INDEX

FROM TRIPOLI TO ROME

THE STRUGGLE OF ALLIANCE WITH REFUGEES IN LIBYA

From the Refugees in Libya protest in front of the UNHCR offices in Tripoli to the Ain Zara lager, from Geneva to Brussels via Bologna: the fight of Alliance with Refugees in Libya for the evacuation and the reception of the Human Rights Defenders does not stop and arrives in Rome.

SUMMARY OF THE EVENT IN ROME | 31 MAY - 1 JUNE 2024

The two-day event in Rome was a (successful) follow-up to the inaugural event in Bologna last January.

With the presence of 7 of the 14 human rights defenders evacuated from Libya to Italy on 7 May, Refugees in Libya brought together, around a discussion table, the actors involved in the evacuation process devised by Daniela Pompei of the Community of Sant'Egidio, as well as the institutions capable of implementing it by imagining and building new safe passages, and, last but not least, activists from all over Europe who, thanks to Alliance with Refugees in Libya, amplify the voices of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.

THE FIRST DAY

The first day of the event was hosted by the Pontifical Gregorian University and introduced by Vice-Rector Di Luccio, who described the initiative as one of the decisive steps towards pursuing a "culture of welcome". After that, it was the turn of David Yambio, spokesperson for Refugees in Libya, who individually welcomed the seven people who arrived in Italy on the last evacuation flight from Tripoli and recalled the importan-

ce of recognising the protesters as defenders of human rights, not only for the sake of justice, but also to set a precedent for those still stuck in Libya. "We are here to celebrate our courage, because what we have done is underestimated. This is not something done by a community of privileged people but by people who have had to endure inhuman circumstances. It has become bigger than we ever expected", added Naeima Hussein, second spokesperson, recalling the 100 days of protest in front of UNHCR Libya. The last speech of the introductory part was given by Tiziano Schiena (Alliance with Refugees in Libya) who reviewed the four years of work on the European side of the Mediterranean, made possible by the inspiring acts of resistance of more than 5000 people in front of the Tripoli offices, both before and after the violent evictions put in place by the Libyan militias.

THE FIRST ROUND TABLE

The first Round Table "Humanitarian Corridors: from evacuation to reception" was moderated by Alice Basiglini (Alliance with Refugees in Libya) who stressed the need for cooperation across all actors involved in building and maintaining humanitarian corridors. Luca di Sciullo (Idos) presented the 2023 annual report, which clearly showed a positive impact of migration in terms of economic income, it was in fact estimated that people on the move in Italy had a positive balance of around 6.5 billion euros.

Similarly, Barbara Funari (Councillor for Social Policies of Roma Capitale), Gianluca Bogino (Municipality II) and Maria Romano (Municipality III) promised the support of Roman institutions in facilitating bureaucratic procedures in the reception system, promising to leave a door open for our future requests.

Finally, Valeria Guterrez (Community of St. Egidio) reported the opening of new humanitarian corridors in Lebanon for Syrian war refugees and described the particularly difficult situation for setting up humanitarian corridors from Libya to Italy, due to the political and social chaos in Libya and the lack of will of the various successive Italian governments. Valentina Itri (Arci) and Giulia Gori (Federation of Evangelical Churches) expressed concern about the inadequacy of reception sites. Lorenzo Leotardi (UNHCR Italy) defended the role of the UN agency, emphasizing its dependence on the will of each individual state. David Yambio asked to speak: "Can we, refugees in Libya or people on the move, be recognised as entities and get involved in collaborations and participate in the discussions with the institutions? Is it possible to be part of the tables that decide our lives?".

THE SECOND ROUND TABLE

Edgardo Maria Iozia (Alliance with Refugees in Libya) moderated the second Round Table 'Safe Passages: Imagining New Access Routes' whose objective was to provide alternative ways of evacuation and future integration into the job market.

