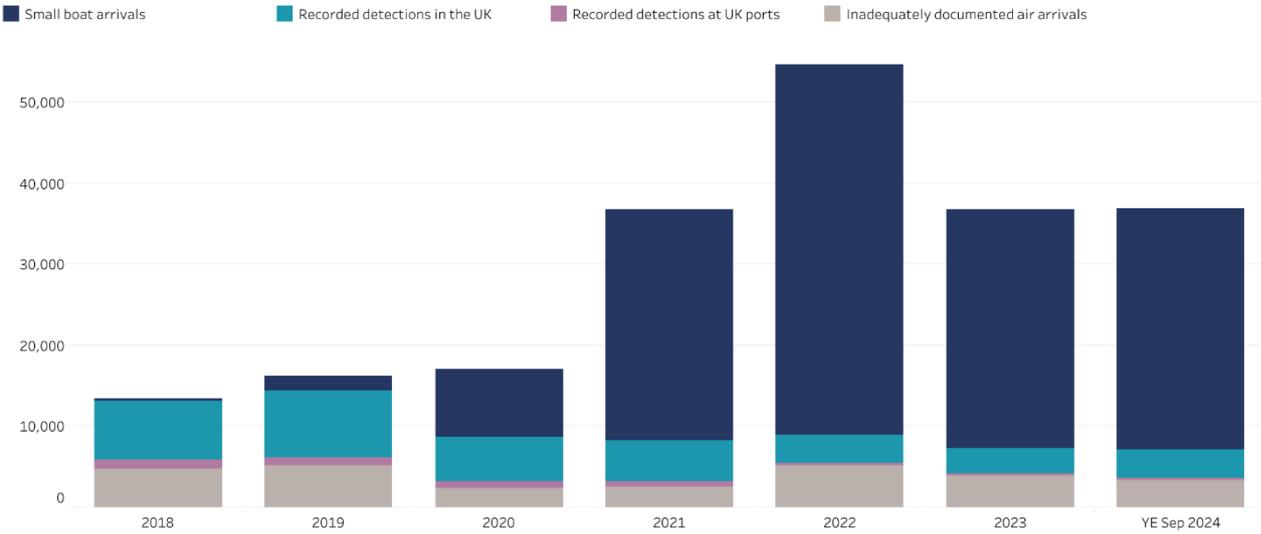


Figure 2 - Number of people detected while attempting to enter the UK without authorisation (2018-2024) - Taken from Cuibus, M., & Walsh, M. P. (2025), *Unauthorised Migration in the UK*

Taken together, these elements provide the picture of a country where, as of 2022, a significant portion of the population had the perception that immigration, a phenomenon which they considered to be problematic, was growing once again in magnitude, up to the point where it could have been considered an immediate emergency which had to be tackled. This perception of a threat was not something unprecedented in the British context. Rather, citizens have historically experienced this sensation, especially in economic terms, even before the outstanding 2015 crisis. In this sense, a significant precedent is to be found in the early 2000s, when Polish citizens entering the country after the EU 2004 enlargement were seen as a potential threat to the British economy and to the stability of its job market

(Harris et al., 2022). The recent crisis and the rise of populist parties, then, added further elements of complexity to this attitude. Specifically, after the increase in the number of immigrants there was, particularly among people with a lower income, a growing chauvinistic dimension which added to the concerns for the management of the welfare state (Cappelen et al., 2025). Not only, but there was also an opposition towards migrants, as they were perceived to be culturally distant. This was due to the effect of right-wing authoritarianism, an element proper of many of those right-wing populists which progressively gained a lot of attention from the public in the 2010s. The aggressive component of right-wing authoritarian stances, indeed, is a sign of the relevance given to the enforcement of group norms. Consequently, those individuals who are not aligned with these shared norms (in the case of migrants, because they come from a completely different cultural context) tend to be rejected (Peresman et al., 2023).

The socio-political environment in which the UK-Rwanda deal saw the light, therefore, was one of an increasingly high exposure to a new wave of immigration. This was occurring in a country which, as was shown in the previous Chapter, had an asylum system which struggled to keep pace with the high number of asylum requests to be processed, and which had a significant portion of its population with a strongly negative attitude towards migrants. The origin of the agreement between the UK and Rwanda, indeed, needs to be found in the urge, felt by both political actors and part of the public opinion, to strengthen the control over national borders, and to do so by introducing hard measures which could succeed in managing efficiently and sustainably mass immigration, something which the then-operating asylum system was not able to do.

This urge manifested itself quite in advance. The first signs that an externalisation policy was about to be introduced, indeed, occurred in March 2021, when the then-Home Secretary, Priti Patel, published the so-called “New Plan for Immigration”. This presented the intention to introduce a core reform for the British immigration system, namely the possibility to move asylum seekers from the UK while their case still had to go through the whole administrative, and potentially judicial, evaluation procedure (Grierson & Henley, 2021). This decision was presented as a solution to what were considered the two greatest limits of the British asylum system. On the one hand, it was aimed at improving its fairness and efficiency. The government underlined especially the necessity to protect the UK

border, the need to reduce the amount of caseloads which were growing to an “unsustainable” level and, ultimately, the will to avoid a waste of public money, as the cost of the asylum system for taxpayers was getting higher every year.

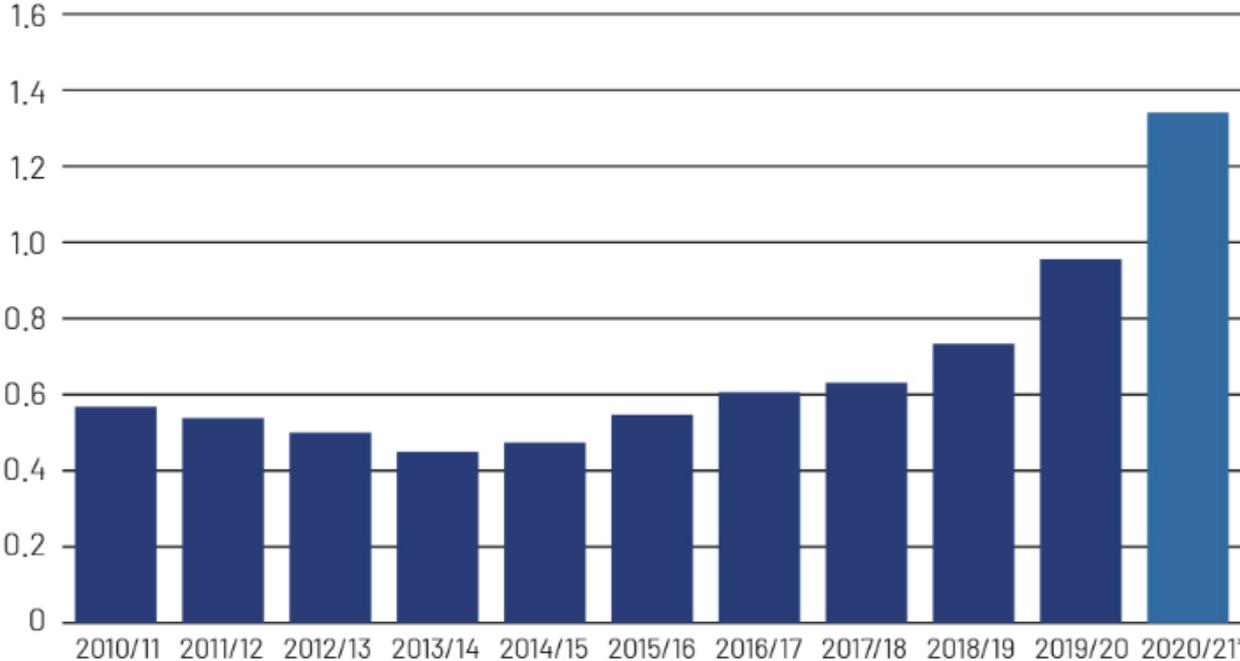


Figure 3 - Cost of the asylum system to the taxpayer in £ billions (2010/11 - 2019/20 + forecast for 2020/21) - Taken from Home Office (2022), New Plan for Immigration: policy statement (accessible)

On the other, a core goal of the Plan was to deter illegal entry in the UK, so to contrast the criminal network responsible for people smuggling. The very same choice to forcibly move asylum seekers out of the country while their claims were still pending was presented as an attempt to create a disincentive for them to enter the country illegally in the first place<sup>19</sup>.

At that point, the UK still lacked a fundamental element to begin an externalisation policy. That is to say, they did not have an agreement with another country where to send migrants. Several options were evaluated and discarded, either because they were unviable or because they could not find a deal with some States. In the end, the final decision to opt

<sup>19</sup> To look at the Plan in detail, see Home Office (2022), New Plan for Immigration: policy statement (accessible), Gov.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration/new-plan-for-immigration-policy-statement-accessible#chapter1>.

for Rwanda was due not just to the willingness to make a deal shown by the east-African country, but also to the fact that it was a State which had experience as a host for refugees, and which was generally inclined to take them, even from other countries<sup>20</sup>. Two elements corroborated this notion. On the one hand, the elevate number of people displaced in Rwanda (almost 140,000 as of 2021<sup>21</sup>) proved that it was a country with the capability to actually host refugees sent by London. On the other, the fact that, in those same years, Denmark was able to formally establish a cooperation agreement with Rwanda for the transfer of asylum seekers<sup>22</sup> was a good indicator that this was possibly the most preferable choice even for the UK.

## 2.2 Origins of the Italy-Albania Agreement

Just like it was done for the UK-Rwanda case, even when understanding the origins of the agreement between Italy and Albania one cannot avoid looking, in the first place, at the Italian national context and, particularly, at how the issue of immigration was perceived. The first element to bear in mind is that as of fall 2023, time of the announcement of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries, after some years during which immigration was regarded as a less fundamental issue and during which migrants were less perceived as threat (possibly because the Covid-19 pandemic inevitably led people to be more concerned about other matters), the trend saw a new inversion (Diamanti, 2023). The results of social surveys conducted at the time reveal that 64% of the people interviewed believed Italy had to reinforce the control of its borders. Quite on the opposite side, 34% of respondents thought that the country had to be more open towards the rest of the world, while the remaining 2% was in doubt. Also, 45% of the

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<sup>20</sup> See The Week (2024), Why the UK picked Rwanda to process asylum seekers, *The Week*. Available at: <https://theweek.com/news/politics/956440/why-the-uk-chose-rwanda-to-process-asylum-seekers>.

<sup>21</sup> See UNHCR (2021), Rwanda – Key Statistics, *UNHCR*. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/rwanda?year=2021>.

<sup>22</sup> See Republic of Rwanda – Ministry of Foreign Affair and International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2022), Joint Statement on Bilateral Cooperation, *uim.dk*. Available at: <https://uim.dk/media/hq3dzgsw/faelles-erklaering.pdf>.

population saw migrants as dangerous for public order and people’s safety, this data being the highest recorded since 2007.

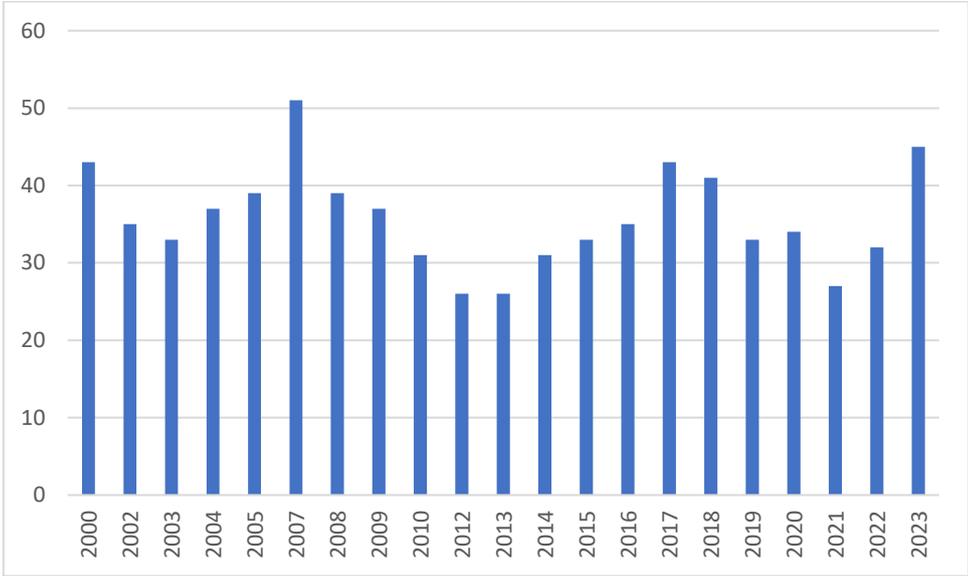


Figure 4 - Italians Considering Migrants a Danger for Public Order and People's Safety (%) - Elaborated from Diamanti, I. (2023), *Dopo il Covid torna la paura dello straniero. Due terzi degli italiani per le frontiere chiuse*

These findings should not come as a surprise if one recalls that Italy is a country with a generalised misperception of the magnitude of the immigration phenomenon, with citizens believing that migrants make up 21% of the total population, while the actual figure amounts to 11% (Ipsos, 2024). This wrong belief, in turn, affects how much foreigners are perceived as a threat, a sentiment which tends to be stronger when the number of immigrants in a country is overestimated, particularly among those who have a highly idealised vision of the society they live in, which, according to them, should not be altered (Kosic et al., 2023). This perceived threat assumed a dual nature. On the one hand, what was seen at stake was the preservation of the national identity, which became a predominant theme in the socio-political public discourse, ultimately leading the majority of Italians (57.4%) to feel threatened by those who want to introduce norms and traditions contrasting with local ones (CENSIS, 2024). On the other, aspects of economic competition were proven to be relevant in exacerbating a negative attitude towards migration, as evidence suggests how people are more likely to express negative views about immigrants when

they feel their economic position is at stake. That is, when they are less educated, poorer and living a region with a higher unemployment rate (Nese, 2023).

