



Civil MRCC

Coordination and documentation platform for people in distress in the Central Mediterranean

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N°15

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# ECHOES

## From the Central Mediterranean



Safira -Rescue of 79 people after an Alarm Phone alert  
Crédit Méditerranée, 29.11.24

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Refugees in Libya continue their fight for evacuation

## 10 YEARS OF STRUGGLE!

In 2025, several civil sea rescue organizations will look back to the last 10 years of their fight for safe passage. 2025 is also 10 years since the historic summer of migration. The memories of these months of hard-won freedom of movement from Athens to Stockholm and with demonstrations of welcome all over Europe appear today as something from another time and world.

Yet through the chains of migration these struggles are closely linked to current refugee and migration movements and are likely an important factor in their ongoing tenacity and assertiveness. In the Central Mediterranean fewer people were able to reach Italy this last year compared to record numbers in 2023. In the eastern and in the western Mediterranean/Atlantic regions the numbers have increased once more. In total, a remarkable number of about 200,000 people reached the southern European coasts in 2024.

In 2024:

- **65,474** people arrived in **Italy** and Malta by sea, many of whom arrived autonomously (UNHCR figures up to December 29)
- **12,410** people were rescued by the **civil fleet** from more than **240 boats** in distress (CMRCC figure up to December 31).
- **21,470** people were pushed back to **Libya** after they were intercepted by the EU-supported so-called Libyan Coast Guard (IOM figure up to December 28).
- **1,689** people have been reported **dead or missing** on the Central Mediterranean Route (IOM figure up to December 28)

# 2025: 10 YEARS SUMMER OF MIGRATION...

... AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A CHAIN OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIONS?



*Lesvos in Summer 2015  
Credit: Moving Europe*

In summer 2025 it will be ten years since the struggle for freedom of movement in the Aegean Sea and along the Balkan route culminated in a historical march of hope. At the beginning of September 2015, thousands of refugees and migrants primarily from Syria gathered at a train station in Budapest-Keleti. Because access to trains was refused by authorities, they decided collectively to walk on highways to the north. They publicly demonstrated their determination to reach their destination cities in northwest Europe, even by foot if necessary.

## **March of Hope from Budapest**

*"The images of this march will surely find their place in the iconography of this long summer of migrations: a long line of people who, after a week of waiting, reappropriated their own mobility and collectively left Budapest. Under the impression of these images and the knowledge that a repressive strategy had failed, Germany and Austria announced that they would open their borders and receive the refugees, whereupon the Hungarian government organised the bus transport to the border. Over the course of the weekend, at least ten thousand refugees reached Germany. The borders were finally open." (1)*

This incredible breakthrough against the European border regime was a hard-fought success of many months of daily fights along this eastern Mediterranean route. In the weeks afterwards,

struggles for freedom of movement continued wherever Balkan governments tried to block the people on the move.

## **"Dublin" collapsed and a Corridor from Athens to Stockholm**

The ongoing mass arrivals between Turkey and Greece and the dynamics of these weeks not only led to the full collapse of the so-called Dublin system: for the first time, a new corridor from Athens to Stockholm was opened.



*People on the Move in October 2015 in Slovenia  
Credit: Moving Europe*

For a few months, refugees and migrants could move freely by bus and train through many parts of Europe. Moreover, they were able to choose where they wanted to apply for asylum freely. The enforced suspension of border controls also led the business of smugglers to break down.

The summer of migration proved again that smuggling apparatuses can only exist as long as border guards and Frontex create the conditions for them. When safe passages were opened on the Balkan route, people no longer paid the high costs associated with dangerous and clandestine border crossings. And while people continued to die at sea as a result of closed borders between Turkey and Greece, the death rate fell to a 20-year low in the Mediterranean. In the end, about two million people made it to Europe in 2015/2016, where many were welcomed by solidarity groups at train stations.

### Chain of Actions in September 2025?

Various solidarity networks have started to discuss if and in which way the 10th anniversary of the summer of migration and the march of hope could become

not only an occasion to remember but also to intervene against the brutalization of borders.

Can we imagine in such times of ongoing rollback and growing rightwing dominance breaking the normalization of death and pushbacks? Is it worth trying to mobilize additional capacities for a chain of transnational actions in September 2025 to overcome the very defensive mood in left wing movements? And if yes, how is it possible to organize interconnected activities between the 10 years of civil sea rescue and the 10 years of summer of migration?

*no one is illegal, Hanau*

#### To read further about the summer of migration and the march of hope

- [https://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope-en/ \(1\)](https://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope-en/ (1))
- <https://moving-europe.org/march-of-hope-3/>
- <https://moving-europe.org/still-moving-europe/>
- <https://urls.fr/8Ur932>



People on the Move in September 2015 at the Croatian-Slovenian border Credit: Moving Europe

# LATEST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

## FLYING UNDER FLUSSI: THE LATEST ATTACK ON AIRBORNE OPERATIONS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

Fighting Fortress Europe has never been easy, but the civil fleet is operating in an increasingly smaller space in the Central Mediterranean. We witness a highly militarized and mobile so-called Libyan coast guard backed by the EU and other Libyan militias in the Central Mediterranean.

For years, we have seen criminalization attacks on the civil actors. One of the latest results of this being the amendments to the Piantadosi Decree, following the 'reasoning' of externalisation of borders to control NGO behaviour and movements in international space.

Now, under Decreto Flussi, published on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and finally voted by both chambers on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024, the Italian government extends this to aircrafts, and thus to Sea-Watch's Airborne operations. The decree contains paragraphs solely dedicated to adapting the Piantadosi Decree to aircraft taking off and/or landing in Italy which are involved in aerial monitoring operations. With the new Decree-Law Nr. 145, the Meloni government now aims to restrict the freedom of overflight, and ultimately, Airborne operations. This new attempt exactly follows the scheme of the Piantadosi-Decree for NGO ships: Abide by a set of conditions, or the aircraft will be detained.



*Crew member of the Seabird 2 uses binoculars to search for boats in distress in the central Mediterranean. Credit: David Pichler / Sea-Watch.*

The conditions specified are as follows:

Firstly, an aircraft must inform about distress cases “immediately and with priority” to the rescue coordination centers (RCCs) responsible for the area in which there is a boat in distress, together with the RCCs of the adjacent Search and Rescue Regions and the relevant aviation authority. This rule is not contradicting international law but only enlarging the list of authorities to be informed.

Second, pilots are required to follow operational instructions from RCCs. While competent authorities have to coordinate rescue operations according to the SAR legal framework, such treaties also establish clear duties for any (also private) actor which happens to witness a person in distress at sea. The clearest example would be, being on scene of a distress case and having the duty to support by remaining on scene to relay updated communication to support surface assets but receiving an order from a so-called Libyan Coastguard patrol vessel to simply leave the area. Thus, the documentation of violations of the law, as it is the case in case of shipwrecks, or illegal interceptions to Libya, would go unnoticed and the risk for violence and death for the people on board of a distress case increase. Here, the starkest contrast between international law and the Flussi decree is apparent.

In terms of sanctions, the decree establishes the possibility for ENAC (the Italian Civil Aviation Authority) to issue a fine between 2,000 and 10,000 Euros to the pilot. Furthermore, as an associated sanction they have the chance to detain the involved aircraft for a minimum of 10 days and a maximum of 20 days. In cases of repeated violations, the detention would increase from a minimum of 30 days to a maximum of 60 days. After this, the asset would be confiscated.

These foreseen penalties follow the sanctions which have been applied to NGO ships. Although so far despite numerous detentions conditions for repetition have only occurred twice for the vessels of the civil fleet (for Sea-Eye and MSF’s Geo Barents), with Decreto Flussi changes are now being introduced that appear to lead to a substantial tightening of the sanctions that will be adopted. Whereas previously, only the captain was considered responsible for any potential transgression, now the shipowner/operator will also be held accountable.

So, now we also see that the Flussi Decree has been further adapted to tighten the grip on the ships as well as the Airborne operations of the civil fleet.



*Seabird 2 in the central Mediterranean. Credit: Stefano Belacchi / Sea-Watch*

**“ The goal of the Decreto Flussi is clear: to make the civil fleet inoperative and to make human rights violations invisible. Ultimately, this will only lead to more deaths at sea.**

**Once again we see necropolitics laid bare in a regime that produces violence and death.**

**At the very least, maybe we can see this decree-law targeting Airborne operations as some sort of win: they are desperately trying to get rid of us. But as long as people fight this regime with their very flesh, we will stand with them. “**

***Sea Watch Airborne***

#### **WEBSITE**

**<https://sea-watch.org/en/mission/airborne/>**

# IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!


## A DIARY OF RESCUE COORDINATION BY CIVIL ACTORS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The following section provides an overview of the level and impact of rescue coordination by civil actors in the Central Mediterranean Sea, using brief reports and X extracts.