Initially, trade association representatives Andrea Tondo (Confartigianato) and Valentina Fabbri (Confcooperative) emphasized the job shortage in their respective sectors and how migration could be the ultimate solution in this context.

Trade union representative Diana Agostinello (CGIL) offered her support for the initiative and reiterated the importance of defending workers' rights.

Professors and researchers from the Universities Enrica Rigo (Roma 3), Jacopo Anderlini (Parma), Paolo Iafrate (Tor Vergata),

Danilo Turco (Pontificia Gregoriana) proposed new agreements on study visas and tried to formulate new legal frameworks.

MAY 1st

The first panel on May 1st, 'Border Outsourcing and Border Screening: The Consequences of the Migration Pact', featured guests from various universities and associations: La Sapienza, L'Orientale in Naples, and the Sciabaca & Oruka project (ASGI). The basic rules of the new European Migration Pact and their worrying implications were discussed: the new migration agreements concluded by the EU with several southern Mediterranean states and the constant disregard of human rights for non-European people has led to some counter-reactions from the civil society. This is why David Yambio and his fellow activists proposed 'The Campaign for a New EU Pact: A Pact Against Discrimination and Structural Racism in Europe', an international grassroots initiative that can already count for quite a lot of support in Italy and abroad.

The second workshop of the day "Activist Communication and the Bias of Social Platforms" was dedicated to the dangers of social media platforms for political activists and especially for people on the move. The limitations of using undemocratic web tools where a constantly changing algorithm can decide on the visibility of a message must be overcome with self-produced tools. "The criminalisation of migration and solidarity" was the title of the last workshop. The worrying war against migrants and humanitarian activists brought the discussion mainly towards how to continue the campaign and focused on the need to develop new strategies for the future: creating new media material as a counter-narrative to the insurgency of radical right-wing move-ments growing stronger in Europe - with video testimonies, reports, documentation work and documentaries to be screened throughout the EU.

REFUGEES IN LIBYA IN ITALY

After the Saturday workshops, a special session was dedicated to the formal definition of Refugees in Libya (RiL) as an Association in Italy, almost a year after RiL began to become a reality in Europe. The statute was discussed again adding the final changes, and the f board members were elected.

THE MOBILE EXHIBITION

The entire event was accompanied by the Mobile Exhibition, a collection of written and video testimonies of the detainees of Ain Zara and the Human Rights Defenders in Libya, telling of the repression that protesters in Libya continue to face and of the struggle for humane treatment.

This exhibition was conceived as a "traveling exhibition", a live proof of the stories and traumatic experiences of human rights defenders who are supposed to reach places they themselves cannot reach in person. It has already been presented at a political event in Frankfurt and will continue to travel through various cities to promote the evacuation campaign and raise awareness about human rights violations in Libya.

PORTUGAL'S NEW MIGRATION PLAN

Portugal's new center-right government, which has been in office for only two months, is greatly restricting the possibilities for people to move within the country, confirming the dismal European trend in migration policies. In all likelihood, in the coming years the government will only lead to further obstacles and closures.

FROM 'DOORS WIDE OPEN' TO 'DOORS CLOSED'

Following a sad restrictive trend against people on the move across Europe, the new center-right government in Portugal has promised radical changes in the migration policies.

The executive of Prime Minister Luis Montenegro, who took office on April 2nd, recently announced a new migration plan, which aims at restricting the existing immigration policies of the country, considered one of the most liberal and welcoming in Europe and described in this context by the Prime Minister as the 'wide-open-door' policy.

In particular, the 'expression of interest' mechanism included in the Portuguese visa rules has been removed: this system allowed foreigners to enter Portugal and subsequently apply for a residence permit by presenting an employment contract or a promise of an employment, thus allowing them to come to the country even without a contract. With the government's new rules, one will need to already have a regular contract of employment before moving, with the exception of people moving from Lusophone countries, students and highly qualified workers, who will be able to benefit from special conditions. It will therefore no longer be possible to regularize cases in which one enters the country with a tourist visa and after obtains a contract of employment.