Besides these structural and attitudinal causes, other elements, more factual in nature, led the Italian government to make the externalisation agreement. Just as for the British case, the new rise in the number of irregular arrivals in the early 2020s was a significant factor. In 2023, year in which the agreement was set up, these amounted to more than 157,000, roughly 50% more than 2022, 130% more than 2021 and, most relevantly, slightly more than those registered in 2015, year which marked the beginning of the well-known refugee crisis.

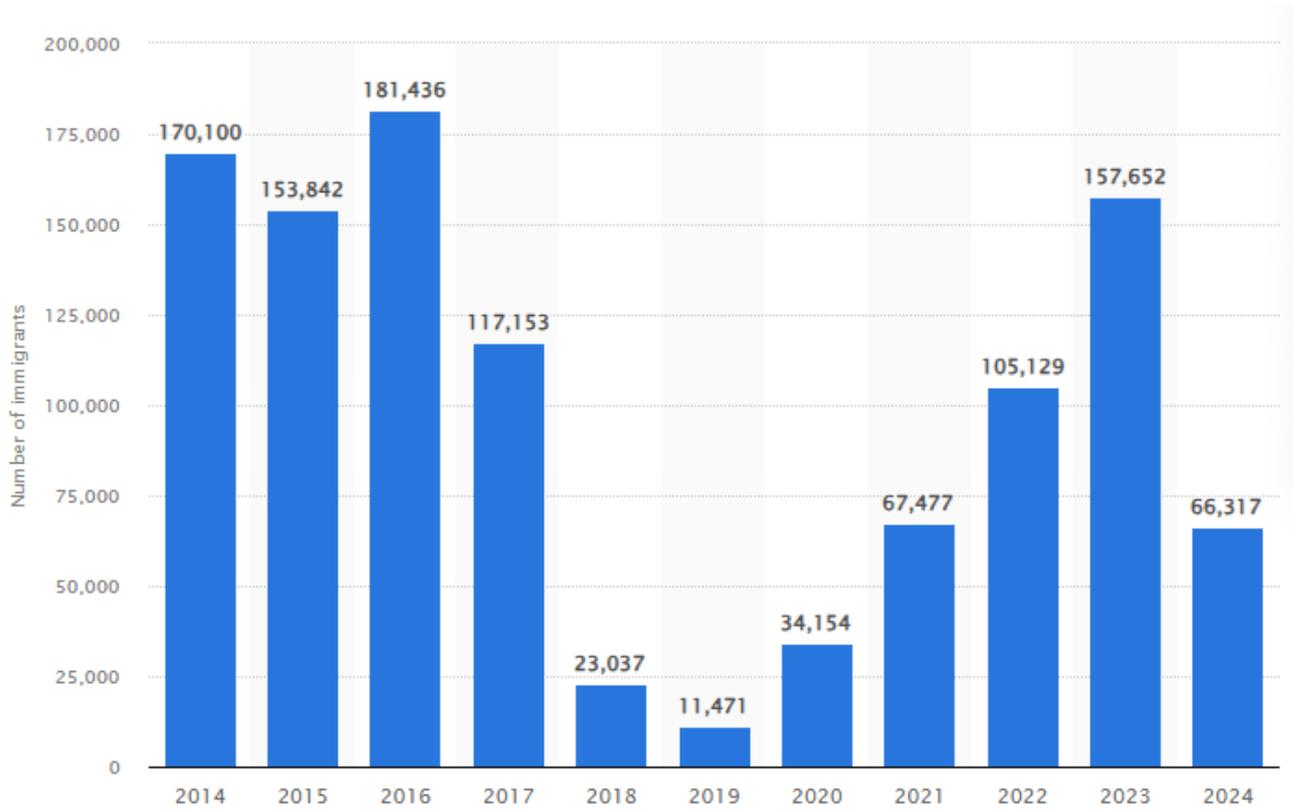


Figure 5 - Number of immigrants who arrived in Italy by sea (2014-2024) – Taken from Macchi, L. (2024), Number of immigrants who arrived in Italy by sea from 2014 to 2024

Furthermore, a key event shocked the public opinion and contributed to put the theme of immigration back to the centre of the public debate. On the night between 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February 2023, indeed, a boat carrying migrants sank a few miles away from the

Italian coast. Of those on board, 94 died, 35 of them being children<sup>23</sup>. The incident got known as the disaster of Cutro, from the small town in front of which it occurred, and received a massive attention from the media, especially because both Italian authorities and Frontex were accused, on the one hand, of having underestimated the dangers to which the boat was exposed, ultimately causing the death of many people, and, on the other, of having attempted to hide the proof of their responsibility in the incident. Leaving aside the doubtful elements still surrounding the course of events of that night, what happened in Cutro significantly contributed to raise again the attention devoted to the issue of immigration and provided an important incentive for the government to intervene on the matter. A well-designed policy, indeed, would have not only addressed the concerns regarding the perceived excessive number of migrants in the country, but would have also prevented the possibility for a similar incident to ever occur again.

The origin of the agreement between Italy and Albania, therefore, lies in a socio-political context which presented two fundamental features. As for the former, there was a systemic and quite well-spread negative attitude towards migration. Attitudes which were re-emerging in the few years before the agreement was set up, because of the new increase in the number of arrivals and the new salience it gave to the theme of migration. As for the latter, there were some limits in the management of asylum seekers at the time, determined by a long-lasting institutional deficiency. This consisted of an excessively stressed system, unable to efficiently deal with a constantly growing number of requests. Since most of these elements did not come up out of nowhere, but were rather pretty old and clearly evident, one can easily see why some proposals to tackle them necessarily had to emerge quite in advance, as the problems had been discussed for many years. The Italy-Albania deal is no exception to that, as it was not a totally unexpected move from the government. The creation of hotspots outside the EU territory, but still managed by the EU, for the evaluation of asylum requests had indeed been foreseen in the 2022 electoral program of Fratelli d'Italia, the party leading the governing coalition<sup>24</sup>. This was a clear sign of the political will to shift to a tougher management of immigration, a will which was not

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<sup>23</sup> See RaiNews (2023), L'inchiesta su naufragio Cutro: "L'Italia e Frontex sapevano rischi per la barca. Si poteva evitare", *RaiNews*. Available at: <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2023/06/il-naufragio-a-cutro-poca-trasparenza-da-parte-dellitalia-e-di-frontex-si-poteva-evitare-0217cae6-b5eb-4fb3-93df-f08e73581acd.html>.

<sup>24</sup> To look up at the program, see Fratelli d'Italia (2022), *Il Programma – Pronti a risolleverare l'Italia – Elezioni politiche 25 settembre 2022, Pagella Politica*. Available at: [https://cdn.pagellapolitica.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Programma\\_FratelliItalia.pdf](https://cdn.pagellapolitica.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Programma_FratelliItalia.pdf).

extemporaneous and determined by unforeseen shocks, but rather programmatic and built over time.

As regards the decision to choose specifically Albania as a partner country for this kind of solution, this was due mainly to one factor. That is, the close relationship the two countries have, which is rooted, in the words of the Albanian Prime Minister Rama, in historical, cultural and emotional elements<sup>25</sup>. This link is not something claimed without evidence. On the contrary, the key document to which we can trace back the 2023 Memorandum of Understanding is an older treaty between Italy and Albania, stipulated in 1995. In this, it was provided also a mutual promise to make joint efforts to contain migratory flows (art. 19), as well as to have frequent consultations over international matters of common interest (art. 5)<sup>26</sup>, possibly opening the door to work together in order to tackle critical situations. Although externalisation policies had not been introduced yet, this Treaty foresaw the possibility to establish a cooperation between the two countries to manage, in a restrictive way, the migratory phenomenon. Thanks to that, it was used as a legal basis to quickly set up the Memorandum of Understanding in November 2023, without making a parliamentary passage. A decision which, as it will be seen below, raised some criticisms.

### *2.3 Early Developments of the UK-Rwanda Agreement*

As previously said, the deal with Rwanda was part of the execution of a more systemic plan, and was set up in April 2022, a year after the former was announced. The first divisions it generated pretty much aligned with the traditional positions which characterised the British public debate over migration. In fact, when the first evidence of an incoming finalisation of the agreement came out, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson

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<sup>25</sup> See RaiNews (2023), Migranti, Giorgia Meloni firma un accordo con Edi Rama: "In Albania 2 centri italiani di raccolta", *RaiNews*. Available at: <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2023/11/giorgia-meloni-riceve-a-palazzo-chigi-il-premier-albanese-edi-rama-migranti--centri-gestione-in-albania-c0132259-62d6-4bb0-bc27-827e53ce9af2.html>.

<sup>26</sup> The Treaty can be consulted at Ambasciata d'Italia a Tirana (1995), Trattato di Amicizia e Collaborazione tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica di Albania, *ambtirana.esteri.it*. Available at: [https://ambtirana.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/23490\\_f\\_alb047\\_trattato\\_di\\_amicizia\\_e\\_collaborazione.pdf](https://ambtirana.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/23490_f_alb047_trattato_di_amicizia_e_collaborazione.pdf).

remarked how British people themselves had expressed on several occasions, through their vote, the will to adopt solutions to control borders. This was done to justify a policy which had immediately produced critical opinions. The Labour party, indeed, had defined the deal as “unworkable and unethical” and had underlined its esteemed cost of £ 120 million to be sustained by taxpayers (Syal & Badshah, 2022). Some exponents of civil society had a negative reaction, too. The plan, indeed, provided to set up a scheme for which some asylum seekers reaching the UK would have been transferred to Rwanda<sup>27</sup>. There, not only their claim would have been processed and evaluated, but they would have also been encouraged to settle. This has been regarded as particularly problematic by humanitarian activists and NGOs, who criticised not only the idea itself, seen as a way to shift away responsibilities, but also the choice of Rwanda as a partner for this kind of policy, given its poor records for its respect of human rights. To all of these criticisms, Johnson replied by providing a completely different perspective. According to him, Rwanda had been going through a process of change which ultimately made it a safe country, able not only to welcome migrants but also to integrate them, thus allowing the resettlement scheme to take place. Moreover, he also added another actor to the debate when he declared that the UK was seen as too soft over the issue of immigration. That, he claimed, was due to the fact that, over the years, many lawyers acted against the government (Syal, 2022). By stating so, he made evident also to the general public how relevant the judiciary and courts’ decision could be not only to influence the public opinion, but also to determine the course of policies, either indirectly, as here implied by Johnson, or directly, as occurred immediately after the agreement was announced.

Interestingly, indeed, it was precisely a court to cause the following major key developments for the policy, starting a trend characterising its whole lifecycle and for which judicial bodies constituted the biggest obstacle the British executive had to face in order to actually enforce the provisions of the agreement. Such a trend began in June 2024, when the European Court of Human Rights issued injunctions to stop the first flight

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<sup>27</sup> The whole agreement, including provisional mechanisms regarding how to manage the whole relocation process and how to organise the evaluation of asylum applications directly in Rwanda, can be consulted at UK Government (2022), Agreement Between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Rwanda for the Provision of an Asylum Partnership to strengthen Shared International Commitments in the Protection of Refugees and Migrants, *Gov.UK*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/656f51d30f12ef07a53e0295/UK-Rwanda\\_MEDP\\_-\\_English\\_-\\_Formatted\\_5\\_Dec\\_23\\_-\\_UK\\_VERSION.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/656f51d30f12ef07a53e0295/UK-Rwanda_MEDP_-_English_-_Formatted_5_Dec_23_-_UK_VERSION.pdf) [Accessed: 09/08/2025].

directed to Rwanda to transfer asylum seekers, following a ruling from the Court itself regarding one of the persons to be transferred (Taylor et al., 2022). Following that, in March 2023 Suella Braverman, Patel's successor, introduced the Illegal Migration Bill, an instrument through which the Home Secretary was given a legal duty to detain and remove those illegally arriving to the UK, either to Rwanda or to another "safe country" (Davies, 2024). The bill was immediately contested within national courts, making it all the way up to the Supreme Court. The final decision regarded it as unlawful, on the ground that there were not the necessary conditions to consider Rwanda a safe country. In particular, it was argued that it did not offer enough guarantees to ensure the possibility for claims to be correctly determined, ultimately compromising the fairness of the whole asylum procedure (Syal & Taylor, 2023).

