

borderline-europe, Sicily

SCIROCCO

News from Italy



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Schirokko] is a hot, strong south-easterly wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and northern Italy, often for just a few hours. This briefing note has been published regularly since March 2021 and is currently issued on a monthly basis.

Political and social situation

New security package: CPRs and hotspots are equated with prisons

The adoption of a [new security package](#) by the Meloni government is imminent. The new provisions will equate CPRs (Centri di Permanenza per i Rimpatri, deportation detention centers) and hotspots with prisons. In addition, the tightening and extension of certain penalties will mean that more people will be imprisoned, although prisons are already overcrowded due to the Italian government's repressive policies. Among other things, the new security package provides for the punishment of occupying buildings or blocking streets with one's 'own body' with prison sentences and the abolition of the mandatory postponement of sentences for the imprisonment of mothers or pregnant women. Begging - i.e. poverty - and even very minor violations of police officers will be punished more severely in future. Finally, Art. 415 of the Criminal Code will punish "passive resistance by arrestees or attempts to escape with a prison sentence of up to eight years. This [...] also applies to revolts in the CPRs and hotspots".

By equating CPRs and hotspots with regular detention centers, an image of refugees as criminals is created. Repression precedes the hearing of the individual right to protection, which was once the basis of the European asylum system and has been gradually dismantled in recent years: "In the face of events that are always classified as 'emergencies', the current [Italian] government has given a security and repressive response by issuing legislative decrees or bills that attempt to resolve perceived social insecurity by introducing numerous new criminal offenses and increasing the use of pre-trial detention. These are measures with a partly symbolic, partly strongly repressive effect, which mainly affect the most vulnerable groups [...] and which further exacerbate prison overcrowding and living conditions in prisons that are already below adequate standards," comments the [Antigone Association](#) on the situation in Italian prisons.



Photo: [LasciateCIEntrare](#)

"Milestones" of the repression

As milestones of the Meloni government's repressive measures, Antigone mentions the so-called "Rave Decree" (Legislative Decree no. 162/2022 of October 2022); the so-called "Cutro Decree" (Legislative Decree no. 20/2023 of March 2023 and later Law no. 50); the law on the prosecution of the crime of surrogacy committed by an Italian citizen abroad (July 2023); the so-called "Judicial Decree" (Legislative Decree no. 105/2023 of August 2023, later converted into Law no. 137/2023); the so-called "Caivano Decree" (Legislative Decree no. 123/2023 of September 2023, later converted into Law no. 159 /2023); Law No. 138/2023 (September 2023) and Law No. 90/2024 (June 2024). The Meloni government's new security package follows in this tradition. According to the Antigone Association, it aims to "criminalize all forms of dissent". The contents of the aforementioned legislative decrees can be read in detail [here](#).

Updates on the situation in the CPRs and hotspots

The catastrophic conditions in the CPRs and hotspots, which we regularly report on here, are also perpetuated by the provisions of the new security package - despite regular harsh criticism from non-governmental organizations and Italian politicians (see [previous issues](#) of this newsletter). [This article](#) describes the conditions in the deportation detention centers; for example, in **Ponte Galeria**, the **CPR in Rome**, there are suicide attempts every two

days. Unbearable heat, broken showers, the detention period extended to 18 months under the new laws, no psychological support and much more make the CPRs a living hell for those detained there. Civil society organizations also sharply criticize the conditions.

The hygienic and medical conditions in the CPRs are still unsustainable and are exacerbated by the summer heat. In response to these conditions, riots, suicide attempts and violence are on the rise. Given these circumstances, political calls for “more deportations” exacerbate the situation in the CPRs, from which around 25% of detained migrants are actually deported and 75% are detained in degrading conditions - despite the existence of readmission agreements with the relevant third countries, according to the Guarantor for the Rights of Detainees of Lazio, [Stefano Anastasia](#), in a report on 2023. According to the data processed by Anastasia, the number of detainees in Rome's Ponte Galeria CPR nevertheless increased by 60% last year. More than half of all those affected come from Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) and the number of Nigerian and Egyptian citizens is also high. Protests flare up time and again and are then broken up violently.

CPR Palazzo San Gervasio

Migrants set fire to the detention center of Palazzo San Gervasio (Basilicata) in protest against the death of a boy who was beaten and died there due to lack of care.

CPR Macomer (Sardinia)

Irene Testa, the guarantor for the rights of detainees, criticized that the conditions in the CPR Macomer in Sardinia are so dire that migrants would rather return to their countries of origin, where they are often exposed to violence and persecution. 49 innocent people are locked up there for 18 months in boiling cement blocks, without refrigerators or fans. They are forced to drink hot water in unbearable heat. There are no sponges to wash with or chairs to sit on, and the sheets are made of plastic-like material. “A shameful situation that is not worthy of a civilized country,” says Testa.