The new law of the Government of Montenegro foresees other actions affecting the migration policies, such as the strengthening of collaborations with NGOs in order to increase the number of places available in reception centers for refugees and asylum seekers, including the creation of new municipal centers in Lisbon and Porto. But also the creation of a task-force to reduce illegal immigration and work exploitation, but also more efficient repatriation processes, the widening of access to public services for pregnant women, the re-establishment of migration observatories, and a re-examination of the current language controls for those applying for Portuguese nationality, with the intention of making them more stringent.

The government's stated aim is to limit the number of new arrivals in Portugal, in the wake of those who claim that the system in place until now has caused the country's housing crisis and led to the reception of thousands of people without filters or restrictions. The country's foreign population has doubled in the last five years and, according to government figures, arrivals from abroad account for one million people, a number equal to about one tenth of the country's total population. The migratory pressure is also increasing in terms of regularization applications: while 180,000 people were regularized last year, there are still 400,000 pending applications, which the government intends to tackle by promising, at the time of the European election campaign, new resources for personnel and a special task force.

Opponents and civil society associations, on the other hand, brought attention to the negative consequences of the government's recent moves. The system in place until a few weeks ago allowed more people to be brought out of the irregular economy, making them contribute to the tax system from the outset by being integrated into the legal economy.

Indeed, 14% of taxpayers are of immigrant origin and the contribution of this part of the population is estimated to be around €1.6 billion in 2022 alone, compared to only €257 million received in social benefits. Once again, therefore, it is the immigrant population that contributes to the social security of the country of arrival, getting in return increasingly controlling and closed policies.

The new government, in office for only two months, has already greatly restricted the possibilities for people moving to Portugal and, in all likelihood, the coming years can only lead to further obstacles and closures.

THE NEW MIGRATION AND ASYLUM PACT

EUROPE AND THE OVERCOMING OF THE 'DUBLIN SYSTEM'

On 10 April 2024, the Parliament approved a reform of the European legislation on migration and asylum policies, leading to a final Pact that has been under discussion for four years and which member states would need to incorporate into their national legislation within two years.

STRENGTHENING NEO-COLONIAL MANAGEMENT OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE TOWARDS THE EU

On 10 April 2024, the Parliament approved the reform of the European legislation on migration and asylum policies, leading to a final Pact that has been under discussion for four years and which member states would need to incorporate into their national legislation within two years.

In the intentions of the EU Commission, one of the objectives of the reform was to overcome the Dublin system, which was conceived back in the 1990s. This treaty stipulates that the first country in which the migrant arrives, needs to take care of the entire asylum procedure.

The Dublin Regulation (I, II, III) has undergone various additions and amendments over the years, but the attribution of responsibility for the migrant's entry will remain unchanged: the countries of arrival are the ones designated to deal with the non-EU citizen's procedure (registration, reception and asylum request, possible return).

In 2015, the voluntary and non-compulsory nature of relocations was confirmed: Member States are not obliged to share equally the responsibilities and burdens related to reception management, which fall mainly on Italy, Spain, Malta and Greece as countries of arrival.

In 2020, the new Pact on Migration and Asylum was finally drafted and approved by the Parliament this April.

This document consists of five parts:

identification at the border and the asylum application process,

digitisation of sensitive data,

introduction of the concept of 'pretence of non-entry',

reinforcement of returns and solidarity between member states, exceptional provisions during periods of high migratory pressure.

IDENTIFICATION AND SCREENING

Migration has always been a reality for Europe and always will be, over the centuries it has defined our societies, enriched our cultures and shaped many of our lives
(Ursula Von Der Leyen, 2020)

The first part of the pact defines uniform rules on the identification of third-country citizens upon arrival, thereby increasing security within the Schengen area.