### OCTOBER 2024

- October 2** Thanks to information from **Seabird**, the **Nadir** was able to find a rubber dinghy with 43 people. As water was already entering, everyone was evacuated to the Nadir. The crew then continued the search with **Trotamar III** coordinated by the Italian authorities. Later in the evening, a rubber dinghy with 35 people was discovered and rescued by Nadir. Shortly afterwards, Nadir searched for another boat in distress but was harassed by the so-called Libyan coast guards and had to change course and stop searching for another boat in distress. The fate of the boat is still unknown.
- October 10** During the night, 6 people are directly recovered from the water in the Libyan SRR (search and rescue region) by the crew of **Ocean Viking**. In the morning 41 people are rescued from an overcrowded fiberglass boat in the Maltese SRR. Later in the afternoon the crew rescues 36 people from an unseaworthy plastic boat (1).
- October 11** **Solidaire** rescues 41 people from a rubber boat.
- October 12** The **Nadir** crew spots an iron boat in distress with 49 people on board. Due to the imminent risk of capsizing, all people are taken onboard. The people, including 23 women and 3 small children, had departed from Tunisia the day before.
- October 14** Following a report from **Alarm Phone**, **Mare Jonio** completes the rescue of 58 people in danger of life, in international waters in the Tunisian SRR. The same day, **Sea Eye 4** rescues 22 people after they had to jump from their boat in international waters. 26 people on a rubber boat, who departed from Libya and had spent 2 days on the water already are spotted from the **Nadir**. The crew assesses the situation and then accompanies the boat for about two hours before taking them onboard. People are then disembarked in Lampedusa.
- October 26** The crew of **Humanity 1** rescues a single person without life-saving equipment from an unseaworthy boat in distress spotted in international waters off the Libyan coast. The person stated to have fled and asked the crew for help and protection. Italy assigns the distant port of Salerno as a place of safety – almost 3 days of navigation and 870 km away from the location of the rescue.
- October 30** Following an alert from **Alarm Phone**, the **Ocean Viking** rescues 25 people, including 5 unaccompanied minors, from a wooden boat in distress in the overlapping Tunisian & Maltese SRR. They left from Sabratha, Libya & spent over 4 days at sea with just 1 bottle of water each.
- October 31** The crew of **Life Support** rescue 38 shipwrecked people rescued in international waters of the Maltese SRR after reaching out to **Alarm Phone**. The boat was drifting and taking on water (2). **Life Support** conducts later on a 2nd rescue in international waters, in Maltese SRR. 34 people are rescued after reaching out to **Alarm Phone**, including 5 unaccompanied minors. Livorno is assigned as a place of safety for disembarkation.

1

 **SOS MEDITERRANEE**  
@SOSMedIntl  
@SOSMedIntl performed 2 rescues in 12h. Last night, 6 people were directly recovered from the water in the Libyan SRR & this morning 41 people were rescued from an overcrowded fiberglass boat in the Maltese SRR.

 **EMERGENCY**  
@emergency\_ong

**2**  
#LifeSupport: 38 naufraghi soccorsi in acque internazionali della zona #SAR maltese. La barca era alla deriva e imbarcava acqua. Assegnato il POS di #Livorno. Leggi tutto su

# NOVEMBER 2024

November 6

**Ocean Viking** performs the rescue of 140 people, incl. 5 women & 4 children, from a double-decker wooden boat in the international waters off Libya. In the afternoon, the crew of **Ocean Viking** carries out a second rescue of 38 people from a flimsy rubber boat in the Maltese SRR, after overhearing several Mayday Relays on the VHF. After an **Alarm Phone** alert, another group of 7 people is rescued by **Ocean Viking** in the Maltese SRR.

The same day, the crew of the **Nadir** encounters an overcrowded rubber boat in distress with 30 people on board and accompanies the boat close to Lampedusa, before Italian Guardia di Finanza takes all people on board.

November 7

**Alarm Phone** alerts a distress case of an overcrowded wooden boat with 37 people on board. The **Nadir** crew encounters the boat, provides lifejackets, and stabilizes the situation until the arrival of the Italian coast guard (1).

**Sea Eye 5** rescues 110 people off Lampedusa.

**Trotamar III** rescues 72 people.

November 11

43 people are rescued by the sailing vessel from Blue Lab, **Nihayet Garganey VI** and disembarked in Lampedusa.

November 12

**Life Support** rescues 49 people from a boat in distress in the central Mediterranean. Among the rescued are 6 women and 6 unaccompanied children.

November 19

**Aita Mari** rescues 53 people who have called **Alarm Phone**, mostly young people and minors, after three days at sea.

November 21

**SOS Humanity 1** crew rescues 70 people from distress at sea, including over 25 unaccompanied minors and female survivors who have left from Libya already two days before.

November 22

The crew of **Sea-Watch 5** rescues 49 people from distress at sea after they have called the **Alarm Phone** (2).

November 26

Following a VHF radio message from a NATO aircraft, **Ocean Viking** rescues 48 people from an overcrowded rubber boat in the Libyan SRR. 90% of the survivors are unaccompanied minors. Towards the end of the rescue operation, the Libyan coast guards approach the scene at full speed, dangerously maneuvering. Despite the unnecessary tension, SOS Mediteranée teams manage to bring everyone safely onboard Ocean Viking.

The crew of **Humanity 1** rescues another 47 people from distress at sea and later on, another boat with 46 people, found by the crew following a distress call to **Alarm Phone**.

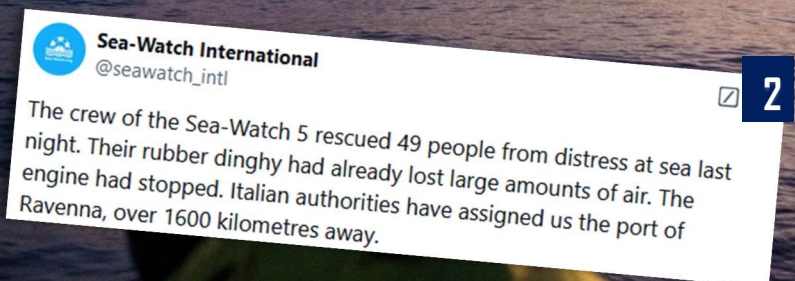
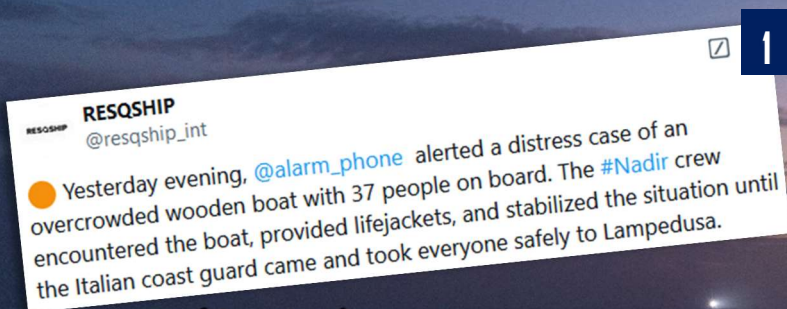
November 28

**Geo Barents** crew witnesses a tragedy while arriving to rescue people in distress on a deflating rubber boat, with armed men on a fast boat in their close vicinity. Armed men threaten the people on the rubber boat and shoot in the air, causing over 70 people to jump in the water. Geo Barents rescues everyone from the water and the rubber boat, but the fast boat leaves with the 29 women and children on board.

The same day, **Aita Mari** rescues 33 people who have reached out to **Alarm Phone**.

November 29

The sailing vessel **Safira** rescues 77 people in international waters.