This set of judicial interventions inevitably heated up even more the public debate, which meanwhile was filled with several public statements going in favour or against it. The most relevant and striking contributions came from a quite different set of actors. A significant intervention for the Conservative party was from the former Prime Minister Theresa May, who criticised the plan as an insufficient tool to deal with the problem of migration. This was a major sign of crisis for the Tories, which began to show lack of internal cohesion over the policy, ultimately delegitimising it even more to the eyes of their opponents, who could also rely on data certifying how, despite the expected deterrence effect presented by the government, the number of boat arrivals did not present any significant variation after one year from the announcement of the agreement (Skoulding, 2023).

It was in this context that the Sunak government decided, in December 2023, to propose the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, whose provisions were aimed at overruling the Supreme Court's decision. The bill, indeed, established by law that Rwanda was a safe country, so that courts could no longer stop transfers on this ground, and that asylum seekers had a very limited scope to challenge their forced removal to the east-African country<sup>28</sup>. After a long and complex series of policy developments, the vote for this Bill was perceived to be decisive to finally confirm the line of the country to tackle

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<sup>28</sup> For more details on the bill, see Home Office (2024), Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill: factsheet, Gov.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-safety-of-rwanda-asylum-and-immigration-bill-factsheets/safety-of-rwanda-asylum-and-immigration-bill-factsheet-accessible>.

immigration and, eventually, to actually put the agreement with Rwanda in practice. The context in which Sunak had to reach this goal, however, did not make it an easy task at all. The public opinion was heavily divided and claims against the policy advocating for a different approach were strongly increasing. What is more, voices against the agreement came also from within Sunak's party, so that his political concerns regarded not only the need to persuade the public opinion that the Rwanda scheme was the best solution to face the issue of immigration, but also, and mostly, the need to convince his own MPs to back him up and not to vote against the Bill in Parliament.

What can be inferred from these early developments is that, just before what can be considered the central political moment of the whole path for the adoption and implementation of the deal with Rwanda, most of the relevant actors had already shown up. These would be the government, political parties, public opinion, civil society and the courts. Moreover, with varying degrees of efficiency, all of them had already impacted the course of events. The courts, in particular, had produced the most significant consequences, as their judgments forced the executive to make ad hoc bills so to pursue their objective. Political parties, civil societies and public opinion, instead, have not had a concrete impact, yet. Notwithstanding that, they already made manifest some critical fractures which would have soon be decisive.

#### *2.4 Early Developments of the Italy-Albania Agreement*

As previously anticipated, the 1995 Treaty between Italy and Albania was used as a legal basis to quickly set up the Memorandum of Understanding in November 2023, without making a parliamentary passage. This new agreement provided that Albania would have allowed Italy to use some areas within its territory to build two centres for the management of irregular migrants. The construction of these centres would have been paid entirely by Italy, which would have also maintained a full jurisdiction within these. Specifically, Italy would have brought there some migrants not belonging to vulnerable categories and would have executed, *in loco*, landing and identification processes,

screening and evaluation of asylum applications via fast procedures and, in case these got rejected, returns to the countries of origin.<sup>29</sup> The Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, when publicly announcing the deal, declared that the three main objectives to be reached by the agreement were to contrast human trafficking, to prevent illegal immigration and to allow only those migrants having the right to international protection to enter Italy<sup>30</sup>. Politically speaking, therefore, it was framed as a tool addressing concerns over a phenomenon which had caused, on the one hand, the entrance in Italy of a number of migrants which was perceived to be too high, ultimately creating problems of economic and social order, and, on the other, the creation of a whole criminal system exploiting the flows and capitalising over them.

The first reactions to the agreement were, as it could be easily expected, aligned with pre-existing divisions over immigration. Other members of the governing coalition, indeed, expressed a positive opinion on the deal, pleasing it for its innovative character, its capacity to strengthen borders and its compliance with both EU Law and European Commission's political guidelines (Barone, 2023). It is important to note how, unlike in the UK case, there had not been open signs of internal opposition or criticisms towards the agreement. This was the case because the Italian governing coalition is built on the principle of connected least minimum winning coalition. According to this principle, governing coalitions in multiparty systems as Italy are created by putting together the lowest possible number of parties which are ideologically aligned (Clark et al., 2017). This is done so that political parties participating in the alliance are fundamental elements for the very same existence of the government. If one of them leaves, indeed, the executive has no longer a parliamentary majority in support and ends its mandate. Because of that, it is very unlikely that allied parties, especially when there is a clear power hierarchy as the Meloni government's one (with Fratelli d'Italia having a higher share of votes, and

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<sup>29</sup> The whole agreement can be consulted at Ministero per gli Affari Esteri e la Cooperazione Internazionale (2023), Protocollo tra il Governo della Repubblica Italiana e il Consiglio dei Ministri della Repubblica di Albania per il Rafforzamento della Collaborazione in Materia Migratoria, *esteri.it*. Available at: <https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PROTOCOLLO-ITALIA-ALBANIA-in-materia-migratoria.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> To read the full declaration, see Governo Italiano – Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2023), Dichiarazioni alla stampa con il Primo Ministro d'Albania, l'intervento del Presidente Meloni, *governo.it*. Available at: <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/dichiarazioni-alla-stampa-con-il-primo-ministro-dalbania-lintervento-del-presidente-meloni>.

therefore power, than its allies Lega and Forza Italia<sup>31</sup>), align differently on major, politically relevant topics.

As regards other reactions after the deal with Albania was announced, one must note that the EU had a more neutral response, as the Commission did not express any opinion at first. Instead, it only asked for more details on the agreement to the government. After a preliminary assessment, it concluded that, despite many would have thought it would have been considered to be in breach of EU Law, it was actually “outside” of EU Law, and therefore legitimate (Liboreiro, 2023). This position can seem quite striking, but avoiding condemning a policy which attempted to reduce irregular arrivals is actually a coherent position for the Commission President von der Leyen (who, indeed, explicitly pleased the agreement), as one of the points of her programme provided to strengthen European borders (Cook, 2023).

Finally, immediate criticisms came inevitably from political rivals. MEPs of Partito Democratico, the biggest opposition party, defined it as useless and wrong, and presented a formal question to the Commission. At the national level, instead, the party’s leader Elly Schelin criticised the decision of the government not to make the Parliament formally approve the agreement (Barone, 2023). This argument was raised also by some commentators, which defined this procedural lack as a violation of the Constitution<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, negative opinions came also from members of civil society, ultimately confirming once more how much relevant and divisive the issue is. The key critical aspects were underlined mostly by scholars and NGOs, which, as anticipated above, noted how the fact that Albania was not part of the EU might have created problems when it came to apply EU Law in its territory, ultimately causing migrants sent there to receive a different treatment with respect to those whose requests were processed in Italy. Not only, but also individual rights of migrants (such as right to personal freedom and right to asylum) were considered to be put in danger by the agreement, because of the procedural provisions forcing migrants to stay within the centres. Some even claimed that the transfer of people from the Italian territory (i.e. the boats on which migrants would have been rescued in the

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<sup>31</sup> *Infra*, p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> See Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici e l’Immigrazione (2023), *Accordo Italia-Albania ASGI: È incostituzionale non sottoporlo al Parlamento, ASGI*. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/10/Downloads/ASGI\\_2023\\_11\\_14\\_protocollo-italo-albanese-osservazioni-su-necessita-ratifica-parlamento-ex-art.-80-cost-1.pdf](file:///C:/Users/10/Downloads/ASGI_2023_11_14_protocollo-italo-albanese-osservazioni-su-necessita-ratifica-parlamento-ex-art.-80-cost-1.pdf).

first place) to a third country, done with the aim of avoiding them to enter Italy, might be regarded as a form of deportation (Camilli, 2024).

Concerns over the agreement came from Albania, too. There, the Constitutional Court had to express itself on the compliance of the Memorandum of Understanding with the national Constitution and, for this reason, suspended the ratification process of the agreement until it took a decision. The elements the Court had to judge regarded whether the agreement was concretely providing a transfer of part of the Albanian territory to Italy and whether the mechanism established constituted a restriction of fundamental human rights (Bushati & Furramani, 2024). Although the Court ruled that this was not the case, the controversy raised in Albania influenced also the public debate in Italy, as there was the potential to create the dual perception that the agreement was indeed illegal and that it could have been a political failure regardless of what the Italian government could do.

Following the pressures made by opposition parties, the Italian government decided to make a legislative passage in Parliament to ratify the agreement. The context in which this key political moment was approached was characterised by an animated civil society, which offered several critical points on the basis of which a party or an individual MP could start to think that the agreement still needed to be adjusted, ultimately deciding to strike it down. However, because of the strong cohesion shown by the majority coalition, together with the implicit approval received by the EU, collecting enough votes against the ratification seemed an impossible task for the opposition forces.

## CHAPTER III

### PARLIAMENTARY VOTES AND THE ROLES OF POLITICAL PARTIES, MPs AND PUBLIC OPINION

As shown in the previous Chapter, both the UK-Rwanda and the Italy-Albania agreements had to face a fundamental legislative passage, in order for the two policies to be adopted and to get started with the implementation phase. Precisely because of their nature, this moment was the one above all the others where political parties, MPs and the public opinion played a significant role in the path towards the adoption of the policies. Political parties and MPs, in particular, had to actively make a choice, which was heavily influenced by the attitude of public opinion and by their need to maximise their share of votes, determining the future of the agreements. In order to understand how and why they acted in a given manner and produced a given result, it is important to first look at the specific political context of the two countries, so to better understand why and how the mechanisms which will be discussed later have operated.

#### *3.1 Political Context at the Time of the Key Parliamentary Vote in the UK*

As of January 2024, time of the third reading vote of the Rwanda bill for the House of Commons, MPs had to take into account three usually politically relevant elements before deciding how to vote. In the first place, there is a purely numerical factor. As a result

of the general election of 2019, indeed, the Conservative party had gained 365 seats out of 650<sup>33</sup>. This implies that Tories on their own had a complete control over the Parliament, as they had 39 seats more than the 626 required to have a majority, and, consequently, over the executive (the Sunak government, indeed, was entirely composed of Conservative exponents, even after a reshuffle<sup>34</sup>). That, in turn, had two major implications. On the one hand, no party was forced to negotiate their position over any given bill with other political forces. Since an outcome in accordance with the Tories' will was generally supposed to be guaranteed, precisely because they alone could reach the majority, all parties could vote without any political constraint coming from being part of a coalition. This applied mostly to opposition parties, which could express themselves as either in favour or against without any immediately relevant consequences. On the other hand, and possibly most importantly, having one party with more seats than those strictly required to have the parliamentary majority left space, although it was a very tiny one, for internal opposition, as up to 39 Conservative MPs could potentially vote against the bill without compromising its possibility to pass. It must be specified that the Single-Member District Plurality system present in the UK creates some interesting effects, in this regard. MPs, indeed, have to carry on their parliamentary activities so to favour the interests of their constituency (Raymond, 2017), with the ultimate goal of being re-elected. If they do not do that, their electorate might not compensate them at the following electoral round, because of the dynamic known as retrospective voting, meaning that voters look at the past performance of incumbent parties while in office to decide how to vote in the following election (Healy & Malhotra, 2013). As such, they might, in some cases, even go against the directives of their party, if voting accordingly would cause them to lose a lot of consensuses at home. Still, in order to be elected they first need to be selected as candidates by their party. Thus, they also need to make sure that they comply as much as possible with the directives given by their leaders. In fact, considering that both Conservative and Labour select internally who to present as a candidate for each constituency, politicians must always try to emerge as a reliable candidate for the party, i.e. one who will stick to the voting indications once they become an MP, thus not putting in danger the integrity of the parliamentary group (Paxton,

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<sup>33</sup> See BBC News (2019), Results of the 2019 General Election, *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2019/results> [Accessed: 13/08/2025].

<sup>34</sup> To see the complete composition of the Sunak government, see Morton, B. (2023), Rishi Sunak's reshuffle: Who is in the prime minister's cabinet?, *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-63376560>.

2023). Because of that, if some Tories did evaluate that, overall, the trade-off between the need to comply with their party's indications and the need to please their constituency would have favoured the latter, they could have pursued that way. Not only, but that could have also come with little harm for the party itself, had the number of internal opposers been not too high. In this way, they could have even minimised their loss as regards fellow party members' approval.