Persons at the border will therefore have to be detained in hotspots for identification and screening procedures involving the collection of sensitive data such as: fingerprints and facial scans,

health check-ups, security checks. This applies to all persons aged 6 years and over.

The procedure can last up to seven days, under administrative detention. This is the EU blackmailing migrants, who are not allowed to refuse. No additional specialized officers are foreseen to explain this procedure through linguistic-cultural mediation.

DIGITISATION AND CONTROL

The changes affecting immigration administrations are part of a broader process that aims to make control policy an instrument of state modernisation

(Spire, 2008)

The EURODAC (European dactyloscopie) tool, a digital archive with all the biometric data of the applicants, would involve the 'screening' of anyone suspected of being an undocumented migrant. This could have a broad and indiscriminate impact on racialised communities already subjected to profiling on the basis of physical characteristics, as reported by ASGI.

Indeed, the facial recognition algorithms used by law enforcement agencies now appear to be unreliable tools, especially when it comes to recognising non-white people; migrants become bodies on which to test technological advances in screening.

ASYLUM APPLICATION PROCESS

The States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin
(Geneva Refugee Convention, 1951).

The asylum application system, according to the provisions of the Pact, shall take place in the first instance at the border, prior to entry into the country of arrival. This procedure is justified with the need to speed up the procedures for recognising political asylum and at the same time to prevent faster access for those who have little chance of successfully completing the legal process.

While it is true that the asylum recognition procedure for asylum seekers has taken far too long in recent years, the shortening of the process by an initial screening at the border represents a high risk of human rights violations.

Indeed, the policy paper states: 'Asylum applications with a low probability of being accepted should be processed quickly without requiring legal entry into the territory of the Member State. This procedure would be applied to applications from applicants who attempt to deceive the authorities, applicants from countries with low recognition rates who are unlikely to be in need of protection, or applicants who pose a threat to national security'.

The foreign minors are not exempt from these provisions. Instead of jointly assessing the personal history of the applicant and the socio-political events within the country of origin, those who come from a state with an asylum recognition rate of less than twenty percent will be precluded from embarking on an integration path in the EU.

The procedure will take a maximum of 12 weeks.

A further development is the delocalisation of border areas, through the creation of hotspots outside national borders, as in the case of the Italian centres in Albania - not yet operational.

It should also not be forgotten that Italy has recently updated its list of safe countries and therefore provides for accelerated default procedures for people from Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Colombia, Ivory Coast, Egypt, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Morocco, Montenegro, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Serbia, Sri Lanka, and Tunisia.

LEGAL FICTION OF NON-ENTRY

Once their undesirability is established, the state governs them by means of strict border controls, which are followed by detention and forced deportation. In doing so, the state imprints the border on the migrants' very bodies.

(Wilson, Weber 2008)

The concept of 'legal function of non-entry' is introduced, i.e.: the waiting zone extends beyond its physical dimension and as long as the foreigner has not passed the first stage of the application process, he/she is legally still considered to be at the border.

This translates to the applicant's inability to have free legal aid for administrative paperwork, to the shortening of time for appeal in case of a first denial.

The protection of people with special conditions of vulnerability is not really taken into consideration, and the carelessness with which applications will be screened according to provisions of the Pact endangers the safety of non-EU citizens.

'SOLIDARITY' BETWEEN MEMBER STATES AND STATE OF CRISIS.

The double message that Fortress Europe conveys (....) is 'I saved you, I gave you life, now however I take it back: your body escaped death (...) I will be the one to handle it'

(Sword, Valentine. 2008)

No real division of responsibilities within EU countries is established.

Member states will be able to choose whether to:

accept a certain number of migrants

send personnel or tools

Pay a 20,000 euro fee for each applicant they refuse to accept

In situations of exceptional pressure on the reception system, the state in question can request the Commission to declare a state of crisis, which includes support from member states, exceptions to procedures at the border, with the possibility of taking emergency measures including rescues at sea 'against hostile non-state actors' (read: NGOs).