Foto: Hotspot Porto Empedocle, contrada Caos

Hotspot Porto Empedocle

The [Association for Legal Studies on Immigration \(ASGI\)](#) recently requested official information on the management of the new hotspot in Porto Empedocle, which is intended for the identification of migrants entering Italy for the first time. It was only in January 2024 that an agreement was signed between the Prefecture of Agrigento and the Italian Red Cross (CRI) on the management of the hotspot, which provides for the provision of reception, assistance and integration services for migrants in the hotspot. ASGI's request related in particular to the treatment of underage refugees. The Immigration Office in Agrigento replied that the procedures for identifying and legally determining migrants would be carried out by the Immigration Office and the criminal investigation department. Those affected are not allowed to move freely from the hotspot during the identification process, so they are effectively detained there.

Now, in addition to the hotspot built last year in the Caos district, further containers have been set up for a **test phase of accelerated border procedures** (in line with the European migration pact, GEAS). Similar to the center for accelerated border procedures set up in Pozzallo/Modica, up to 60 people are to be detained here after a test phase. The detention must be confirmed by the competent judges in Palermo. The center in Pozzallo/Modica had to close for the time being because various judges deemed it unlawful; the proceedings are still before the ECJ. It is therefore questionable how the

center in Porto Empedocle can function. Further information on Pozzallo/Modica can also be found in [our summary](#) of the current situation of refugees.



Foto: "reception-tent" at the port of Porto Empedocle

Investigation into the 'manslaughter' of a doctor in the Lampedusa hotspot has begun

On February 28, 2023, 26-year-old [Fatoumata Bamba](#) from the Ivory Coast died of a pulmonary embolism in Lampedusa - just a few hours after arriving on the island by boat with her husband and two children. Her death should have been prevented by the doctor at the Lampedusa ambulance. Because he acted negligently, the public prosecutor's office is now investigating manslaughter under deputy public prosecutor Gaspare Bentivegna. The first preliminary hearing will take place on September 18 before the presiding judge of the Agrigento court, Micaela Raimondo. "For five hours," according to the report by forensic pathologist Alberto Alongi, pathological anatomy specialist Emiliano Maresti and cardiology specialist Pietro Di Pasquale, 'the [attending] doctor limited himself to observing the patient [Fatoumata Bamba] without carrying out any kind of examination, not even the most essential measurements of vital signs or an objective examination, despite [...] an incipient pulmonary embolism'. The medical experts assume that different behavior on the part of the doctor would have prevented the death with a high degree of probability.

Trans-Mediterranean Forum: Relations between Italy and Libya

The [Trans-Mediterranean Forum on Migration](#) met in the Libyan capital Tripoli at the end of July. This event was presented as a success by the Italian authorities, but there can be little talk of progress. Many pointed to the absence of prominent figures such as General Khalifa Haftar, who controls part of Libya, numerous heads of government of European states, heads of European institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Mediterranean. Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi reiterated the need to "move from tactical cooperation between individual countries to a strategic regional approach", presenting this as a challenge that Italy could not tackle alone. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni also reiterated that "the Mediterranean is a priority. There is no Mediterranean without Italy and Libya together". According to Meloni, the states must therefore work together to combat human traffickers and increase legal 'migration flows', for example. She also made it clear that Italy would like to strengthen cooperation with Libya in the energy sector: the Italian company Eni manages the company Mellitah Oil&Gas, which mainly supplies Italy with gas, in a joint venture with the Libyan National Oil Company. Sea-Watch e.V. criticized the Italian government's migration policy as "dystopian" and expressed its disappointment about the cooperation between Italian politicians and the Prime Minister of Western Libya, Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah. Representatives from Chad and Tunisia have repeatedly come close to physical confrontations due to the serious human rights violations against racialized migrants from sub-Saharan countries residing in Tunisia. In Tunisia, attacks on migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have increased after Tunisian President Kais Saied spoke of an "ethnic displacement" of Tunisians by people from sub-Saharan Africa. The meeting took place in camera. [This article](#), which is well worth reading, puts the geopolitical debate at the Libyan meeting into context.



Foto: Entrance to Gjadër, Meltingpot

Update: Bilateral agreement on migration control between Italy and Albania

The opening of the [hotspot and \(detention\) centers in Albania](#) managed by Italy has been postponed again. For legal and logistical reasons, it is currently not possible to open the centers. As part of a bilateral agreement between Italy and Albania, the extra-territorial centers are intended to prevent the movement of migration to Italy and asylum procedures are to be carried out in border states outside the European Union. People who have been rescued or intercepted at sea by Italian government vessels are to be accommodated there. This approach is legally controversial, as the Council of Europe and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for example, have pointed out (see [previous issues](#) of this newsletter).

The head of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office, [Eve Geddie](#), also emphasized the dangerous and unlawful nature of these centers: "The new rules subject people in distress at sea to long and unnecessary journeys, in flagrant violation of Italy's obligation under international law to ensure the swift disembarkation of survivors to a place of safety." She goes on to say that "[arriving] people are automatically and arbitrarily detained in Albania, which can lead to prolonged detention. Under the agreement between Italy and Albania, migrants remain under Italian jurisdiction, but there is a risk that their right to apply for political asylum will

be severely restricted." For Amnesty International, these centers represent the latest attempt by an EU country to circumvent its obligations under EU and international law by favoring the practice of 'outsourcing' the processing of people's applications for protection outside its territory. Thus, all this should take place as unobserved as possible, even if the [UNHCR has now allowed itself to be involved as a monitoring institution](#) in the more than inhumane business of the Italian government.