## DECEMBER 2024

- December 3** **Humanity 1** crew rescues over 80 people including unaccompanied minors from distress at sea. The weather makes the rescue a challenge for our crew. The crew activates a medical emergency plan due to the critical condition of survivors. The same day, 45 people, including unaccompanied children, are rescued during the night by the **Geo Barents** team from an overcrowded boat in distress in international waters. The boat was taking on significant amounts of water due to bad weather conditions, making it unstable and at high risk of capsizing (1).
- December 11** An 11-year-old girl is rescued at sea by the sailing vessel **Trotamar III**. The boat she was traveling on with 45 other people sank 3 days before and she was clinging to an inner tube. Rescuers heard her screams and were miraculously able to find her. **Alarm Phone** has reported 3 missing boats departing from Tunisia, for which the fate of the people remains unknown.
- December 12** While patrolling international waters off Libya, **Ocean Viking** overhears several VHF mayday relays indicating a boat in distress requiring immediate assistance. Ocean Viking team rescues 34 people from a rubber boat. One hour after the rescue is completed, a Libyan coast guard asset approaches at fast speed, crossing Ocean Viking's bow, ordering the crew to leave despite operating in international waters (2).
- December 14** In a complex rescue operation in collaboration with the Italian Coast Guard, the Ocean Viking rescues 129 people, including 43 women (1 pregnant) and 43 children, from a 15m steel fishing vessel in the Ionian Sea, 76NM from the Italian coast.
- December 19** **Aurora** rescues 47 people in distress that has been spotted and reported by aircraft **Seabird** hours earlier. The people report they have been at sea for 2 days (3).
- December 28** **Aurora** secures 56 people in a boat reported by **Alarm Phone** and spotted by **Seabird** until the Italian Coast Guard arrives to take them onboard and bring them safely to Lampedusa.



MSF Sea  
@MSF\_Sea

x1

1

45 people, including unaccompanied children, were rescued last night by @MSF team from an overcrowded boat in distress in international waters.

The boat was taking on significant amounts of water due to bad weather conditions, making it unstable and at high risk of capsizing.



SOS MEDITERRANEE  
@SOSMedIntl

2

1/2 This morning, while patrolling international waters off Libya, #OceanViking overheard several VHF mayday relays indicating a boat in distress requiring immediate assistance. @SOSMedIntl team rescued 34 ppl from a rubber boat. The main claimed nationalities are Syria & Gambia.



Sea-Watch International  
@seawatch\_intl

x1

3

Last night, we rescued 47 people in distress. Their boat was already taking on water. It has been spotted and reported by our aircraft Seabird hours earlier. The people reported they had been at sea for 2 days. By the time of rescue, they were showing signs of hypothermia.



# ANALYSIS

## THE COMOROS ROUTE: A GRAVEYARD IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

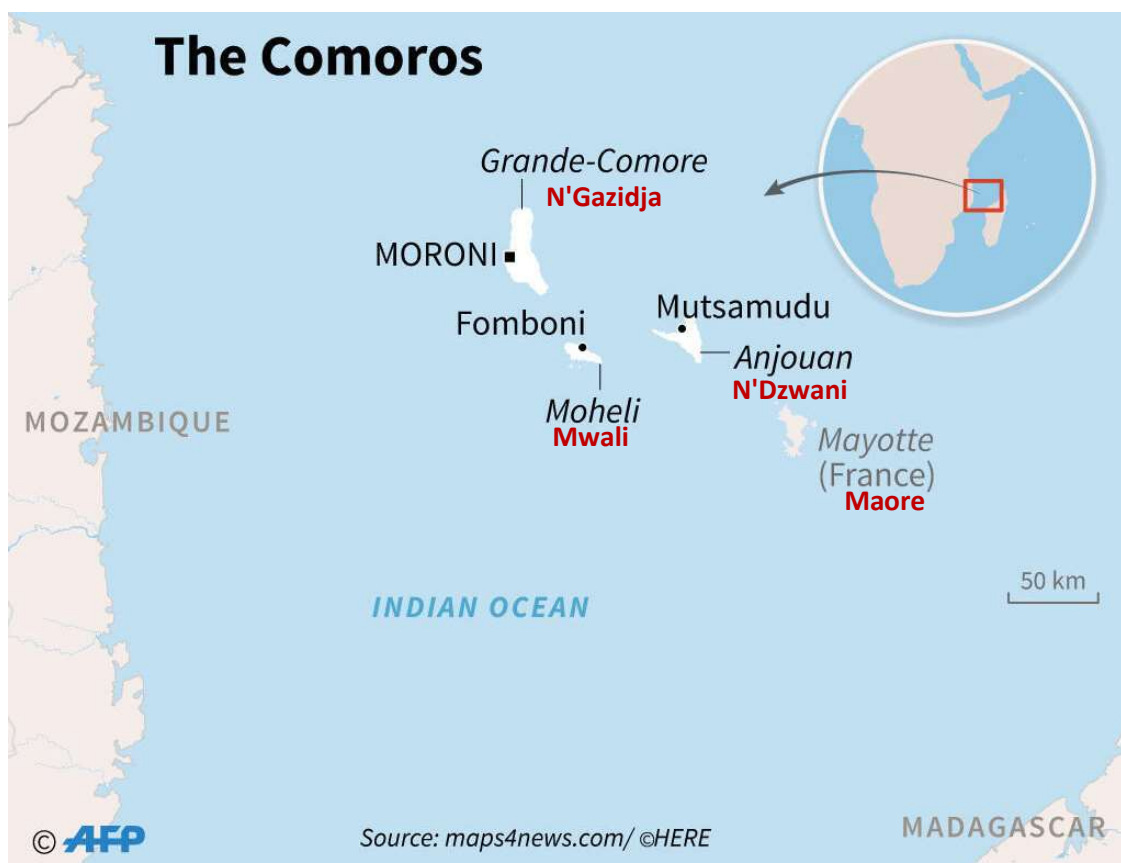
**Catherine Benoît**

The Central Mediterranean route is considered as the world's most deadly maritime route, but there is another route that is little known, but just as lethal: the Comoros route, which since the mid-1990s has transformed the northern Mozambique Channel into a marine graveyard. This route runs from Nosy Be, an island on the northwestern coast of Madagascar, through the three islands of the Union of the Comoros, namely N'Gazidja (Grande Comore), N'Dzwani (Anjouan) and Mwali (Mohéli), and along the East African coast to Maore (Mayotte in French), the fourth island of the Comoros archipelago, which, in violation of international law, became a territorial collectivity and then the fifth French overseas department in 2011.

The Union of the Comoros is both the point of departure for Comorians traveling or migrating to Maore and the point of convergence for nationals from the surrounding regions. Nationals of African countries (Great Lakes region, Somalia, but also West Africa) are taken by boat to N'Gazidja, from where they continue their journey via N'Dzwani, unless they are transhipped at sea in the *kwasa-kwasa* (the

name given to the frail boats that make the journey between the Union of the Comoros and Maore), to reach their destination. Malagasy nationals, on the other hand, either ride a boat directly to Maore or transit via N'Dzwani, without being informed of this detour, where they wait several days before tackling the most dangerous part of their itinerary, i.e. the crossings being made in *kwasa-kwasa* instead of the more powerful motorboats used in Nosy Be.

The "Missing Migrants" project database hosted by the International Office for Migration (IMO) records 293 deaths in this region since 2014. A French Senate report published in 2012 estimates the number of people who died between 7,000 and 10,000 for the years 1995-2012, figures that are certainly underestimated and are in any case obsolete by now. The figure of 70,000 deaths would certainly be more plausible if we estimate that, for a population of around 800,000, every extended family comprising a dozen people has lost at least one member since 1995. Accidents, deaths and disappearances are both invisibilized and silenced because no international, national or civil society organization has looked into this route. Only La Cimade, in conjunction with Comorian organizations, has published a brochure



and video clips to inform families about the possibilities of locating and identifying the dead and missing, and transferring them to their countries of origin.[1]

How did this seventy-kilometre channel between N'Dzwani and Maore, crisscrossed for centuries by the surrounding populations, become a deadly pathway? In 1995, anticipating the political process that would lead to the departmentalization of Maore, the French government decided to definitively sever the ancestral family and political ties linking the four "moon islands" by requiring Comorian nationals to have a visa to travel to Maore. This rarely-granted visa, also known as the "Balladur" visa after the French Prime Minister of the time, is also referred to as the "visa of death": since they are no longer able to travel by regular sealines or airlines, Comorian nationals are left to using the *kwasa kswasa*, whether to attend a family or religious celebration, meet up with friends, celebrate an event, seek medical treatment or work there.

Until 2002 crossings went smoothly, with few shipwrecks. That year, the Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, developed brutal policies to arrest and deport foreigners on land and at sea, demonstrating if proof were needed that this deadly frontier is political, not geographical. The *kwasa-kwasa* pilots came to leave the Comoros when the weather conditions are the most unfavorable, believing that the Comorian coastguards or French border patrols are not out in force. Over the years, they have taken increasingly dangerous routes, extending the crossing time from two hours to up to twenty-four hours, based on the location and frequency of patrols off the coast of Mayotte.