The second relevant element to be considered is voters' attitude, both towards parties and towards the bill itself. Voting intentions are a useful tool politicians tend to look at, as they are a good indicator of how consensus changes over years. Moreover, in this specific case they were even more important than usual, as the third reading vote took place in January 2024 and the following general election occurred six months later. It therefore became fundamental for MPs to consider the reactions their vote for such a hot topic would have generated in their constituency, considered that they would have had little to no time to eventually reverse them. The survey closest in time to the vote predicted a complete change in parliamentary equilibria. According to that, the Labour party was expected to gain the parliamentary majority in July, with 47% of respondents saying they would have voted for them, while Conservatives were selected by 20% only. These data were confirmed even by looking at results at the regional level. Whereas in 2019 all regions in England expressed a clear Conservative majority (even in some districts, mostly located in the North-East, which had traditionally voted for Labour), the projections for July 2024 suggested that most of those constituencies would have elected a labour candidate, instead. A similar situation was expected to occur in Scotland, where, besides the Tories, also the National Scottish Party, by far the winning party in 2019, was expected to lose votes to the Labour<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, there would have been a lot of MPs, especially within the Conservative party, having an incentive to vote against the Rwanda bill to improve their position in front of a public opinion which would have not otherwise voted for them, as they would have seen them as the "standard" Tory candidate, who they did not intend to support. Conversely, voting against the bill could have been used as a sign to differentiate

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<sup>35</sup> To see the results of the survey and to compare them with previous parliamentary equilibria see Uberoi, E., Baker, C., Cracknell, L., Allen, G., Roberts, N., Barton, C., Sturge, G., Danechi, S., Harkfer, R., Bolton, P., Mchnes, R., Watson, C., Dempsey, N., & Audickas, L. (2020), General Election 2019: results and analysis, *House of Commons Library*. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8749/CBP-8749.pdf>; YouGov (2024), Survey Report, *YouGov*. Available at: [https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/TheTimes\\_VI\\_Immigration\\_Cons\\_240117\\_W.pdf](https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/TheTimes_VI_Immigration_Cons_240117_W.pdf).

themselves from that kind of image, and possibly to gain more support from the electoral base. Also, another key factor they had to consider was the public perception of the policy.

**To what extent do you support or oppose the government's proposed policy to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda?**

Region (4953 GB adults - 30 June 2023)

	All	London	Rest of South	Midlands	North	Scotland	Wales
Strongly support	<b>24%</b>	16	28	24	27	16	26
Somewhat support	<b>18%</b>	18	18	20	18	20	17
Somewhat oppose	<b>11%</b>	12	10	12	12	10	11
Strongly oppose	<b>28%</b>	37	24	22	28	35	30
Don't know	<b>19%</b>	17	20	22	17	18	15

YouGov | What the world thinks yougov.co.uk

Figure 6 - Support for the Rwanda Policy -Survey Results by Region - Taken from YouGov (2023), To what extent do you support or oppose the government's proposed policy to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda?

A close look at these data adds a further element of complexity, as the situation appears to be more fragmented. If looking merely at voting intentions would have suggested that there was a good incentive to vote against bill, so to intercept a clearly pro-Labour electorate, here appears how, instead, the shift in electoral consensus did not change much the divisive character of the deal with Rwanda in itself, as there is no clear majority in favour or against it. MPs, therefore, also had to consider that, for quite a significant number of voters, their alignment with the Labour party did not necessarily imply that they disagreed with the policy. This, in turn, means that voting in favour of the policy might not have necessarily been a move going against popular will. Such a complex situation, characterised by contrasting incentives, made it likely for some MPs to go against their party directives, when deciding how to act in order to gain people’s approval.

Parties' indications, finally, constitute the third key element politicians need to look at. As previously discussed, UK politicians have a strong incentive to meet their leaders' requirements, so to be selected as candidates running for a seat in the next elections. As general elections were approaching, this factor became even stronger in the specific case of the vote for the third reading of the Rwanda bill. The indications MPs received were pretty straightforward and dichotomic. On the one hand, the Conservative leadership obviously called for a vote in favour. This occurred not only because the whole policy was an initiative of a Conservative government, but also because it was one of the fundamental priorities for Sunak's mandate, identified as such by the Prime Minister himself<sup>36</sup>. The Labour, on the other, have opposed the policy since the very beginning, and their key priorities did not include to stop or limit immigration, unlike their rivals (Mason & Wannell, 2023). Labour MPs had, then, a further incentive to show alignment with the directives received. Because it is useful for parties expected to win incoming elections to select in advance who will cover cabinet's roles (Norris et al., 2024), improving their position to the eyes of party leaders could have also increased the chances of being appointed for an executive position a few months later. As for the other opposition parties, they all voted against the bill on the second reading and there had been no signs of a change in the indications coming from their leaders.

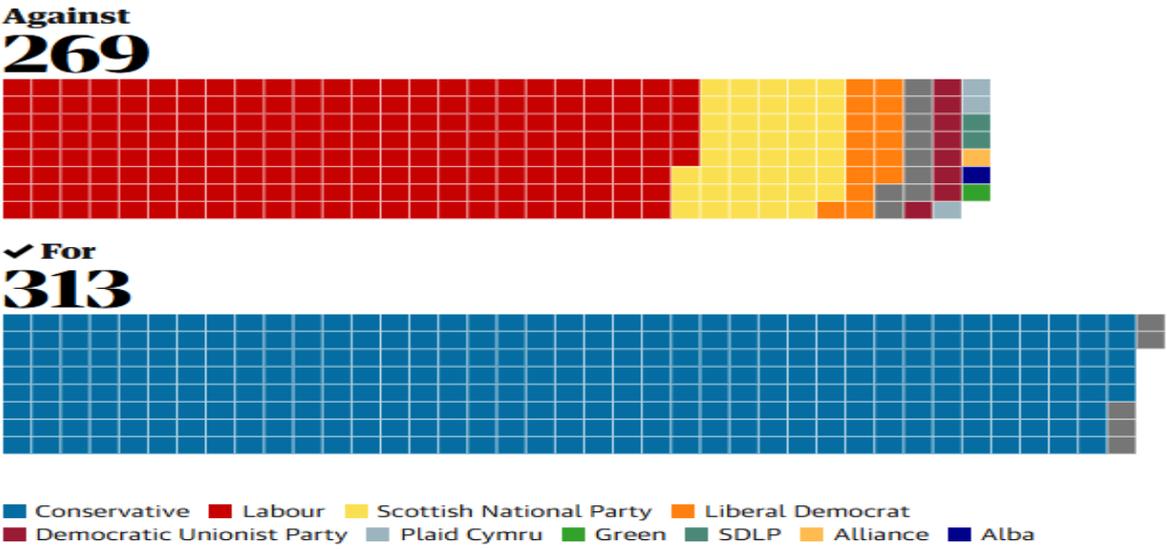


Figure 7 - Second reading vote for the Rwanda Bill - Taken from Voce, A. (2023), How did your MP vote on the Rwanda bill?

<sup>36</sup> See Sunak, R. (2023), PM speech on building a better future: 4 January 2023, Gov.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-making-2023-the-first-year-of-a-new-and-better-future-4-january-2023>.

This should come as no surprise, as there are findings proving that voting against the majority has a positive electoral return for opposition parties (Tuttnauer & Wegmann, 2022). What was, instead, a little unexpected was that such an incentive led the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords to ignore the Salisbury-Addison Convention, established to help governments with majorities in the Commons, but not in the Lords, to negotiate with the latter (Craig, 2024). This element clearly contributed to increase the chances of an opposition entirely confirming its rejection of the bill. The situation for the Conservatives was, instead, less uniform and led to some internal opposition, as will be shown below.

### *3.2 Political Context at the Time of the Key Parliamentary Vote in Italy*

Even in Italy the decisive vote for the bill ratifying the agreement with Albania occurred in January 2024, and even in that case MPs had to look at the same three fundamental factors: the composition of the Parliament and of the government, the public opinion's sentiment at the time of the vote and the requirements from their party's leadership. As for the former, the first element to underline is a common feature of multi-party systems. In the current Parliament, indeed, there is no party able to gain a majority of its own. Therefore, in both chambers (the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate), the three right-wing parties (Fratelli d'Italia, Lega and Forza Italia)<sup>37</sup> had to set up a coalition in order to gain a parliamentary majority and, therefore, to have the necessary political strength to form the government led by Giorgia Meloni, whose Ministers indeed came from one of these parties or were formally independent<sup>38</sup>. The numbers of this coalition, too, configured another element proper of multi-party systems. The division of MPs across parties at the time of the vote for the ratification of the agreement with Albania (which was

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<sup>37</sup> Actually, in the lower chamber the majority is made up also of a small party, Noi Moderati. This, however, only counts 7 MPs, and has, therefore, no real political weight. To look at the whole composition of Parliament in both chambers after the elections, see Corriere della Sera (2022), I risultati alla Camera delle Elezioni 2022, *Corriere della Sera*. Available at: [https://www.corriere.it/elezioni/risultati-politiche-2022/camera.shtml?refresh\\_ce](https://www.corriere.it/elezioni/risultati-politiche-2022/camera.shtml?refresh_ce) [Accessed: 13/08/2022]; Senato della Repubblica (n. d.), Elezioni del 25 settembre 2022, *Senato della Repubblica*. Available at: <https://www.senato.it/leg/19/Elettorale/riepilogo.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> To see how Ministries are split among coalition parties, see Openpolis (2022), I Ministri Governo Meloni, *Openpolis*. Available at: <https://www.openpolis.it/i-ministri-del-governo-meloni/>.

slightly different from the one at the beginning of the legislature, since some MPs changed parliamentary group) was, indeed, the following.

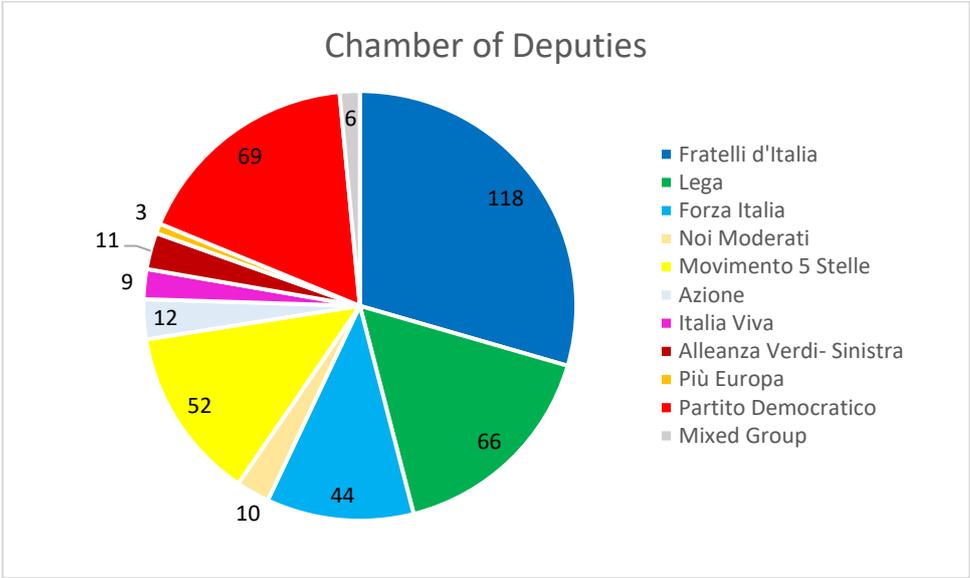


Figure 8 - Composition of the Chamber of Deputies (January 2024) - Elaborated from Openpolis (2022), La XIX legislatura e gli equilibri del nuovo parlamento; Camera dei Deputati (n.d.), Gruppi Parlamentari – Modifiche Interventute

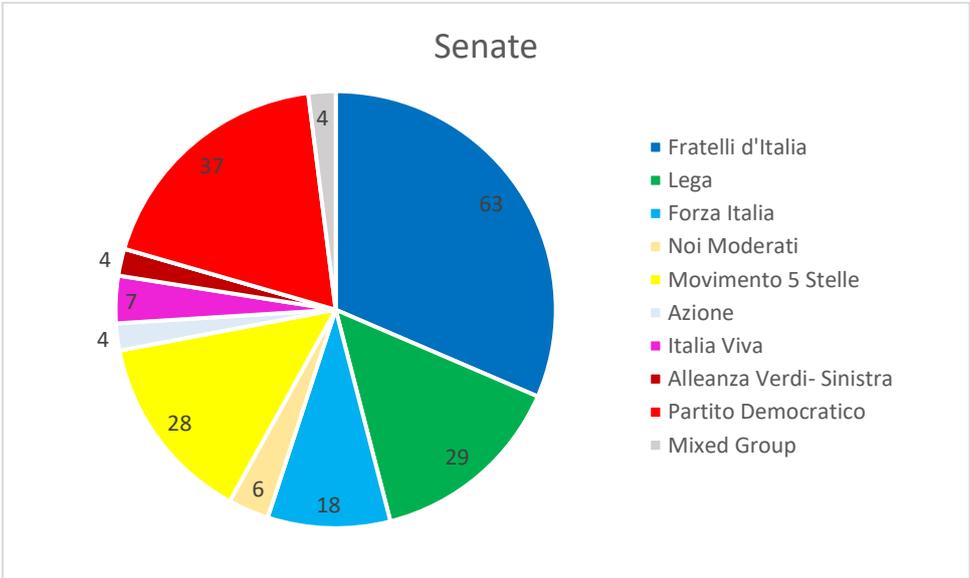


Figure 9 - Composition of the Senate (January 2024) – Senators for life excluded- Elaborated from Openpolis (2022), La XIX legislatura e gli equilibri del nuovo parlamento; Senato della Repubblica (2025), Variazioni nella composizione dei gruppi del Senato nella XIX Legislatura

These numbers clearly qualify the majority supporting the Meloni government as a connected least minimum winning coalition. Because of that, none of the three parties could decide to vote against their allies without any major consequences, such as a bill not being approved (since the other two alone cannot reach the required majority in the two chambers), possibly leading to a government breakup. This could have occurred only if they had expected to still be part of the following government and if they had expected this to strengthen their political power, which was not the case. Theoretically speaking, however, there would have been a tiny space for individual right-wing MPs to vote against the bill. As regards the specific context of the Chamber of Deputies, where the decisive vote occurred (after the bill previously got the approval of the Senate), this consisted of 37 possible internal opposers, as the coalition overall had 238 seats out of 400, the required majority being 201.