Anti-democracy: threats to press freedom, populism and the abolition of the criminal offense of abuse of office

Journalist and writer [Roberto Saviano](#) commented on Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's attitude towards journalists. "Our democracy is under attack, but not just since today. Today we are paying for the cowardice of center-left politics on crucial issues concerning labor, prison and immigration. If reporting on criminal dynamics means criticizing Italy, then I have to assume that for certain politicians, our country and the mafia [...] are the same thing". According to Saviano, Meloni is not attacking journalists in principle, but is specifically targeting those who report independently and do not allow themselves to be dictated to by the government. He criticizes Meloni for trying to undermine the freedom of the press and only accepting reporting that is in line with the government. This is followed by an analysis of the online contributions by Matteo Salvini (Lega) and Matteo Piantedosi (independent, but close to Salvini). [Valigia Blu](#) examined how the two right-wing politicians spread populist statements in different ways in order to spread hatred against refugees and activists on social media.

In democratic states, the **criminal offense of abuse of office** is a central control mechanism against arbitrariness and the abuse of power by elected officials. This has now been abolished in Italy - a move that evokes memories of the fascist era and highlights the current government's hostility towards democracy. Immediately after the fall of fascism, it was reintroduced into the constitution as one of the first reforms deemed urgently necessary. "The reasons were clear at the time," said the public prosecutor of Perugia, [Raffaele Cantone](#), in September 2023, when he was summoned before

the Justice Committee to give his opinion on the draft law requested by Justice Minister Carlo Nordio. "In a democracy, it is unacceptable that an elected representative can exceed their powers, just as it is unacceptable that serious crimes such as resistance and violence against an elected representative go unpunished." With the decision to now constitutionally abolish abuse of office, "Italy has decided to be the only legally progressive democracy that does not have a specific criminal offense that punishes a public official who deliberately obtains an advantage for themselves or others," commented Giuliano Foschini from La Repubblica.

Situation of refugees

Refugees in Tunisia

In a survey of 379 refugees from 23 different African countries and with various educational qualifications, the [Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights \(Ftdes\)](#) found that almost 80% of the migrants surveyed dream of a life in Italy. Many of them had already tried to reach Italy several times and/or knew of people who had died during the dangerous crossing. However, as there are no prospects in Tunisia for the people interviewed, they will attempt the arduous journey (again), according to the non-governmental organization. More than half of those interviewed live in precarious and undignified conditions such as on the streets, in parks or in tents in the open air. After arriving in Tunisia, 77% of those seeking protection stated that they had been victims of one or more forms of violence.



Tents of refugees in the Tunesian desert

Five key questions were analyzed during the study period from March to May 2024: Routes and conditions of arrival, conditions of stay in Tunisia,

access to fundamental rights, social relations and interactions with institutions, public bodies and civil society actors. According to the survey, repressive regimes and climate change are the main reasons for the decision to leave the country.

New report on the number of unreported fatal shipwrecks in the Mediterranean

In the new [report "Ghost shipwrecks on the shoulders of family members"](#), Memoria Mediterranea looks at the so-called "ghost shipwrecks" in the Mediterranean. Memoria Mediterranea is a support network for relatives of people who have drowned while fleeing to Europe. "There is a part of migration across the Mediterranean that is invisible", says the network, 'the so-called 'ghost shipwrecks', about which nothing is known and almost no official data is recorded". This refers to shipwrecks that are neither registered nor investigated, which means that many deaths at sea go unnoticed. The new report, which covers the years [2022 to 2023](#), criticizes the lack of documentation and the authorities' lack of interest in these tragedies. It calls for more attention and measures to prevent these invisible disasters and pay tribute to the victims. Requests for help, reports of disappearances and complaints from families are often not followed by concrete search actions, so that Memoria Mediterranea speaks of "serious failures at national and international level with regard to the right to truth and the search for missing persons". Together with the families of missing persons, the network is reconstructing dozens of stories of refugees that would otherwise go unmentioned. "In fact, most of the bodies of migrants who have died in recent years have never been recovered or identified," denounces Memoria Mediterranea. When the bodies are pulled from the sea, they are often buried in anonymous graves. A practice that violates international principles, as the authorities are obliged to clarify the causes of death of the deceased and to compile reports with reconstructive information. International humanitarian law also provides for the dignified treatment of bodies, the search and recovery of victims, the return of mortal remains to families and the burial of bodies. The families of the missing are the first victims to suffer from the violence of migration policy: Not only would they have to

accept the loss of their loved ones, but they would also be denied the right to know what happened to their sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and grandchildren. Furthermore, they are neither represented nor heard in the debate on how to deal with the disappearance and death of relatives, the report states. This approach denies them the right to psychosocial suffering: "A death," the network emphasizes, "can be dealt with more easily through grief, but with missing persons there is an ambiguity of grief that does not allow the loss to be overcome."

Further information on the situation in Italy can be found under "Projects" on our [homepage](#), in previous issues of [Scirocco](#) and in our [spotlight "Cosmos Palermo"](#).

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