The strengthening of this French and European maritime border has accelerated since 2018: (1) creation of the *Groupe d'enquête et de lutte contre l'immigration clandestine* (Gelic) which came into operation on 1<sup>er</sup> September 2018, (2) Operation Shikandra initiated in 2019 which has multiplied surveillance and arrest resources on land and at sea and finally (3) signature of a framework agreement between the two countries signed on July 22, 2019 which formalizes a new partnership between the French and Comorian governments in the fight against irregular immigration with, for example, the implementation of a surveillance system to prevent departures from N'Dzwani and the financing of launches for the Comorian coastguard. Figures published by the prefecture for 2021 and 2022 show an increase in the number of *kwasa-kwasa* interceptions: 459 *kwasa-kwasa* were intercepted out of the 862 detected in 2021 and 571 out of 772

detected in 2022. However, these figures did not give any idea of the number of arrivals or departures, which has now been done since June 2023, when the Maore Gendarmerie announced that during the high season (April-September), around five to ten *kwasa-kwasa* a day seek to land, i.e. between 1,210 and 2,420 a year. This does not tell us anything about the number of departures or what happens before landing in French territorial waters, but it does give an idea of the number of boats that attempt this deadly crossing every week. In February 2024, the Minister of the Interior announced that a "maritime iron curtain" would be deployed off the island. As of now, the details have yet to be worked out.

Unlike the dead in the Mediterranean, the dead in the Mozambique Channel are generally identified when the bodies are found on the shores of N'Dzwani or Maore. In N'Dzwani, bodies that are too decomposed and unrecognizable are buried on the beaches where the ocean washes them up. A stone or a tree branch indicates the place of burial to the person who found them, but otherwise there is no trace of these sites in the landscape. Because of the climate of terror fostered by the Comorian government to keep accidents from being reported, and the criminalization of rescue efforts, families remain silent but are discreetly alerted by those who discover the bodies if they recognize them. In Maore, the fate and identification of bodies differ according to whether they were discovered by local residents or by the gendarmerie, and whether, in the case of a suspicious death, it was necessary to involve the public prosecutor and then a forensic doctor, and finally whether or not the body was handled by a mortician.

An informal system of identification is in place, depending on the willingness of the police to involve Comorian associations and community leaders in the process. Photographs of the dead circulate among them and calls on local radio stations invite Comorians to identify the bodies. In accordance with the rules of Islam, burial takes place on the day the body is discovered on a beach, or the following day if it is discovered in the late afternoon. The question of transferring the body to the Comoros does not arise, as a deceased person must be buried where he or she dies. The residents' associations that manage the cemeteries in each commune are opposed to the burial of Comorian nationals, especially those who died at sea. Comorian landowners have come to develop sizeable cemeteries to allow the burial of bodies found on their own land, but the associations now demand that a kinship link be established between the dead person and at least one family in

the commune. Muslim cemeteries have no stele to mark the dead - the memory of the cemetery owner or those who carried out the burial, and the witnesses to the burial, make up for this.

The French and Comorian authorities silence any communication attempt regarding shipwrecks, deaths and disappearances, as well as their registration. In consequence, deaths are not reported, creating endless administrative and legal problems for the families, and making mourning impossible. In addition, campaigns to prevent departures and distribute life jackets by Comorian organizations are prevented by the French government. While an official census seems out of the question - although methodologically possible - the collection of testimonies and the creation of a hotline such as those developed by *Alarm Phone* would make it possible to list boats in distress situations, report on *kwasa-kwasa* interception techniques and assess the possibility of developing rescue services in the two SAR zones of the Comoros, which are under the responsibility of Madagascar and Mozambique. France, for its part, is responsible for the SAR zone

south of Madagascar and La Réunion. Since 2019, the *Centre régional opérationnel de secours et de sauvetage* (CROSS), has been working in partnership with the *Société nationale de secours en mer* (SNSM) based in Maore in the island's territorial waters. According to the CROSS annual report, 2023 saw a 26% drop in rescue operations compared with 2022, with a total of 136 rescue operations. Of these, 99 (58%) involved the *kwasa-kwasa* and required 89 medical assists, i.e. almost two interventions per week for *kwasa-kwasa* arriving in French territorial waters (in the absence of systematic observation, we don't know what happens in international waters or along the Comorian coast, where many shipwrecks occur right from the start).

In the meantime, a collective of civil society associations and Comorian personalities has been set up in Marseille. "La Parole aux morts" aims to record shipwrecks, the dead and the missing.

Testimonies can be posted or sent to the collective's Facebook page at the following address: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61556731565274>

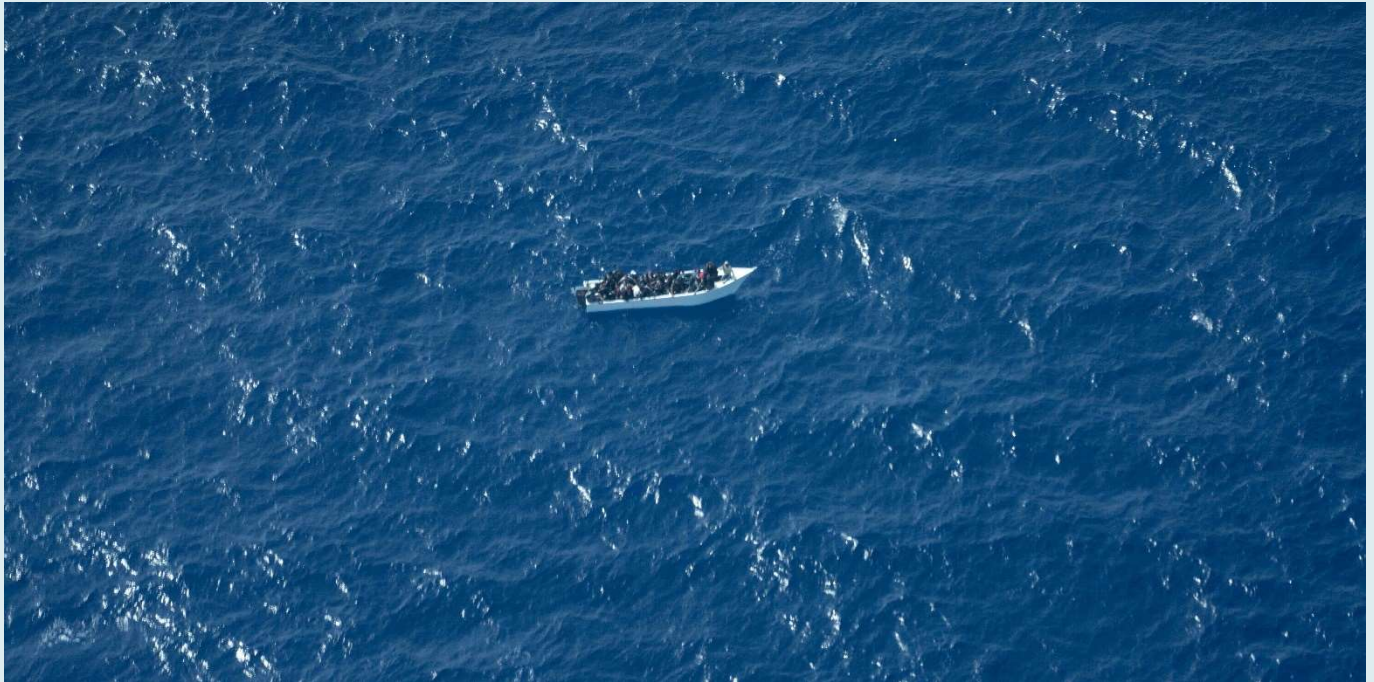
[1] Cf. Cimade 2020 *Morts et disparitions dans l'archipel des Comores. Accompagner les proches de personnes mortes ou disparues en mer*, Paris.



Picture: Volo-Volo Market, Moroni (NGazidja/Grande-Comore) 2021. Credit: Catherine Benoit.

# FORCED TO DISAPPEAR

02.09.2024 SHIPWRECK: A TRAGEDY THAT COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED



*Picture: Sea Watch*

## Call for Justice

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2024, the non-governmental organisation Sea-Watch, together with three survivors and a relative of one of the victims, filed a complaint to the Public Prosecutor's Office in Agrigento, trying to shed light on alleged institutional negligence in one of the recent and tragic shipwrecks happening at the doorstep of Fortress Europe. The event, which occurred between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2024, off the coast of Lampedusa, claimed the lives of 21 people, including three children. The criminal complaint seeks to provide evidence of the delays and failures in responding to distress alerts by the Italian and Maltese authorities and every other actor potentially involved.

