

## Interview with Admiral Giuseppe De Giorgi

# A new hat for the former Chief of the Italian Navy

*Admiral Giuseppe De Giorgi, Chief of Staff of the Italian Navy in 2013-2016, will teach a course on International Security (INTL 5590) at Webster University Geneva<sup>1</sup> from January through March 2019.*



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GIOVANNA SCOTTON<sup>2</sup>

**Admiral, you have accepted a new challenge. Congratulations. Next year, you will be Visiting Professor of International Security at Webster University. Why did you decide to start this collaboration with an American university? Can you highlight the major topics you will deal with during your course?**

I met Professor Oreste Foppiani (*Head of the Department of International Relations at Webster University*), when I was Chief of Staff. His passion, competence and intellectual lucidity on maritime issues in general and maritime security in particular struck a chord. My contribution to the curriculum of the MAIR will concentrate on the renewed importance of seas and oceans vis-à-vis future peace in the world. It is my intention to offer my students the direct testimony of a man who participated in events of international significance. My students – through the analysis of case studies – will take advantage of a synthesis of the effects of political choices mediated by decisions taken in the field by military and civilian actors. Hence, they will also see lost opportunities and seized opportunities, which determined the outcome – often by chance – of many crucial events. Among the different operation theaters, we will analyze together what happened in Lebanon, Libya and the Persian Gulf.

**You served your country wearing the Italian Navy uniform for over 40 years and had an adventurous life spent at sea, flying and navigating around the world. However, inside the uniform there is always a man. How was this great love for the Navy born? What were the milestones, which marked this path?**

Passion for the sea, the aspiration to be part of a “band of brothers” of which to be proud, the desire for adventure, the willingness to step up your game, were and are the main reasons. I had wanted to be a sailor since I was a child. My leadership roles in the Italian Navy marked my professional life. They gave me the opportunity to participate – often as a protagonist – in crucial international events such as the Lebanese Civil War following the truce between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, the strike on Gaddafi in 2011 and the ensuing humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. Finally, yet importantly, the relaunch of the Italian Navy during my years as Chief of Staff of one of the 10 best navies in the world.

**You are known to be the father of Operation MARE NOSTRUM, a mission that faced the migration crisis in the Southern Mediterranean Sea with a completely new approach. Could you explain to the readers of *UN Special* the most significant episodes of this mission and how it has evolved?**

Operation MARE NOSTRUM was born as an answer to the carnage, which took place near Lampedusa Island on the night of October 3–4, 2013, when over 350 migrants lost their lives. This carnage epitomized the many other tragedies at sea which were happening in those days. MARE NOSTRUM was the answer to a humanitarian crisis of biblical dimensions and it became the greatest search-and-rescue (SAR) operation at sea ever implemented: we rescued 160,000 men, women and children, arrested 360 traffickers, and disposed of or confiscated numerous naval units. MARE NOSTRUM was not only a colossal rescue operation, but also a decisive operation to disrupt the trafficking in human beings (THB). In addition, it acted as a sanitary cordon, thanks to the medical personnel of the Italian Health Ministry, the Italian Red Cross and the different NGOs onboard our military ships. Let’s not forget that before MARE NOSTRUM, the surviving migrants landed directly on the Italian coasts, to then be hired by local organized crime and received no medical assistance. MARE NOSTRUM was followed by Operation MARE SICURO, which zoomed in on the control and surveillance of the sea zone right in front of the Libyan Territorial Waters to fight ISIS and protect the Italian Coast Guard naval units involved in SAR missions. On top of MARE SICURO, in 2015, came

the EU Naval Force in the Mediterranean Operation SOPHIA, which was conceived to fight THB and support the reborn Libyan Coast Guard. Notwithstanding these ambitious goals, SOPHIA did not achieve the hoped-for results because Brussels was lukewarm, as it had never given the authorization to operate within the Libyan Territorial Waters.

**What is the current situation in the Mediterranean and which geopolitical scenarios do you foresee, including the role of Italy in Libya and all the other actors in the field?**

The United States' disengagement in the Mediterranean, reborn Russian expansionism, the divisions between Sunnis and Shiites, the failed Libyan State, the Iranian presence in Syria and the EU crisis, together with African migration, are only some of the destabilizing elements in a region that only 20 years ago seemed destined to become a tranquil sea under the American aegis. To worsen the situation, there is the reborn contrast between France and Italy. The latter is the object of the Hexagon's aggressive shopping campaign among the Belpaese's last industrial jewels in the crown. One must also point out the fact that Italy is in a phase of marginalization in the Libyan theater. Italy, without the protection of its traditional and most important ally, the United States, and without the support of the now BREXIT-driven United Kingdom to differ from France, reveals all its weaknesses in the international arena. Rome, accustomed to camouflaging itself as a chameleon within the jungle of multilateralism, is struggling to position itself as a sovereign country with its own long-term strategy to pursue the national interest.

**What role do you see for the Italian Navy in the so-called "Enlarged Mediterranean" and in the future EU armed forces?**

The "Enlarged Mediterranean" is of paramount importance for Italy and its significance has been politically underestimated. It is a vast area, full of opportunities, but also full of threats. Italy, being the link between Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, can put itself in the picture as the natural reference for MENA countries willing to work with Europe. The Peninsula can also become extremely relevant, acting as the validating EU and NATO partner, to cooperate with the Southern Mediterranean countries. Only by assuming this responsibility, will

Italy be able to obtain from Brussels a strategy which can give to the Mediterranean its deserved priority and centrality in political choices. The latter should include both security and economic development as far as the protection of the environment and the sustainable use of the energy and food resources of the seas are concerned. At the same time, to support a convincing Mediterranean foreign policy, Italy must equip itself with a military instrument able to work in peacetime as well as during war. It plays a primary role in the security of the region through constant presence, surveillance, deterrence and the projection of force in both the Mediterranean Sea and the "Enlarged Mediterranean." Keeping this in mind, the relevance of the

Italian Navy is evident, because it is the first implementation tool to maintain balance in the Mediterranean, to protect regional stability and the defense of human rights, as well as Italy's vital national interests. The hypothesis of an EU Navy is instead subordinated to the transformation of the EU from a mere economic entity to a sovereign federation of states, not nations, but regions with an autonomy limited to domestic policies. How much and when this perspective could materialize depends on whether or not populist nationalism will intensify from its current success not only in Europe, but also in the Americas. ■

1 www.webster.ch

2 Italian Navy Selected Reserve journalist.

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