Moving to the public opinion's sentiment, two main elements must be discussed here. In the first place, the voting intentions registered a few days before the parliamentary vote indicate an almost identical share of consensus among political parties, with respect to the 2022 election. Fratelli d'Italia, indeed, was still the first party of the country (28,8%) with quite a significant advantage on the second (Partito Democratico, 19,1%). Meloni's allies Lega (8,5%) and Forza Italia (7,4%) maintained a critical role as fundamental actors allowing the governing coalition to exist but could not overturn the internal hierarchies of power within it. As for the other opposition parties, they did not increase drastically their share of potential voters either<sup>39</sup>. All parliamentary forces, therefore, had experienced little variations, but not so significant to produce an incentive neither to go against their own allies nor to change their mind over key themes and to adopt different positions from those which made them be elected in Parliament. What occurred, de facto, over the first 15 months of government was a maintenance of the status quo, electorally speaking. Then, one also needs to take into account the popular opinion over the deal with Albania itself. Again, the topic confirms to be a very divisive one, with 45,6% of people having a positive view of it, 35,7% having a negative one and the remaining 18,6% being not sure<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> The look at voting intentions in detail, see Presidenza Del Consiglio Dei Ministri - Dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'Editoria (2024), Intenzioni di voto, *sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it*. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/io/Downloads/Sondaggio12647.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> See Presidenza Del Consiglio Dei Ministri - Dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'Editoria (2023), Immigrazione ed elezione diretta del capo del governo, *sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it*. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/io/Downloads/Sondaggio12527.pdf>.

However, having Italy an electoral system which is mostly proportional, most of MPs do not need to look at what are the results for a specific constituency in order to try to maximise their electoral return. Rather, they need mostly to stick to their leadership's indications so to be selected as candidates and, eventually, to follow broader clues from the electorate at the national level. However, the data over the appreciation for the deal with Albania could not give any precise indication on a major opinion shared by the majority of population, as it showed a pretty balanced situation. Thus, in this specific context, Italian MPs had no incentive to vote in a given manner coming directly from an analysis of public opinion's position.

Finally, the last element they had to look at were party leaders' indications. These were pretty straightforward and followed the classic pattern of two contrasting blocks (majority coalition and the opposition) voting in opposite ways. Such a line emerged from the very beginning, as could be seen by looking at the first parliamentary debate over the Memorandum of Understanding, which occurred when Foreign Affairs Minister Antonio Tajani delivered a speech in the House of Deputies to clarify some aspects regarding the agreement. In that occasion, MPs' interventions presented a clear-cut division, with members of the majority pleasing the agreement and underlining how much needed it was, and opposition parties criticising it. The key arguments against it concerned its ineffectiveness and the waste of public money it would have caused (a point made by all opposition parties), besides the problems it presented under the humanitarian point of view (proper of left-wing parties only)<sup>41</sup>. These first interventions over the issue were a solid first indication of the parties' official position on the agreement, and no significant changes of opinion were registered in the following months. It is relevant to note that the unity shown by the majority since this very preliminary phase was another sign of Meloni's political strength. The Prime Minister, unlike most of her predecessors, was able to keep her stability and electoral dominance both within and outside the government (Bull & Polverari, 2025). In that sense, it offered little to no incentive to right-wing MPs to vote against the bill, regardless of any eventual doubts over the agreement on a personal level. Doing so, indeed, would have had negative effects only, mostly in terms of loss of party leadership's approval, with no positive returns in exchange, due to the presence of the

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<sup>41</sup> To read the full debate, see Camera dei Deputati (2023), Seduta n. 199 di martedì 21 novembre 2023, *banchedati.camera.it*. Available at: [https://banchedati.camera.it/tiap\\_19/ctrStartPage.asp](https://banchedati.camera.it/tiap_19/ctrStartPage.asp).

multi-party system. Indeed, even if they had not voted against the agreement, they would not realistically have gained the vote of citizens in favour of it, as they would have had to compete with other politicians sharing with that set of voters not just the favourable opinion on the deal with Albania, but also the same opinion on other key themes.

### *3.3 Parliamentary Outcome in the UK*

The third reading vote for the Rwanda bill occurred on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and saw the bill approved with 320 ayes and 279 noes. However, if one looks closely at what individual MPs voted, they will notice how there was a tiny component of 11 Conservatives who actually voted against the bill<sup>42</sup>. This actually came not as a surprise, since during the weeks preceding the vote a much bigger group of rebels, more than 45, expressed concerns over the way the bill was drafted, and tried to propose several amendments to adjust it. The common ground for these protests was that, because of the way it was written, the bill was still in breach of international law and could thus have been easily challenged and stopped by courts. Proposed amendments to counter this possibility included a clause allowing the UK government to ignore parts of human rights law in relation to sending people to Rwanda and another ensuring ministers could automatically reject last-minute interim orders from the European Court of Human Rights, as those which were issued for the very first flight back in 2022 (Whannel & Zeffman, 2024). From the legal point of view, the concerns raised were partially grounded on a solid base. The bill, indeed, could have hardly been challenged by domestic courts, except for the limited set of cases foreseen within the same. However, there would have still been significant possibilities that the Strasbourg European Court of Human Rights would have been able to do that, since, despite the bill stating that only a minister could have decided whether to comply or not with any eventual interim measure issued by the ECHR, failing to actually respect them could have been

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<sup>42</sup> See UK Parliament (2024), Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill Committee: Third reading, *UK Parliament*. Available at: <https://votes.parliament.uk/votes/commons/division/1724#noes>.

interpreted as a breach of International Law obligations, thus putting the UK in conflict with the Court and the Council of Europe (Jones, 2024).

Following that argument, the bill apparently received such a harsh internal opposition in order to improve it and to pass it only once it would have been possible to avoid that kind of scenario. In that way, the Conservative party would have avoided seeing one of its key policies to be regarded as a failure, and its promoters as incompetent, ultimately damaging even further the image and the political consensus of the party, which was already in a critical situation and needed to be reinforced before the general election took place. However, there is further evidence suggesting that this is only part of the story. The other relevant element is that this internal rebellion constitutes also the peak of a long-lasting series of contrasts within Tories which erupted in this occasion. Looking better at who took part in this group of internal opposition helps grasping better the deepest, and more strictly political reasons, behind this case. Five main groups have been identified (Stacey & Adu, 2024).

The first of these is that of New Conservatives. These are some MPs who got elected for the first time in 2019, thanks to an unprecedented win of Conservative candidates in the so-called “Red Wall”. This name stands for a geographical area, located across the Midlands and Northern England, made up of constituencies having a consistent cluster of people belonging to the working class and generally voting Labour and who, however, progressively got closer to the Tories, ending up voting for them and winning them several seats in 2019 (Kanagasooriam & Simon, 2021). New Conservatives’ political future was compromised, as the growing electoral favour the Labour party had gained back made it very unlikely for them to be re-elected in July 2024, since their constituency would have expressed again a Labour candidate. They therefore needed to signal to their electorate that they were misaligned with the rest of the Tories over some fundamental themes, so to increase their chances of still been taken into account at the moment of vote. Having this in mind, it comes as no surprise that their front leaders, Miriam Cates and Danny Kruger, were among the 11 Conservatives who voted against the bill.

Then there was a group of Old Brexiters, who had always manifested quite a big disappointment for being under the jurisdiction of the ECHR. Consequently, they have been among the most active promoters of those amendments allowing the UK to escape

interim orders from Strasbourg. It is relevant to note, here, how their interest was to exploit another central theme of the British public debate, that of Brexit, which had become a key cleavage dividing the electorate and which had remained such even years after the referendum, with voters tending to favour those politicians who had positions matching what they voted in 2016, whether they were Remainers or Leavers (Curtice, 2018). Their intention, then, was to stress once more their strong position against the UK's perceived submission to international and supranational institutions, ultimately securing the vote of hard Leavers, so to increase their chances of being voted again in the following round of elections. Two of them, Bill Cash and David Jones, indeed voted against the bill.

The third and the fourth group, those of former ministers on the one hand and of Boris Johnson's loyalists on the other, had a common reason behind their opposition. That is, to further weaken the already unstable Sunak's leadership. They criticised the bill under different perspectives, both formal and substantial, but the real intention was to compromise Sunak's image as a leader for the future of the Conservative party. Since the incoming election was expected to be largely won by Labour, many of the most prominent Tories were concerned more with trying to win an internal battle for being the next leader of the Party, rather than with strengthening the position of the party as a whole, which was seen as inevitably compromised to realistically stand a chance in the close electoral round.

Finally, the last rebel group was the moderate Tory faction known as One Nation. They raised concerns not for some specific aspects of the bill, but rather for its entire premise and for the general idea at the base of the whole policy. Indeed, at first they even threatened to oppose the bill regardless of any sort of amendments which could be made. In doing so, they seemed to be intentioned to intercept a broad sentiment, quite spread among the British electorate, perceiving the policy as a cruel act, because of the way it would have impacted on migrants. The implicit consideration, therefore, was that pursuing this plan would have not been able to attract a large share of votes, as the British public was still able to feel compassion and a sense of humanity (McKee, 2024). Thus, in order to safeguard their image in front of citizens, or at least to minimise the damage it would have received, they wanted to put some distance between themselves and the policy.

What all these groups had in common was that they were contesting the bill of their own party so to maximise their political return. Not only, but even the fact that most of

these, in the end, took the decision to vote in favour of the bill, notwithstanding the harsh opposition they made, was politically motivated (Crerar & Syal, 2024). Many, indeed, were concerned with the effect that being aligned with the Labour party (especially over a hot topic as immigration) with an election around the corner might have had. The dual risk, indeed, was to lose the support of both the party's leaders and the people who voted for them back in 2019. Others, instead, thought that opposing the bill might have ended up in a situation of complete chaos, perceived and real, for the Tories. This might have realistically implied to definitely lose voters' trust towards the party, which would have been seen as weak, divided and politically unable to govern, and to worsen significantly the outcome of the general election.

To sum up, the vote on the third reading of the Rwanda bill saw the public opinion and individual MPs playing a fundamental role, which concretely posed a threat to the future of the externalisation policy set up by the Sunak government. Having a public opinion largely prone to vote Labour at the general election which was about to take place caused many Tory MPs to seriously consider voting against the bill, so to show some misalignment with the general line of the party, at least over one of its most controversial policies, in an extreme attempt to gain back some favour from the electorate of their constituency. This scenario, however, did not occur, as, despite some internal opposition did actually take place, most Conservative MPs still prioritised their need to stick with the position of the party. This, in fact, gave them the dual benefit of not losing the trust of their local Tory voters and of having the possibility to strengthen their position in the party, either by becoming the new leader or by having as a new leader someone who had a high consideration of them. In that sense, the role of the party, seen as a separate actor from its members, was crucial, as it made the policy go at least through the legislation phase.

### *3.4 Parliamentary Outcome in Italy*

The vote in the House of Deputies over the bill ratifying the Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Albania occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024, after the same

bill had already been approved by the Senate. Unlike in the UK, Italian political parties did not split up. Rather, they voted according to the standard scheme for which the majority coalition is in favour of a government proposal, while the opposition is against it. The agreement was, indeed, ratified with 155 ayes against 115 noes<sup>43</sup>. The very same fact that only 67,5% of MPs voted, whereas in the UK they were 92,1%, is already indicative of how this outcome was largely expected and how there were no signs of potential internal opposition within any of the two blocks.