## A Foreseeable Tragedy

The distress case was first spotted on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024 by Seabird 2, an aircraft operated by Sea-Watch in partnership with the Humanitarian Pilots Initiative to monitor the human rights violations perpetrated daily in the Central Mediterranean Sea against those trying to reach the EU shore. The aircraft identified a critically distressed vessel carrying approximately 30 people aboard a small, overcrowded, unseaworthy boat lacking safety equipment. Despite three alerts sent to the Italian and Maltese authorities and an

additional mail from Alarm Phone, no action was taken until the 4<sup>th</sup> of September. The Italian Coast Guard rescued seven survivors from a partially submerged boat that day. The survivors recounted that they had departed Libya on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September and that 21 of the people who were on board drowned due to the boat's precarious conditions and rough seas.

## Evidence

The complaint is supported by aerial footage, technical analyses, survivors' testimonies and a simulation by maritime experts, which underscore critical lapses in the rescue response. The study demonstrates that the vessel's trajectory was well-documented and its distress undeniable. Indeed, the drift simulation conducted by Dr. Luca Kunz revealed that the boat had already entered the Italian Search and Rescue (SAR) zone by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, one day before any rescue operation was launched. Additionally, a technical assessment by Dr. Luca Viviani confirmed the match between the boat sighted by Seabird 2 and the one eventually rescued by the Coast Guard.

Furthermore, survivors identified themselves and the other people travelling with them in photos captured by *Seabird 2*, substantiating the link between the initial distress call and the delayed rescue.

Survivors' accounts paint a harrowing picture: the vessel capsized multiple times due to waves, forcing the passengers to undertake desperate measures to stay afloat. The situation worsened overnight, with freezing conditions and the rough sea, which resulted in the loss of the lives of three children and numerous others.

### **A Pattern of Inaction**

The complaint shows how Italian and Maltese authorities failed to respond to a distress situation, violating international maritime safety laws. Indeed, as the previous shipwrecks, such as, among too many others, the "Children's Massacre" of 2013 and the Cutro shipwreck of 2023 demonstrate, this is a recurring and systematic pattern of institutional inertia leading to preventable deaths. The complaint calls for a thorough investigation to determine any criminal liability and to ensure better compliance with search and rescue obligations in the future.

### **A Call for Accountability**

The competent authorities are now required to:

- Investigate the causes of the delay in rescue;
- Assess possible criminal liability for failure to rescue, namely negligent shipwreck (Article 449 of the Criminal Code), multiple manslaughter (Article 589 of the Criminal Code) and failure to assist;
- Ensure that such tragedies are not repeated by complying with international maritime rescue obligations.

The complaint represents a call for justice for the victims and their families. This foreseeable shipwreck raises once more crucial questions on managing the migration route of the Central Mediterranean Sea and the consequences of the EU externalisation policies on the lives of the people on the move. "Behind every number is a life that could have been saved". As the Mediterranean continues to be the deadliest border to cross for people on the move, this complaint serves as a reminder of the human cost of failed governance and the urgent need for change.

**Sea-Watch**

### **Press release and testimonies**

<https://sea-watch.org/en/sea-watch-files-charges-against-italian-authorities/>



# REPORT

## DETENTION, ILLEGALISATION AND THE SO-CALLED CEAS REFORM IN SOUTHERN ITALY



Porto Empedocle: Migrants waiting for transfer to the closed or open centres. Credits: Maldusa

### MONITORING THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN THE LIGHT OF THE EUROPEAN MIGRATION PACT

*“In September 2024, our new project began, carried out by the organisations borderline-europe and Maldusa, managed by the Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration, and supported by the Protestant Church in Hessen and Nassau (EKHN), the Protestant Church in the Rhineland (EKIR), LeaveNoOneBehind, and Pro Asyl!*

*In recent years, Europe has been characterised by increasing attacks on human rights in general and the massive dismantling of refugee rights in particular. One example of this is the 'Common European Asylum System' (CEAS), which aims to make detention centres at the EU's external borders the standardised norm. Unlawful pushbacks and pullbacks characterise and dominate the daily reality of refugee and migration movements, particularly in the eastern and central Mediterranean. Continued attempts to externalise the border regime can be seen in the EU's billion-euro deals with Turkey, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt and Lebanon.*

*Sicily, the EU's southern external border and arrival point for migrants by sea, is a testing ground for the implementation of the new European asylum and migration policy. With the Albania-Italy deal, Italy is one of the first EU states to actually attempt to extraterritorialise border procedures, pre-removal*

*detention, access to asylum, and refugee status determination (RSD).*

*It is vital to keep monitoring this complexity, highlighting the critical role of civil society actors, as well as the critical actions and voices of people on the move.”*

### Content of the report:

- The implementation of new border procedures in Italy after the 'Cutro decree'. Main challenges and ongoing legal battlegrounds
- State-of-the-art on implementing the new border procedures
- The ECJ's (European Court of Justice) decisions on detention in accelerated border procedure centres
- The extraterritorialisation policy of the Albania-Italy deal
- 'Safe countries of origin' and the Albania-Italy deal in the continuity of Italian migration policies
- What will come next

**Chiara Denaro and Judith Gleitze**

### Full report

<https://www.maldusa.org/!detention-illegalisation-and-the-so-called-ceas-reform-in-southern-italy-monitoring-the-situation-of-refugees-in-the-light-of-the-european-migration-pact2/>

# LEGAL FRAGMENT

## THE SALVINI TRIAL

After three years of proceedings, involving 24 hearings and the testimony of 45 witnesses, the trial of Matteo Salvini in Palermo, for his role in the Open Arms case, reached its conclusion on December 20. The sentencing took place at 9:30 a.m. at the court located in the “Pagliarelli” prison in Palermo. The trial ended with the verdict acquitting the defendant Matteo Salvini because the fact does not exist.

Salvini, the former interior minister and current transport minister, faces charges of kidnapping and neglect of duty for his actions in August 2019. He has been accused of preventing the disembarkation of 147 people, including minors, who had been rescued at sea by the NGO Open Arms during three separate rescue operations. For 19 days, the ship was kept at sea without permission to dock, despite the urgent medical needs of those on board.

The case stems from Mission 65, when Open Arms conducted three rescues in the Mediterranean, saving people in dire condition. Despite these efforts, the ship was denied access to Italian ports, leaving those on board stranded at sea.

During a hearing on September 14, 2024, prosecutors from the Palermo Public Prosecutor’s Office requested a six-year prison sentence for Salvini, in addition to other penalties. At the time of the incident, Salvini was serving as Italy’s interior minister, overseeing the country’s policies on migration. The charges relate to his role in preventing the safe disembarkation of migrants aboard the Open Arms ship during the 2019 crisis.

The investigation began in November 2019, following a request by the Palermo Public Prosecutor’s Office

based on information gathered by the Agrigento Public Prosecutor’s Office. It focused on various criminal charges related to the August 2019 events, when the Open Arms ship arrived off the coast of Lampedusa with migrants aboard. The Palermo prosecutors have argued that Salvini acted with intentional disregard for both international law and the personal freedoms of the individuals involved, thus committing the crimes of kidnapping and refusal to perform official duties.

This trial is notable as it is the first time a sitting minister has faced criminal charges for actions taken in the exercise of his office. The Palermo prosecutors have sought to affirm Salvini’s criminal responsibility, arguing that his actions knowingly violated the rights of the 147 migrants.

In addition to the actions of the Palermo Public Prosecutor’s Office, other institutions have weighed in on the case: The Regional Administrative Tribunal (TAR) of Lazio ruled in August 2019 to suspend the government ban on Open Arms’ entry into Italian waters. The Agrigento Public Prosecutor’s Office had ordered the seizure of the ship, and the Palermo Tribunal of Ministers conducted the investigation and sought permission to proceed with charges against Salvini. The Senate of the Republic authorized the trial, and the Palermo judge ordered Salvini to stand trial.

Our goal was never to seek condemnation, but to ensure the truth about what happened during that mission came to light. For that reason, we are very satisfied with the way things have unfolded.

**Open Arms**

**WEBSITE** <https://www.openarms.es>



*Open Arms, rotation 65*

# CRIMINALISATION

## EL HIBLU 3: NEW WEBSITE, TOUCHING VIDEO AND COURT SESSION ON 22.1.25

A few days before yet another court hearing on 6th of November in Valletta, the Coalition for the El Hiblu 3 - a coalition of groups and individuals in Malta and beyond who demand dropping charges against Abdalla, Amara, and Kader - launched a new website. The information and materials include a chronology, an archive concerning the case of the El Hiblu 3, as well as a day counter, highlighting the limbo of criminalisation, in which the three friends are stuck for a long time.

### A "Must-See" Video of Human Rights Defenders

The website has a touching 10 minute long video (as well as a 2 minute short version) of the award ceremony that took place on April 13, 2024, a few weeks after the fifth anniversary of this scandalous case of criminalisation. Abdalla, Amara, and Kader were presented with the Human Rights Defenders Award at the University of Malta. Seven speakers from Maltese and international human rights organizations celebrated the bravery and solidarity of the three young men, before Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, the former President of Malta, on behalf of the Coalition for the El Hiblu 3, presented the El Hiblu 3 with the award. After several laudations, Amara

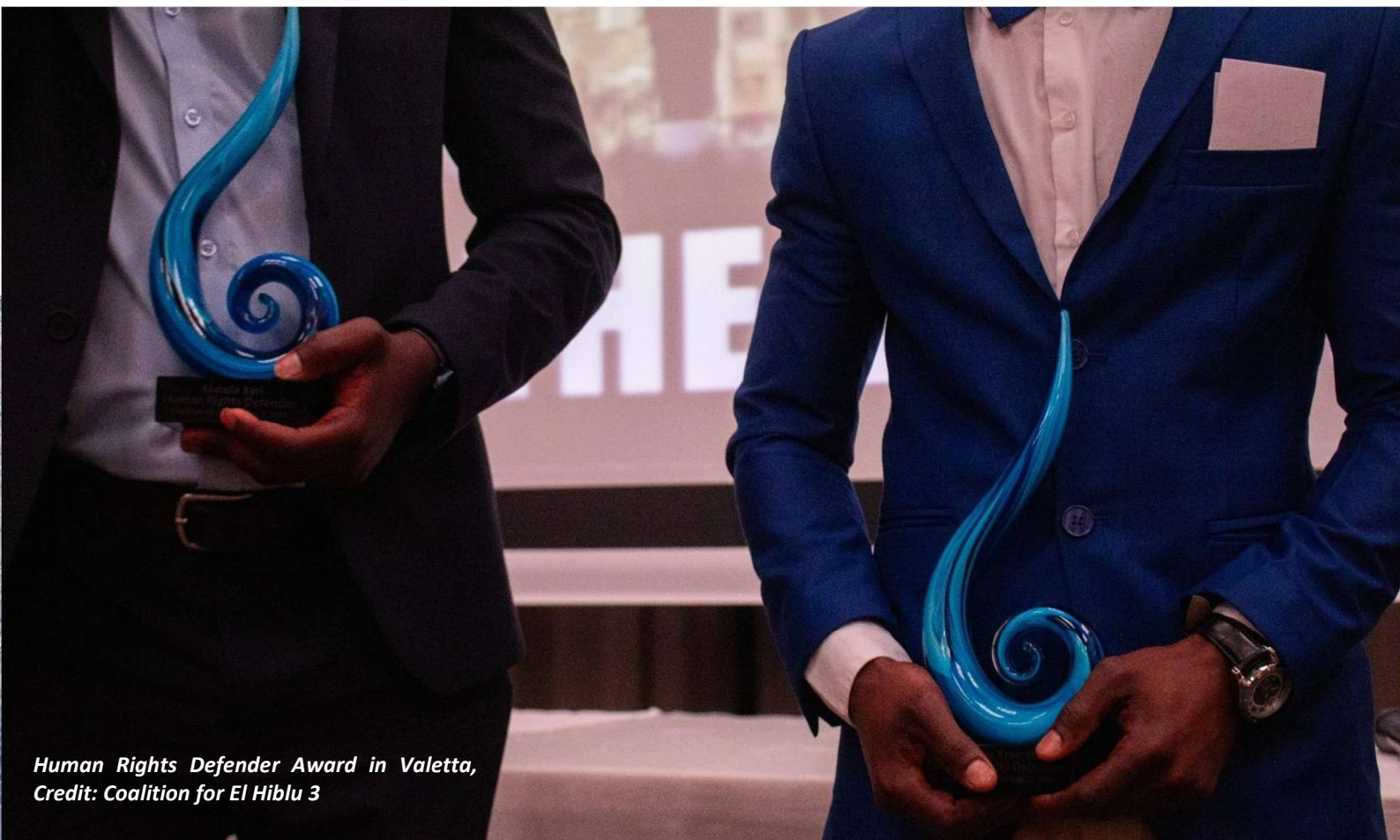
thanked everyone, concluding: "I accept this award not only on my behalf but also on behalf of all those who continue to fight for human rights around the world courageously. Let us seize this moment as a reminder of the power of collective action and the possibility of a brighter future for generations to come."

### Next Hearing on 22 January 2025

In the meanwhile, the farcical trial against Abdalla, Amara, and Kader continues. The day counter will show 2126 days of stolen time, when they are back in court on the 22nd of January 2025. At this important court session, the three magistrates will rule on the question of jurisdiction that was heard at the last hearing with strong submissions by the defending lawyers. The session will start at 9:00 a.m. in the Valletta court building and everyone is invited to join and to show solidarity with Abdalla, Amara and Kader - until these three young men are free.

*Coalition for the El Hiblu 3*

<https://elhiblu3coalition.org>  
[eh3coalition@gmail.com](mailto:eh3coalition@gmail.com)  
X: @FreeTheEH3



*Human Rights Defender Award in Valetta,  
Credit: Coalition for El Hiblu 3*



# AMPLIFYING VOICES

## FROM TRIPOLI TO BERLIN, TO MAZARA DEL VALLO AND TO FRANKFURT

### REFUGEES IN LIBYA DEMAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND EVACUATIONS

The series of events to amplify the voices and demands from Refugees from Libya continued in the last months. On 18th and 19th of October in Berlin a panel and several workshops were co-organized together with the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR). Arranged by the "Convention on the Rights of the Mediterranean" another two day event took place on the 29th and 30th of November in the Sicilian city of Mazara del Vallo. Another public discussion happened on the 10th of December, the international day of human rights, by invitation of a mayor from Frankfurt/Main.

### The Berlin Event

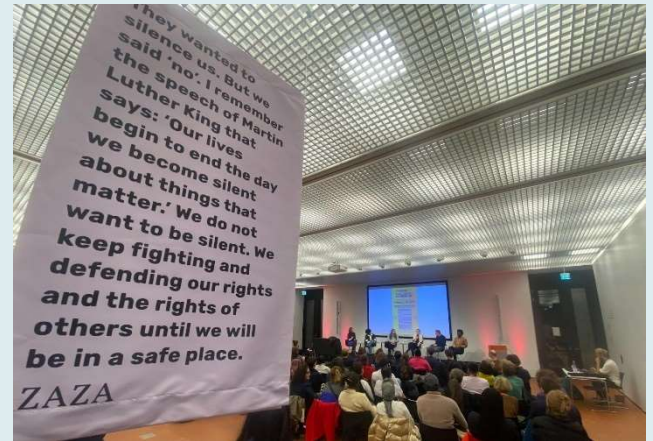
The event was split into two days: Friday's panel titled "Evacuation, not Externalisation! The Right to Move against an EU for the Few" and Saturday fully dedicated to three different workshops:

- Collective Hotline: Limits and perspectives of an indispensable tool;
- Accountability avenues and challenges for international crimes against people on the move in Libya;
- Fighting for Freedom of Movement: Connecting struggles and exchanging strategies.

Representatives from Refugees in Libya (RiL), from the Alliance with Refugees in Libya (ARiL), from ECCHR, a Member of the German Parliament, members from the Civil Fleet and from other organizations as well as individuals came together with the goal to cast light on the current situation of refugees and migrants in Libya and offer new solutions for evacuation mechanisms in Germany.

A centerpiece of the campaign is the **Mobile Exhibition**, which showcases written and video testimonies from detainees at Ain Zara and Human Rights Defenders in Libya. This powerful collection documents the repression faced by protesters and their ongoing struggle for their rights and for evacuations and it was also presented in the events in Mazara del Vallo and in Frankfurt.