The reason for this outcome is to be searched, once again, in the Italian parliamentary and electoral framework, characterised by a largely proportional electoral rule and a multi-party system. Because of that, the attention MPs dedicate to the opinion of their constituency is not as relevant as in the UK, as they still have chances to be elected even if their party is not the most voted. In order to do that, they need instead to try to stick to the indications of their party's leaders. Doing that, indeed, would allow them to be selected as candidates for one constituency at the next election. Moreover, the more they get approval of their leaders, the higher are their chances of being written in the first spots of the candidate list (although this is not the only criterion considered for the selection).

As a marginal note, one may also see how the scenario that has been observed with these two cases confirms an interesting claim made among scholars, according to which wedge issues (that is, topics which have the potential to break up parties internally) can be exploited by political rivals in two-party systems, but not in multi-party ones. This happens because, in the latter context, political forces do not want to jeopardize relations with parties they might end up being allied with in the future (van de Wardt et al., 2014). A divisive topic such as migration, able to polarise the electorate so much, has in fact all the required features to be exploited as a wedge issue. And although this has happened in the UK, where the Tories emerged as weak and divided even though they were able to pass the Rwanda bill, in Italy this did not occur, not only for the risk of compromising relationships

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<sup>43</sup> To look at the details of the vote, see Camera dei Deputati (2024), *Votazione finale nominale n.68 del 24/1/2024 seduta n. 232 presieduta da ASCANI ANNA - Progetto di legge n. 1620*, *documenti.camera.it*. Available at: [https://documenti.camera.it/apps/votazioni/votazionitutte/schedaVotazione.asp?legislatura=19&RifVotazione=232\\_68&tipo=dettaglio](https://documenti.camera.it/apps/votazioni/votazionitutte/schedaVotazione.asp?legislatura=19&RifVotazione=232_68&tipo=dettaglio).

with potential future allies, but also because the very same institutional features of multi-party systems favour internal cohesion among parties, independently from rivals' actions.

The parliamentary vote to ratify the agreement between Italy and Albania, therefore, was dominated by political parties as the main actors determining the adoption of the policy. Just as happened in the UK, and possibly in every other democratic system, the public opinion had a significant, although indirect, role, as it conditioned the positions of political forces. Individual MPs, instead, were very marginal, since the electoral and party system in which they operate strongly incentivises them to stick to their party's indications, therefore limiting their capacity to determine the outcome of a legislative vote for the adoption of a policy. Capacity that, conversely, even just a few of them could have had with other parliamentary systems and equilibria.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The implementation phase for the two policies was, first of all, determined by the consequences of the two parliamentary outcomes. These, indeed, affected both parties' political equilibria, therefore changing, with varying degrees, the nature of the key political actors, and, in turn, the subsequent development of the two externalisation policies. Although these effects might be limited and could not be regarded as the fundamental element determining what occurred in the following months, they definitely constitute a piece of the bigger puzzle explaining what happened and why. A puzzle which is then completed by other actors, who have also played a role in the implementation of the two agreements, either with a minor or a significant impact.

#### *4.1 Subsequent Political Developments in the UK*

The elections of 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024 to select the new set of MPs for the House of Commons in the current legislature was outstandingly the key political moment which conditioned heavily the decisions of MPs as regards the vote on the Rwanda bill. Therefore, an analysis of the political developments following the approval of the bill cannot be focused on anything but the result of this election. As was largely expected, the Labour party was the clear winner, securing a large majority with 411 seats out of 650, against the

121 obtained by the Conservative. Whereas the former had their seats more than doubled with respect to the 2019 election, although their share of votes at national level increased only by 1.6%, the latter saw their seats cut by 68,8%, with a national share of votes reduced by 19,9% (Cracknell & Baker, 2024). What these numbers suggest is that the key cause behind this overturn is to be identified more in a failure of the Tories while in power, rather than in the capacity of the Labour to push a convincing alternative message. The lower turnout (59,7% against 67,3% of 2019) strengthens this suggestion, as it would seem that voters who did not show up at the electoral cabin had voted Conservative in 2019 (or the Scottish National Party, which also experienced a significant downfall, in most of Scotland's constituencies) but felt unsatisfied with the results obtained by the government. It is no case that the constituencies with the lowest turnout elected a Labour MP.

The activity of the Conservative governments which were in power during the 2019-2024 legislature was, indeed, perceived as a bad one, unable to bring positive results both on concrete and identitarian matters. The aspect which was most heavily criticised was the economic performance, particularly for how it affected the cost of living. The growing price for houses and an increase in personal debts affected more and more people, who went progressively closer to a condition of in-work poverty. Among the electorate, the burden of being held responsible for this situation was assigned to the Tories, if not just because they were in charge while this situation emerged, at least because they were not able to solve or limit it (Davis, 2024). As a consequence of the worsening of the British people's economic status while they were in government, the Conservative party began to be considered as not reliable for managing major economic issue of a country. The Labour party and its leader Keir Starmer well exploited the situation. The key programmatic policies, indeed, were proposals to address directly the concrete issues the British population was complaining about, such as an increase in poverty, a major issue for housing, and a very inefficient National Health System. Tackling the immigration challenge, instead, was not set as a priority by the Labour party, which, during the electoral campaign, only stated that it would have stopped the Rwanda plan and would have used the money saved in this way to institute a new Border and Security Command, whose main task would have been to contrast people smuggling (David, 2024). Although this may sound as a major proposal with a high political relevance, given how much immigration has been a central theme in the public debate over the last ten years, the Labour party did

not emphasise it, giving way more prominence to the issues of economy, health and education.

Issue Area	All	CON	GRN	LAB	LD	REF	SNP
Economy	80	88	50	82	76	94	78
Education	36	55	15	60	14	13	33
Environment	54	54	78	39	78	16	33
Europe/Brexit	13	4	2	2	7	72	72
Governance	10	13	7	5	10	9	78
Health	81	68	77	86	88	87	78
Immigration	29	32	8	37	1	97	0
Social Welfare	16	42	9	8	8	4	61

Figure 10 - Issues mentioned by parties in leaflets (%) - Taken from Milazzo, C., & Trumm, S. (2024), *Local campaign messaging at the 2024 General Election*

Therefore, a fundamental part of Starmer’s strategy to gain the support of the population and win the election was to adopt a cautious approach minimising policy commitments and reducing significantly the role of ideology (Griffiths, 2025). Labour exploited a critical situation affecting a multitude of people, generally seen by politicians as split in ideological blocks over divisive issues such as migration, and offered them what seemed a viable solution to an immediate problem.

Notwithstanding this, one should not believe that the chaotic management Sunak made of his immigration policy and of the deal with Rwanda, especially considered how prominent this theme was in his communication while he was in charge, did not affect at all the electoral outcome of the General Election. On the one hand, indeed, one must consider that the lower credibility attributed to the Conservative party at the end of term was not determined entirely by the poor results in terms of economic performance registered during their mandate, but also because they presented multiple signals of disunity and internal fragmentation over the course of five years, which culminated with the internal crisis over the Rwanda bill. On the other, the important proclaims made as regarded the prevention of illegal immigration, in particular the very ambitious goal of stopping boat arrivals, created huge expectations among right-wing voters particularly critical of migration, as shown by the major increase in Conservative voters believing their

party had the right policies towards immigration (Skinner & Garrett, 2023). The substantial incapacity of the government to set up a policy with which they could keep their promise and meet those expectations led that same cluster of voters to express their dissent towards the party either by abstaining or by voting for Reform UK. This electoral behaviour inevitably resulted in a win for the Labour party with a magnified majority.

Given that, it can be inferred that the result of the third reading vote on the Safe of Rwanda Bill also had a role in making possible a Labour win of this magnitude. The legislative passage over one of the most relevant missions of the governing mandate Sunak imposed to himself turned out to be a victory for the former Prime Minister only at a superficial glance. Rather, the role of individual MPs, which, as was said in the previous Chapter, was not enough to stop the adoption of the bill, actually had a much stronger impact in a subsequent moment, that of the general election. That stretched approval of the policy, indeed, was the last, and possibly most evident, sign that Sunak and his political agenda were not able to guarantee unity and stability within the Conservative party. As such, the opposition some Tories carried on in Westminster at the time definitely determined the end of the credibility the whole party had among the electorate, thus contributing, although to a minor extent, to make the transition to a Labour government possible. A transition which, as it will be seen below, will determine the end of the Rwanda scheme.

#### *4.2 Subsequent Political Developments in Italy*

Given the proof of strength provided by the Italian parliamentary majority with the vote to ratify the Memorandum of Understanding with Albania, it is legitimate to expect that the political equilibria between parties were not overturned, or that, if they did, this was not because of the externalisation policy set up by the government. Actually, given that, since then, Italy has not experienced a particularly critical shock or crisis able to generate strong criticisms for the Meloni government (Donald Trump's new tariff policies could become problematic in the incoming future, but as of now they still have to produce

concrete effects in people's daily life), the support for Fratelli d'Italia should have remained the same, if not increased.

A good indicator of the short-term effect this deal with Albania produced in electoral terms can be found by looking at the results of the European Parliament elections held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Although they should be approached by voters having in mind European politics and the groups making up the EP, which present significant differences from the 27 different national scenarios, this does not actually occur. Rather, voters express their preferences highly influenced by what happens in national politics, and they use them to produce changes at the domestic level, or at least to launch significant signals to their national politicians. This classifies the European elections as second-order ones (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) and makes them a good proxy to reflect Italian political equilibria at the national level a few months after the vote on the agreement with Albania.

Fratelli d'Italia confirmed its position as first party, with 28.75% of votes, as well as Partito Democratico, which was the second most-voted party with a share of 24.11%. As for the other political forces composing the governing coalition, they slightly improved their situation with respect to the voting intention survey of January 2024, but they still remained far from being able to question Meloni's leading status, as they got only 9.58% (Forza Italia) and 8.97% (Lega) of votes. Some significant changes in hierarchies occurred, instead, among opposition parties. If, indeed, Partito Democratico secured by far its role as first opposition force, Movimento 5 Stelle, Azione and Italia Viva experienced negative outcomes. Compared to January 2024, the first two went down, respectively, from 16.1% to 9.98% and from 4.3% to 3.36%. As for the latter, although it had a slight increase from 3.4% to 3.78%, it was still not enough to overcome the 4% threshold<sup>44</sup>. Who, on the other hand, got a very positive result was Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, which almost doubled its votes (from 3.6% to 6.79%), thus making significant progress in the internal competition among opposition parties<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> See Dipartimento per gli Affari Europei (2024), Elezioni europee del 2024: norme nazionali, *affarieuropei.gov.it*. Available at: [https://www.affarieuropei.gov.it/media/7508/elezioni-europee-del-2024-norme-nazionali\\_infografica.pdf](https://www.affarieuropei.gov.it/media/7508/elezioni-europee-del-2024-norme-nazionali_infografica.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> To look at the results of the 2024 European elections in Italy in detail, see Parlamento Europeo (2024), Risultati Nazionali – Italia, *results.elections.europa.eu*. Available at: <https://results.elections.europa.eu/it/risultati-nazionali/italia/2024-2029/>.

Even though Fratelli d'Italia did not increase its share of vote, it sure strengthened its position, as it was able to hold a stable amount of preferences in a country in which governing is often a short-term experience, and also a penalising one, in terms of electoral results (Fittipaldi & Musella, 2022). The key reason determining this outcome is to be found in the party's ability to hold together its electorate, having registered an almost null level of outflows of vote and a small level of inflow<sup>46</sup>. And that, in turn, occurred precisely because the Meloni government was perceived as an active executive, carrying out important policies and setting up major reforms, all of which were part of their electoral programmes and promises to voters. That is to say, in the perception of those who voted them in 2022, they were working well to accomplish the task they were given by citizens. This perception, of course, did not come out of nowhere, but was the result of precise political dynamics which were exploited by the majority to make it easier for voters to build this kind of idea. A fundamental element in this strategy was the high use of law bills of governmental initiative and, especially, of law decrees, a bill entirely written by the government for urgent matters and which the parliament can only decide whether to convert in law or not (Volpi, 2024). This produces the dual effect of reducing the parliamentary debate, thus making it seem that opposition parties are less active and unable to contrast the government, especially on particularly problematic matters, and to increase the perception of a very prolific majority coalition, in terms of policies launched. Moreover, every time the government is able to pass a law with no signs of concrete risk of internal breakup, it reinforces its image and its credibility to the eyes of the electorate, whereas opposition parties appear once more as weak and incapable of contrasting them.