A more detailed report on the Berlin event can be found here: <https://www.refugeesinlibya.org/post/from-tripoli-to-berlin>



*Refugees in Libya Event in Berlin, Credit: ARiL*

### The Mazara del Vallo Event

The Municipality of Mazara del Vallo has an ancient history of relationships and collaborations with the populations overlooking the common Mediterranean sea, which over the centuries have had relationships with the Mazara communities. The choice to hold the conference in this city, where the church bells echo and the muezzin's song at prayer time, was dictated precisely by the characteristics of Mazara. Its historic center has neighborhoods with names like Kasbah and Giudecca, which testify to its multi-cultural and multi-religious roots.

In the introduction session activists from RiL highlighted the living conditions of refugees in Libya, the violence they suffer daily and the risk of being arrested at any time or kidnapped by gangs of traffickers. The Evacuate Human Rights Defenders from Libya campaign aims to get as many people as possible out of Libya.

In the following round table session, a bishop, several Sicilian mayors and institutional actors as well as a member of European Parliament presented their approaches and forms of solidarity to support the right to move for people on the move.

On the second day several workshops took place with activists involved in civil sea rescue organizations, in

solidarity groups on land borders and in communication networks of migrant communities.

A detailed report can be found here:

<https://www.refugeesinlibya.org/post/from-tripoli-to-sicily-evacuate-human-rights-defenders-from-libya-mazara-del-vallo-29-30-november>

## The Frankfurt Event

The Green (Sub)Mayor from Frankfurt invited and introduced the event under the title “No Democracy Without Human Rights - Right to Flee, Sea Rescue, Admission from Libya”. The former Eintracht Frankfurt (football club) President gave the welcoming address in reference to international day of human rights. This was followed by a panel discussion with representatives of Refugees in Libya, Pro Asyl and Seebrücke Frankfurt. The background to the event is the intensified efforts of a new alliance for a Europe-wide reception campaign using the very specific example of human rights defenders in Libya. A corresponding working group has been formed in Frankfurt.

From their call: *“Frankfurt, the safe haven city, should take in 20 human rights defenders from Libya! The*

*city council declared Frankfurt a safe haven in September 2021 – an important sign of solidarity. However, this must also be followed by practical steps. We expect Frankfurt to declare its willingness to accept 20 human rights defenders from Libya. This would also be an important example for other cities to take action in the same way. Our goal is to get 10 more European cities to agree to take in human rights defenders. The demand for 221 evacuations concerns a manageable number of people, for whom a small new window for safe escape routes is to be opened. But it also sends a signal: there is no future without human rights and people are needed to stand up for them! Let's defend the open migration society! Let's support people on the move! Evacuate now !”*



**CONTACT - [evacuatenow ffm@gmx.net](mailto:evacuatenow ffm@gmx.net)**

*Refugees in Libya event in Mazara Credit: ARIL*



## A CARAVAN FOR MISSING PEOPLE IN SENEGAL



Every year, the association Boza Fii organized the third edition of the Caravan for the Missing. From November 1-10, 2024, Boza fii visited five destinations: Rufisque, Fass-Boye, Joal-Fadiouth, Kafountine and Ziguinchor. These cities were chosen because of the high level of tension surrounding the tragedies of migration.

The caravan team organized activities in each of the towns we visited. Upon arrival, we contacted associations, families, and city officials to discuss the Caravan for the Disappeared initiative.

This was followed by a visit to the families of the disappeared. Every night, film and video screenings are planned to show the murderous border policies, the cemeteries of the unknown, and the methods used to search for missing persons at the borders.

The goal of the Caravan for the Missing is to promote the right to identity and dignity for all victims of our borders.

### WEBSITE

<https://bozafii.org>

### VIDEO

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=3tercDaCIJs&si=R7P1sbNBtjNe1CeH>



## TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZING – LIMITS, CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

In November 2024 the website [trans-border.net](https://trans-border.net) published a talk between activists from Precarious Disconnection in Bologna/Italy – engaged in the platform for a Transnational Social Strike (TSS) – and from no one is illegal in Hanau/Germany – engaged in the transnational network Alarm Phone (AP).

Both groups move continuously in the perspectives of global social struggles with a strong connection to movements of migration. Both are convinced in transnational organizing to challenge and to try to overcome the system. The talk is structured around nine questions to reflect and rediscuss various experiences and perspectives. As a teaser we have reprinted here the first question and the two answers:

**QUESTION:** *You move continuously in transnational networks, both – TSS and AP – with a tradition of about 10 years. What is your best-case vision after another 10 years? Where do you want to be in 2034? With TSS in another level of simultaneous strikes? With AP in self-organised ferries against Frontex?*

**PRECARIOUS DISCONNECTIONS (P.D.):** *Ten years is a huge amount of time when considered in political terms. But then the question makes clear that ten years have already passed by since the beginning of the TSS initiative. So, the imagination of the future must confront the fact that the continuity of political initiative is a continuous challenge. It is hard to formulate an expectation when things around are changing so rapidly. Since the beginning, the aim of the TSS has been that of reading events that were as much important as unconnected – single strikes in the workplaces, like the struggle in the US fast food restaurants for a minimum wage, migrants' struggles, national protests like the one against the Loi travail in France – as parts of a transnational "strike movement." This attempt coincided, first, with a redefinition of the strike beyond the traditional idea of an interruption of production, often monopolized by unions.*

*As a social and transnational movement, the strike became for us also the name of a collective capacity to refuse the social and political conditions of*

exploitation. Consequently, the strike movement pointed to the necessity of realizing the political infrastructure, that is the organization, which is required to support and foster it beyond specific events.

Thus, if we are asked to imagine the future, we do not imagine so much a huge coordinated action, but rather the improvement and consolidation of an organization which allow us both to be ready for tackling rapid changes and turning them into opportunities, and to consolidate the subversive force of social movements which otherwise risk to dissolve when single mobilizations come to an end.

**NO ONE IS ILLEGAL/HANAU (NOII):** Yes, now in October 2024 Alarm Phone turned ten and it is still an incredible story. One example: When we started in October 2014, we did it mainly in reference to the situation in the central mediterranean. But we could not imagine in which way our hotline could also intervene in the Aegean Sea as it was dominated – already during this time – by permanent push backs through the Greek Coastguards.

But in 2015 the situation completely changed, and the movement of migration overrun sea- and land

borders, they opened step by step the Balkan route and it happened unexpectedly in what we call the summer of migration. Alarm Phone then received – in contact with Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan communities on the move – hundreds of calls and could support these autonomies of migration in its best way. What we want to say and what we learned again in 2015: the dynamics of social movements can challenge and change a seemingly “stable” repressive situation in a few weeks or months. From 2016 on up to today we had to follow a constant backlash with an unbearable “normalization” of death at sea and a brutalization of the pull- and pushback-regime. But we should never exclude counter developments happening again.

So our dream for 2034 is of course another and more long-term break through and against the EU border- and visa-regime – with “Ferries not Frontex” as a realized slogan to assert safe passages and to end the death at sea. At the same time, we know that this might only be possible as part of a wider cycle of struggles for global justice.

Full interview available on 3 languages (English, Italian, German):

<https://trans-border.net>



# MOBILISATIONS

## THE ITALY-ALBANIA PROTOCOL IS A FAILURE FROM EVERY PERSPECTIVE!

### THE MANIFEST OF NETWORK AGAINST MIGRANT DETENTION



Despite the decision of the Italian government to suspend the deportation of migrant people to Albania, we as **Network Against Migrant Detention** have decided to stick to our mobilization on December 1 and 2 in Tirana, as well as at the centers in Gjadër and Shëngjin, to express our dissent against the deportation system established by the Protocol. While this failure represents a temporary stalemate, we are well aware that the logic driving these policies is far from defeated.

Just weeks after the Protocol's implementation, the use of the hotspot and detention facilities in Albania has been suspended, at least until the European Court of Justice issues its rulings. The mechanism has stumbled over the definition of a "Safe Country of Origin" temporarily challenged by the October 4, 2024 ruling by the European Court of Justice. The ruling states that a country cannot be deemed safe unless it is so across its entire territory and for everyone. In practice, every case must be evaluated individually, and judges must consider whether the country in question is actually safe for the specific individual at the time of the decision. Thanks to this ruling, Italian judges have repeatedly disregarded the executive orders imposed by the Meloni government through emergency legislative decrees.

While this partial victory reflects a European legal framework that still withstands the harsh blows

inflicted by illiberal right-wing forces and governments of all political stripes, it has been achieved through struggles, above all those of migrant people themselves, affirming the right to asylum and freedom of movement. Therefore, we believe that relying solely on the judicial system is insufficient to halt these policies. The horizon towards which the Protocol is heading is the implementation of the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** planned for June 2026. This will introduce new criteria for defining safe countries of origin, broadening the scope for accelerated border procedures. At that point, the design of externalization embodied by the Italy-Albania Protocol might face no further obstacles and could serve as a model to be replicated in other EU Member States.

For this reason, over 200 activists from Italy, Albania, and Greece have gathered this weekend in Tirana, staging protests in front of the hotspot at port of Shëngjin, the detention center in Gjadër, the Albanian government headquarters, the Italian Embassy, and the European House.

Our goal is to lay the groundwork for a broad pan-european and transnational mobilization capable of opposing these policies in the long term.

**As members of the Network Against Migrant Detention, we demand:**

- The dismantling of Italian detention centers on Albanian territory, rejecting any repurposing for other forms of detention
- The abolition of any form of administrative detention for migrant people and asylum seekers.
- The abolition of the concept of a “Safe Country of Origin,” which serves only to restrict international protection.
- The withdrawal of Italian military forces from Albanian territory and their immediate return to Italy.
- The opening of safe, legal and accessible pathways, the right to mobility and self-determination for all migrant people, and the granting of the right to circulate freely, regardless of motivations and status recognition

**The Network Against Migrant Detention sets the following objectives:**

- To oppose the Meloni-Rama Protocol and the model it represents through various political tools, including information campaigns, public mobilizations, strategic litigation, and pressure involving opposition politicians from Italy and Europe, creating a broad, cross-sectoral, and interdisciplinary movement.

- To obstruct the construction of new detention and deportation centers and the strengthening of existing ones in Italy and Europe, promoting a counter-narrative to the populist rhetoric that exploits fear to justify militarized forms of security. This includes exposing the administrative detention industry, highlighting violations of fundamental rights within detention centers, and proposing a reception model centered on dignity, autonomy, and the development of migrant people’s life projects.
- To build a transnational and trans-European movement that establishes the struggle for universal freedom of movement as a fundamental condition for the radical democratization of this political space. This movement stands against both the rise of nationalist, illiberal conservatism in Europe and the neoliberal institution of the EU. Both in continuity with each other, reinforce violent systems of rejection and selection of migrant people.
- To forge connections beyond European territories with those opposing the EU’s border externalization policies, rejecting the neocolonial coercion imposed by agreements with third countries in exchange for European integration and economic support.

***Network Against Migrant Detention***

**WEBSITE** - <https://municipiozero.it/en/the-italy-albania-protocol-is-a-failure-from-every-perspective/>



# “FLOWS DECREE” APPROVED IN ITALIAN SENATE: PUNITIVE APPROACH TOWARDS DISTRESSED PEOPLE AND NGOs

## Joint Statement

**Civil society organizations engaged in search and rescue (SAR) activities in the central Mediterranean express strong concern over yet another attempt by the Italian government to punish assistance to people in distress at sea and to criminalize NGOs.**



*Picture: Wanda Proft / SOS Humanity*

“The real goal of the decree-law is not to better manage rescue operations at sea, but rather to hinder the presence and the actions of humanitarian NGOs by criminalizing their action. In this way, the Mediterranean will be emptied of search and rescue vessels.” It is with these words that organizations engaged in search and rescue activities comment on the approval in the Senate of Decree Law 145/2024, also known as the “flows decree”.

“This new set of rules entails more sanctions, both with administrative detentions and with fines of up to ten thousand euros, including the possibility of confiscation of rescue ships. In addition, the action of NGO planes engaged in monitoring is also targeted, even though they contributed crucially to the rescue of boats in distress and have documented serious and systematic human rights violations. These violations include omissions in rescue, unjustified delays in intervention, and the facilitation of forced refoulement as a result of violent interception. According to the signatory NGOs, this legislation aims at weakening the legal duty to report the presence of boats in distress. There is also concern that these legal measures are an attempt to eventually turn these same planes into tools at the service of the Libyan coast guard's maritime interception system.

“In addition to this, punitive measures for NGO SAR vessels foreseen in the Piantedosi Decree are being even more exacerbated. First, although the duration of the first administrative detention of the ship can now be modulated between 10 and 20 days depending on the severity of the violation, a ban on sailing is still prescribed pending the adoption of the prefectorial order. This, in effect, adds additional days of inactivity for the vessel, with no possibility of appealing. In addition, a reiteration of the violation that occurred up to the previous 5 years triggers the tightening of penalty measures, not only if the reiteration occurs by the same master, but also by the same shipowner.”

“This is a law that severely worsens the current situation: it has repeatedly happened that NGO vessels were detained based on false statements by the Libyan coast guard without even verifying all the records of conversations and exchanges of emails and radio messages carried by the NGOs themselves. Secondly, extending reiteration to the shipowner makes the effect of penalties more severe, because on NGO ships a master tends to change more often than the shipowner. Lastly, the decree shortens the time limits for appealing detentions imposed on NGO ships, which were established by the Piantedosi Decree.”

“Once again,” the signatory NGOs conclude, “it seems that the aim is to make life impossible for those who save lives and witness the violations of international law occurring daily in the Central Mediterranean. This is another harmful, propagandistic and inhumane law, as well as blatantly illegitimate. In fact, the government continues to try to circumvent International Law through ordinary laws, decrees, regulations and administrative practices, attempting to inflict in the short term the greatest possible harm on those crossing the sea and those it rescues. What we expect is an increase in deaths at sea but once again this decree will not stop the solidarity of those who, like us, really try to do something to mitigate the suffering of others.”

## SIGNATORIES

<https://searchandrescue.msf.org/news/flows-decree-approved-in-italian-senate-punitive-approach-towards-distressed-people-and-ngos.html>

# CALL FOR AFRICAN AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

## NO TO THE CRIMINALIZATION OF SOLIDARITY IN TUNISIA

## FREEDOM FOR ACTIVISTS DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



Since May 7, 2024, civic activists in Tunisia have been arrested and placed in pretrial detention. Their so-called crime? Engaging in lawful and transparent actions to assist migrants, often in direct collaboration with the state itself.

Tunisia has long been a crossroads of encounters and a haven of refuge. Yet today, this country of solidarity seems to be losing its way under the weight of multiple crises: geopolitical, economic, climatic, and social.

We, the #Peoples\_of\_the\_South, are subjected to the most insidious forms of domination. Our regimes, often complicit, contribute to the plundering of our resources, the sell-off of our common goods, the impoverishment of productive systems, and the perpetuation of unequal exchange mechanisms and wars that devastate our lands.

These historical injustices, combined with the global crises of capitalism and climate change, exacerbate the suffering of our populations. Deportations, forced displacements, and migration to the North—viewed as a threat by Northern powers—are the direct consequences of these destructive systems. These migrations are, in truth, acts of survival and freedom by oppressed peoples.

The sovereignty of peoples, inseparable from their freedom, is today trampled by these oppressive systems. Reclaiming this sovereignty means not only defending our right to control our territories but also

upholding the fundamental values of solidarity and hospitality that define our shared humanity.

In response, courageous Tunisian citizens have chosen solidarity over indifference. Yet today, their commitment is met with repression. These arrests aim not only to punish individuals but also to crush any movement of solidarity with vulnerable and mobile populations.

We call on African, Mediterranean, and global communities to mobilize and demand:

- The immediate and unconditional release of imprisoned activists;
- The recognition and protection of migrants' rights;
- The defense of peoples' sovereignty, as an essential condition for guaranteeing their freedom and dignity;
- A united struggle against systems of domination and exploitation, whether economic, environmental, or political.

Together, let us affirm our rejection of injustice and our commitment to human dignity. Let us raise our voices to ensure that solidarity -a universal value - is protected rather than punished. Join the campaign and share photos of the detained activists!

LINK - <https://ftdes.net/en/non-a-la-criminalisation-de-la-solidarite/>

18 December 2024



### CONTACTS

Website - <https://civilmrcc.eu/>  
Email - [political-moderator@civilmrcc.eu](mailto:political-moderator@civilmrcc.eu)  
Echoes - [civilmrcc.eu/echoes-from-the-central-mediterranean/](https://civilmrcc.eu/echoes-from-the-central-mediterranean/)

### EDITING TEAM

Sophie-Anne Bisiaux  
Hagen Kopp  
Ileana Maria