Therefore, because of the above-described mechanisms, the vote on the agreement with Albania (which resulted in a clear-cut division, determined by the proper characteristics of the Italian electoral rules and party system, between the parties making up the parliamentary majority supporting it and the opposition being against it) aligned with all other government provisions whose effects was to reinforce the appeal the three parties composing the majority coalition (and particularly Fratelli d'Italia) have on right-wing voters. On the other hand, the effect produced on the remaining part of the electorate was dissatisfaction and disappointment with the behaviour of their representatives in

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<sup>46</sup> See Ipsos (2024), Elezioni Europee 2024: i risultati elettorali e le analisi post-voto di Ipsos, *Ipsos*. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/elezioni-europee-2024-risultati-elettorali-analisi-post-voto-ipsos>.

Parliament. The shift in hierarchies among opposition parties, indeed, must be seen in this perspective. Voters who lost confidence in those parties they opted for in 2022 shifted to other opposition forces which have a lower political power and, thus, have yet to demonstrate whether they can produce some effective opposition or not. Interestingly enough, the most recent voting intention surveys reveal us how this mechanism perpetrated even during last year. In this period, while Fratelli d'Italia kept on the stability of its position both from internal and external competition, it was Partito Democratico, the main opposition party, who started to lose votes because of its almost null capacity to contrast the government<sup>47</sup>. This substantially unchanged equilibrium among Italian political parties confirmed the strong political position the Meloni government had. How this position was exploited during the implementation of the deal with Albania will be seen below.

#### *4.3 Subsequent Policy Developments in the UK*

After the Rwanda bill passed the third reading, little happened in terms of actual implementation of the policy. This occurred, first of all, because the subsequent steps of its parliamentary iter took longer than expected to be completed. For several weeks, indeed, the Commons and the Lords carried on the so-called “ping pong”, passing the bill back and forth without approving the exact same text. In the end, this process terminated in late April 2024, as opposition and crossbench peers renounced to amend the bill (Syal et al., 2024). Such a long fight in Parliament over amendments significantly contributed, in the words of Sunak, to cause delays in the beginning of the implementation phase, as the departures of the first flights transporting big groups of asylum seekers to Rwanda were postponed from spring 2024 to mid-to-late July of the same year (Stacey et al., 2024).

Despite that, there was an attempt to signal to the public that the policy had effectively been started. A few days after the bill was approved, the government launched

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<sup>47</sup> To look at the most recent voting intentions, see Presidenza Del Consiglio Dei Ministri - Dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'Editoria (2025), Intenzioni di voto, gradimento Governo, gradimento leader, *sondaggi politicoelettorali.it*. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/io/Downloads/Sondaggio13507.pdf>.

a scheme for voluntary removals, in partnership with Rwanda. Asylum seekers whose claims had been rejected were offered £ 3,000 to be sent to the east-African country (Seddon, 2024). Once there, they would have received full support and residency to start a new life<sup>48</sup>. Apart from that, preparations for the transfer of asylum seekers with pending cases, the core of the policy project, got started, too. British authorities, indeed, started to detain roughly 5,700 migrants who were planned to be deported in summer 2024<sup>49</sup>. As one could easily imagine, criticisms emerged immediately, and several legal challenges to these provisions were taken to oppose this order. Civil servants were the key actor pushing through this judicial action, and their claims might have been a good test to check for the legal soundness of the Safety of Rwanda Act. However, they never made it past the preliminary hearing stage<sup>50</sup>. Not because courts considered their cases to be inadmissible, but because, during the established period of time for the collection of evidence of both parties, the general elections took place, and their outcome brought the Rwanda plan to be terminated by the new Labour government, as confirmed by Starmer himself a couple of days after the elections (Francis, 2024). Still, the legal actions produced the minor result of allowing the detainees to be released, mostly on bail, as the deportation procedure was not to be operated, according to the government, until July 24<sup>th</sup>. Sunak took this decision because he wanted to hold general elections first, thus allowing citizens to express themselves (also) on this matter before proceeding (Casciani, 2024). In the meantime, Rwanda, too, started to defend the agreement from UN accusations, as there had been claims from lawyers representing the High Commissioner for Refugees, who took part in the series of legal challenges presented by civil servants, that the asylum system in the east-African country was inadequate and could not have supported the British project without seriously harming the human rights of migrants transferred there<sup>51</sup>. UNHCR intervening with a legal action and Rwanda's direct response are an indicator that, despite the unfavourable voting intentions polls, the possibility of the policy being actually

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<sup>48</sup> See Home Office (2024), Failed asylum seekers detained for removal to Rwanda, *Gov.UK*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/failed-asylum-seekers-detained-for-removal-to-rwanda>.

<sup>49</sup> See Al Jazeera (2024), UK starts detaining asylum seekers to be deported to Rwanda, *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/1/uk-starts-detaining-asylum-seekers-to-be-deported-to-rwanda>.

<sup>50</sup> To look at an example of a ruling for one of these cases, see Courts and Tribunals Judiciary (2024), SM and Asylum Aid -v- Home Secretary, *judiciary.uk*. Available at: <https://www.judiciary.uk/judgments/sm-and-asylum-aid-v-home-secretary/>.

<sup>51</sup> See Al Jazeera (2024), Rwanda accuses UN refugee agency of lying in British asylum policy case, *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/13/rwanda-accuses-un-refugee-agency-of-lying-in-british-asylum-policy-case>.

implemented was considered as realistically possible, after the Parliament was able to pass the law. Possibly, it was also because of this reason that Sunak decided to call the general election earlier than what commentators expected. After a long period of negative political developments for the Conservative Party, indeed, having gone through a cornerstone passage for one of the most relevant policies of the Prime Minister's programme, if not the most important, together with a slight improvement in the economic situation, put the Tories in a position that, in Sunak's opinion, would have hardly been better in the few remaining months (Prince, 2024).

What can be inferred from these developments the Rwanda plan had after the third reading vote is that the implementation of the policy was affected by several actors. First of all, the internal opposition brought on by some Conservative MPs who voted against the bill (or threatened to do so) continued to generate further consequences. The internal friction experienced by the Conservative party was, in fact, a heavy strategic indication for politicians of both factions. Opposition parties and Tories who voted against the bill in the third reading understood that, given the huge number of peers who threatened to oppose the bill, there was enough political space to try to fight for amendments. Having them approved would have enormously helped their chances of gaining the favour of those voters against the bill in July, but even just obstructing parliamentary works as much as possible was a good result. This led to the ping pong between the two Chambers which caused unexpected delays in the execution of the policy. Sunak and his majority, instead, understood that they could not push hard for the implementation of the policy immediately, as that same internal fracture within the party reduced significantly their political strength. Having carried on the implementation iter as if it had been approved regularly could have had a potentially catastrophic electoral return, as they would have been accused of ignoring clear political signals, ultimately putting in danger the whole perception citizens had of Sunak government. Accuses which they, indeed, tried to avoid by waiting for the election results before going on with subsequent developments of the externalisation policy. As the Italian case will show, had the bill been approved without this chaotic conflict within the parliamentary majority, the policy would have been realistically implemented much more. Moving on, one also needs to consider the role of civil servants and of the courts. Their action, indeed, was inevitably less impactful than what they did before the Rwanda bill was drafted, mostly because of the very limited implementation the policy received. Its early

suspension determined by the new Starmer government actually does not allow us to know how relevant they would have been, had the implementation continued. Still, despite their limited scope of action, they managed to prevent the temporary detention of people which, as it could have easily imagined, raised some criticisms from the public opinion. This had two minor effects, the former being a direct one, that is to have further slowed down the actual implementation of the policy, and the latter being an indirect one, that is to have kept fuelling the public debate over the policy, as its small action continued to make both ordinary people and experts questioning the legitimacy of Rwanda plan. Finally, a tiny note must be dedicated to civil society and to international bodies as the UNHCR which, pretty much as they did since the plan was first announced, raised claims concerning the critical aspects of the policy, both in humanitarian and in legal terms. However, given that the Conservative party's internal fracture had already significantly weakened the political strength of the government and of the Rwanda scheme itself, one could argue that the role of civil society and international bodies had a very limited effect, as regards the definitive suspension of the policy.

#### *4.4 Subsequent Policy Developments in Italy*

If, in the UK, the implementation of the Rwanda deal struggled even just to get started, the situation in Italy has been slightly easier, although important stops after the policy was adopted occurred also there. The two centres in the Albanian territory got operational as of October 2024, with administrative personnel ready to take service there and with UNHCR in charge of monitoring the implementation of the agreement for the first three months, eventually helping local operators to safeguard rights and dignity of asylum seekers sent there (Tondo, 2024). In the following weeks, three operations (respectively involving 8, 16 and 49 migrants) were executed within the scope of the Memorandum of Understanding. In each of these, exactly as foreseen by the deal, non-vulnerable asylum seekers rescued by Italian boats were transferred directly to the centres, where their claims would have been processed (Millona, 2025).

However, the matter quickly acquired a judicial character. The ordinary Court of Rome, indeed, did not validate the arrest of the people transferred for the first two operations, as some of them came from countries which, according to the Italian government itself, did not present a full compliance with human rights (specifically with the prohibition of persecution, torture or other inhuman and degrading treatments) in the entirety of their territory or for all of its inhabitants. Because of that, the two countries referred to in the case, Bangladesh and Egypt, could not be regarded as safe, following a recent judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union<sup>52</sup>. Early after the Court of Rome's pronouncement, the Italian government responded by adopting a Law-Decree with which updated the list of safe countries taking into account the CJEU's judgment, but still regarding both Bangladesh and Egypt as safe, notwithstanding the problematic aspects of the two countries in guaranteeing the respect of human rights (Morlotti, 2025). The impasse was not solved, though. The third operation, indeed, was stopped by very same Court of Rome, for the judges did not validate the arrest and remitted the case to the opinion of the CJEU, which was asked to evaluate whether the Law-Decree adopted by the government to recognise Bangladesh and Egypt as safe countries was effectively in compliance with EU Law<sup>53</sup>.

The contrasts over the deal between Italy and Albania, therefore, left the field of mere political competition and began to be a clash of power between executive and judicial bodies, both at the national and at the European level. Even the Commission, which had previously expressed itself on the deal in possibilistic terms, indirectly entered the discourse. In April 2025, indeed, it published a list of safe countries, which included Bangladesh and Egypt (Basso, 2025). Although this was done not to intervene specifically on the controversy regarding the Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Albania, but rather to try to set a uniform application among the 27 countries of a couple of provisions foreseen in the New Pact on Immigration and Asylum entering into force in June 2026, it clearly was a favourable development for Meloni. If an indirect approval by the Commission did not imply necessarily that the CJEU would have had the same opinion,

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<sup>52</sup> To look at the judgment, see CJEU (2024), Judgment of the Court - Case C-406/22, *eur-lex*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:62022CJ0406>.

<sup>53</sup> For more details on the two decisions adopted by the Court of Rome and the legal reasoning behind them, see Consiglio Italiano per I Rifugiati (2024), Protocollo Italia-Albania: cosa sta succedendo?, *CIR Rifugiati*. Available at: <https://cir-rifugiati.org/2024/11/27/protocollo-italia-albania-cosa-sta-succedendo/>.

at least she could exploit this fact to reinforce the legitimacy of her policy in front of sceptics in the public opinion and, therefore, to increase her political capability of insisting with her policy. Still, at the beginning of August 2025, the CJEU ruled on the case submitted by the Court of Rome and stated that a country could be regarded as safe if such a designation could be judicially reviewed and backed by clear and accessible evidence. Not only, but it also specified once more that, according to current law, the country must be safe for all of its people and in all of its territory (Genovese, 2025).

What consequences this decision will have for the prosecution of the implementation process of the deal between Italy and Albania remains to be seen. However, the immediate political reactions it generated give a significant indication for the purposes of the present analysis. If, indeed, the leader of Partito Democratico Schlein did not hesitate to comment how the decision of the Court proved that the policy was grounded on illegal rules and that, ultimately, it would have been a failure<sup>54</sup>, Meloni assumed a strong and firm position, claiming that she would have continued to ensure the respect of Italian Law, to guarantee the security of citizens, to contrast people smugglers and to save human lives, regardless of what any judge, politician or bureaucrat could say<sup>55</sup>. It would seem, therefore, that, despite this important stop, the Prime Minister is still willing to insist on this policy, something that had been pretty clear also a few months earlier, when, during the impasse caused by national courts waiting for a decision by the CJEU, Meloni decided to exploit as much as possible the centres in Albania. She did so by issuing a new Law-Decree providing that another type of asylum seekers could be transferred to Albania. These were migrants who were ordered to leave after their claims had been analysed in Italy and who were detained, on the national territory, in centres for return<sup>56</sup>.

The comment worth to be made here regards why, unlike in the UK, where impasses and complications led the government to stop implementing the policy and to remit the final decision to voters, the Italian executive strongly pushed for continuing the application

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<sup>54</sup> See La Stampa (2025), Centri migranti in Albania, la Corte europea dà torto al governo sui Paesi sicuri, *La Stampa*. Available at: [https://www.lastampa.it/politica/2025/08/01/news/sentenza\\_corte\\_ue\\_centri\\_migranti\\_italia\\_albania-15255131/](https://www.lastampa.it/politica/2025/08/01/news/sentenza_corte_ue_centri_migranti_italia_albania-15255131/).

<sup>55</sup> To read Meloni's full intervention, covering also several topics besides immigration, see Meloni, G. (2025), Intervento del Presidente Meloni al Meeting di Rimini 2025, *governo.it*. Available at: <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/intervento-del-presidente-meloni-al-meeting-di-rimini-2025/29604>.

<sup>56</sup> See Governo Italiano – Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2025), Comunicato stampa del Consiglio dei Ministri n. 121, *governo.it*. Available at: <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/comunicato-stampa-del-consiglio-dei-ministri-n-121/28079>.

of the procedures set out in the deal with Albania, as much as the judiciary constraints allowed to. One possible answer, just like in the British case, can be found in the parliamentary vote to ratify the Memorandum of Understanding. Having this occurred without any sort of political tension among the governing coalition, it resulted in a reinforcement of the position of the executive and of the policies it wanted to pursue. The absence of a threatening opposition towards the approval of the bill, indeed, had a significant implication. In fact, the clear support for the policy expressed by a political coalition which was elected to adopt (also) this kind of solution (recall that it was foreseen in Fratelli d'Italia's electoral programme for the 2022 elections) gave the government an important implicit argument grounded on democratic principles such as representativity and the respect of popular will. Interestingly, this kind of reasoning appears to be somewhat corroborated by data, since, notwithstanding the obstacles in implementation posed by the courts led the majority of Italians to have a negative opinion on the policy, the support it received by those who voted for a party member of the governing coalition was still very high (73.7%)<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, Meloni herself heavily emphasised her commitment to the deal with Albania, claiming she would have made it work at all costs<sup>58</sup>, thus confirming it as the core element of her government immigration policy. This statement somewhat forced her to insist with the implementation of the agreement, as doing otherwise would have been considered a political failure, and could have potentially made her lose a significant part of her voters' support. Because of that, despite the dissenting opinion of the courts on several aspects of the policy, the Italian government had the possibility and the incentive to continue the implementation of the deal with Albania, as much as the judicial constraints allowed it to.

In conclusion, the actors which had a fundamental role in the implementation of the deal with Albania are essentially two, these being the Italian political parties, and in particular the members of the governing coalition, and the courts. The former, because of the unanimous and doubtless support for the policy they have shown in Parliament, put the government in a strong position which allowed it to rapidly begin implementing the

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<sup>57</sup> See Presidenza Del Consiglio Dei Ministri - Dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'Editoria (2025), Gestione dei migranti, *sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it*. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/10/Downloads/Sondaggio13410.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> See RaiNews (2024), Giorgia Meloni: "I centri in Albania funzioneranno, dovessi passarci ogni notte", *RaiNews*. Available at: <https://www.rainews.it/video/2024/12/atreju-giorgia-meloni-i-centri-in-albania-funzioneranno-dovessi-passarci-ogni-notte-3fa04d99-b7fd-48b9-94c8-a24455313671.html>.

provisions of the agreement, without any unforeseen delays of political character. Furthermore, this strong position gave the executive the possibility to keep insisting with the policy and to find some alternative uses, but still related to the management of asylum seekers, for the centres located in Albania even when other actors, i.e. the courts, temporarily suspended their use in the modalities originally foreseen. The latter, instead, played a major role in ensuring that the government did not operate in violation of international obligations and against EU Law. Although, as of now, there is no possibility to verify whether their judgments will actually lead the government to suspend or profoundly re-designing their externalisation strategy, the fact that they undoubtedly caused an important stop, which lasted for several months, to the implementation of the policy, at least as regards its most controversial and critical aspects, proves that they played an important and impactful role.

## CONCLUSIONS

Externalisation policies are a controversial instrument that, precisely because of their contentious nature, tend to attract the attention of many actors, whose actions can either ease or hinder their adoption and implementation. In order to understand some possible general patterns and mechanisms for how these actors operate nowadays and the effects they produce, the present analysis has focused on the comparison of two recent cases, which occurred almost at the same time and in a fairly similar context. These were the 2022 UK-Rwanda and the 2023 Italy-Albania agreements, which were both adopted by a European country whose asylum system was still struggling to manage immigration after the 2015 crisis and that were experiencing a new massive increase in the number of irregular arrivals after the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the first place, the present analysis has looked at the key historical precedents in externalisation policies, so to understand why they were introduced and what goals they were able to achieve. These precedents were, namely, the Australian Pacific Solution, the 2016 EU-Turkey agreement and the 2017 Italy-Libya deal. All of these were adopted to face an increase of irregular immigration which was perceived as critical, tackling both security and humanitarian issues raised by the phenomenon. When introduced, they divided political actors in two camps, one in favour and one against them, whose composition mirrored previous divisions over the broader theme of immigration. Some differences emerged with their implementation. If, indeed, in all three cases the policies raised criticism regarding the violation of migrants' right to liberty, as well as non-discrimination and non-refoulement principles (in Australia there were also some judicial

decisions confirming this claim), the Pacific Solution actually reduced the number of arrivals by boat, while the other two did not improve the efficiency of the asylum system.

Subsequently, the analysis has looked in detail at the UK-Rwanda and Italy-Albania cases, going through the processes which led to their adoption and implementation. Throughout these paths, several actors played a role, although they did not all have the same impact. The first of these is the public opinion, which contributed to generate the perception for a need to intervene with tougher rules on immigration. Both deals, indeed, were adopted in countries (the UK and Italy) where there was a negative attitude towards immigrants systemically spread among a significant part of the population. Such a sentiment provided an incentive to politicians to tackle the issue, as they need to meet the electorate's requests to increase their chances of being elected. The same mechanism applied during the legislation phase, although there were some differences between the two countries. In the UK, the majority of voters being likely to vote Labour at the general election which would have taken place a few months later caused many Tory MPs to seriously consider voting against a key bill of their own party, and some of these to actually do that. This was due to the specific electoral rule of the British system, the Single Member District Plurality, which incentivises politicians to align with the positions of their constituency's majority, as that increases the chances of being the only candidate elected in that district. In Italy, instead, since the majority of voters supported the government in charge, and most of these liked the policy, it created an incentive for every MP to vote according to their party's indications, thus making the legislative process quick and straightforward. The action of public opinion, therefore, significantly contributed to the very same existence of the policies in the first place. Political actors, indeed, need to be responsive to voters' demands. Given that these do not concern only one issue and that they can change over time, it may happen that, during the long process which begins with the conception of a policy and ends with its actual implementation, public opinion changes its orientation towards a given issue or starts to give more relevance to other matters. Political actors, thus, must adapt to these eventual shifts and must be able to change their parliamentary attitude accordingly. The difference the British and the Italian case presented as regards the legislative passage of their externalisation policies can partially be explained precisely with this logic, since in one of the two countries, the UK, public opinion changed its priorities and got closer to Labour's stances. This led some Tories to try to adapt to the

electorate's new demand, deciding to vote against the bill to convey the message that they, too, felt some distance from the Conservative party's political agenda.

Related to that, also political actors played a central role, as they are those who practically have to provide for the adoption and implementation of a policy. Aside from the government, which leads the whole process and has the application of the agreements' provisions as its main goal, individual MPs and political parties also had an impact. Again, there are differences between the two countries, determined by the different rules over electoral systems, party systems and how these affect political competition.

In the UK, as said above, individual MPs complicated the legislative passage of the policy, as many Tories started an internal rebellion threatening not to vote for the Rwanda bill, with some of these actually doing so. However, this was not enough to stop the adoption of the policy, since, on the other hand, also political parties played a role, as they provided the incentive for most of the rebels to ending up complying with the leaders' indications, because of the power they have to choose who to present as a candidate for a general election and because these offered them the opportunity to, eventually, improve their position within party rankings, either by becoming the new leader or one of its close supporters. Still, their actions in Parliament produced further consequences during the implementation phase. The rebellion of those individual Tories, indeed, confirmed how Sunak and his political agenda were not able to guarantee unity and stability within the party, thus determining the definitive end of the credibility they had among the electorate. This, in turn, led those MPs who opposed the bill to fight for amendments for several months, as they knew that, potentially, there were the numbers required to pass them, thus producing a ping pong dynamic between the two Chambers, causing unexpected delays before the implementation could actually get started. Moreover, Sunak understood that he could not ignore the political signal coming from the Parliament, which clearly was not giving a full support to one of its most important policies, and therefore decided to wait for the general election to take place before going on with the implementation phase. Individual MPs' action, thus, determined significantly the fact that the deal with Rwanda was practically not implemented at all after being adopted, as the Labour win at the elections caused the policy to be officially terminated. It is relevant to note that these mechanisms do not apply systematically to all polities with a two-party system and as

SMDP electoral rule. Still, they can be expected to occur when in these kinds of countries there is a public opinion which outstandingly does no longer support the government in charge.

In Italy, instead, since the multi-member district plurality electoral rule and the multi-party system strongly incentivises MPs to stick to their party's indications, the legislative passage did not present any complication for the government, thanks to the cohesion of political parties, both internally and within coalitions. This, in turn, further increased Meloni's political strength despite she was implementing a very controversial and heavily criticised policy. Also, it allowed her to keep insisting with it and to find alternative ways to send some migrants in the Albanian centres, even when the courts temporarily suspended their use in the modalities originally foreseen. These two different outcomes imply that the consequences political actors produce on the implementation of a policy depend on how difficult they make the policy's legislative step. If this passage occurs easily, then there is a higher chance that the enactment is carried out with less hesitation, even when some obstructions and criticisms are met. Conversely, if the passage occurs with some difficulties, then the implementation, too, will be negatively affected, as the governments will tend to be more cautious and more obstacles will be met.

Precisely the courts, both at the national, international and (for Italy only) EU level, are another actor which had a major impact on externalisation policies. In particular, the courts' interim measures and judgments proved to have a bigger impact when they followed a strong intervention by the government, in terms of how relevant it was in the policy implementation path. Both in the UK, after the deal had been announced and flights taking migrants to Rwanda were ready to take off, and in Italy, after the Parliament approved the ratification of the agreement and the government started to send irregular migrants rescued at sea towards Albania, the court's interim measures caused a major stop to both policies. Moreover, their subsequent judgments providing that the agreements were in violation of national, international or EU Law forced the two executives to make ad hoc bills so to keep on putting their policy in practice. On the contrary, when governments' implementation was weaker, also the courts' actions produced a minor impact, as it occurred with the UK after the third reading vote for the Rwanda bill, as they did not directly stop the whole policy, but only a preparatory measure (the preliminary detention of asylum seekers who

would have been transferred in Rwanda several months later). Still, even in this case, they were able at least to slow down the implementation process and to continue the public debate over the policy, since both ordinary people and experts, also because of their interventions, kept questioning the legitimacy of the Rwanda plan.

Finally, civil society and international bodies (UNHCR above all) are the last actors to affect externalisation policies. Their core action consists of providing claims and observations either in favour or against a given theme. As for these specific cases, they were almost exclusively negative comments, highlighting the problematic aspects of the policies as concerned their humanitarian and legal aspects. Although they did not directly affect governments' decisions when adopting and implementing the policies (rather, their points tended to be contested and negated), it would be interesting to note that they inevitably eased the entrance of the discussion over the policy within the public debate, ultimately influencing the public opinion, which, as it has been shown, conditions the whole process. Also, it is relevant to highlight that, unlike other actors, their actions did not produce varying outcomes across the two cases. Rather, they had the same kind of impact in both situations, implying that their role could potentially be the same regardless of the contextual specificities of the country in which they operate.

These empirical findings contribute to explore an aspect of externalisation policies which the academic literature has so far offered little coverage of. The dynamics and mechanisms operating internally within States and determining how this kind of tool is adopted, what opinions it generates, how it is implemented and how the interaction between these three aspects produces some specific outcomes, presenting, across different cases, many similarities and some significant differences, has not particularly been looked at so far. This analysis has started to fill this gap. However, the British and Italian cases here discussed belong to a specific context having some particular elements which may not be present elsewhere. These elements regard the fact that both countries have struggled to deal with the 2015 migration crisis, and that, therefore, their asylum systems were still presenting systemic inefficiencies, determined by the incapability to manage the huge number of arrivals they had at the time. Furthermore, their population had a pretty strong anti-immigrant sentiment which, also because of the problems they had in the management of immigration, was quite spread among the population. Finally, the policies were adopted

following a new rise in the number of migrants, occurring after a very complicated period for the two countries, that of the Covid-19 pandemic. A potential input for further studies, therefore, could be to replicate this kind of analysis, but selecting a different case study, possibly one in which these factors (or at least one of these) are not present, so to ultimately determine to what extent the findings discussed above are strictly contextual or can be generalised to the whole phenomenon of externalisation policies.

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