RELOCATION AND REPATRIATION

This pact kills. Don't vote!

(Activists in Parliament in Brussels on the day the pact was signed, 2024)

There is a lack of bilateral or international agreements with most of the migrants' countries of origin, which as of today are signed by Italy only with the following countries: Nigeria, Gambia, Ivory Coast and Senegal (ASGI data).

In the absence of agreements with the countries of origin, expulsions will take place to the countries of departure. Already in place are Italian agreements with Tunisia, Turkey and Libya.

IN CONCLUSION.

These reforms undermine human dignity and contribute to the dehumanization of migrants, as it has been carried out for years by the media and large parts of politics. Many associations, including Mediterranea, have joined together to lobby against Parliament to reevaluate the criminal provisions of the pact.

MSH MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS

WORLD

TUNISIA, May 3. The protesters in front of the UNHCR office in Tunis were attacked by the police. Hundreds of movers demanding evacuation from Tunisia were deported to desert areas on the border with Algeria and Libya.

LIBYA-TUNISIA, May 4 Footage published by Refugees in Libya proves that there is an agreement between Libyan and Tunisian authorities to deport people on the move captured in Tunisia to Libya.

MAURITANIA, May 9. Mauritanian authorities intercepted 120 people on a boat that departed Senegal for the Canary Islands. Two lifeless bodies and one unconscious person were found on board.

NIGER, May 9-12. Five people died while being deported from Algeria to Niger. Their bodies were found by the Alarme Phone Sahara activists at Point Zero, 15 km from Assamaka, near the border. In the following days, following the deportation, 3 more people died at the Assamaka medical center.

LIBYA, May 15. The International Court of Justice has delivered to the UN Security Council a report on the situation in Libya, heralding new international arrest warrants against a number of Libyan citizens, whose names have not been revealed for now, and a request to open an office in Tripoli to make the Court's action more effective.

ETHIOPIA, May 28. 6,000 Sudanese refugees have fled Olala camp, Ethiopia, to the city of Gondar. Ethiopian authorities intercepted and imprisoned the people in the forest near the camp, where living conditions for the refugees are inhumane due to the absence of even the basic necessities.

UNITED KINGDOM, May 2. In London's Peckham district, hundreds of protesters blocked the transfer of some people moving to Bibby Stockholm, better known as the floating prison, from which they would be deported to Rwanda. Police at the end of the demonstration made 45 arrests.

SPAIN, May 10. A lifeless body was found aboard a boat off Gran Canaria, along the Atlantic Route. 170 people were rescued and transferred to Arguineguin, where they received some basic medical assistance.

EUROPEAN UNION, May 16 Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania have signed a letter addressed to the European Commission calling for the construction of new hubs outside the European Union where people awaiting repatriation can be detained.

THE NETHERLANDS, May 16.

The 4 parties forming the majority in the new right-wing Dutch government signed a joint statement saying that the Netherlands intends to "deport people without valid residence permits as much as possible, even using force."

SPAIN, May 20 The Spanish Coast Guard rescued more than 100 people on a boat in distress off Gran Canaria, the archipelago's largest island, along the Atlantic Route.

GREECE, May 21. The Kalamata Court acquitted of all charges the Pylos 9, the people who survived the Pylos shipwreck and were accused of causing the deaths of more than 650 people as human traffickers. However, Greek police have ordered their administrative detention: still 4 of the Pylos 9 are detained in Greek prisons.

SERBIA, May 30. Serbia and Frontex renewed and strengthened their border control cooperation agreement despite the fact that Serbian authorities have repeatedly engaged in human rights violations against people moving along the Balkan Route.

MALTA, May 30 The Malta court has deliberated that the trial against the El Hiblu 3, the people on the move who foiled the push backs of hundreds of people to Libya by the Maltese authorities, will continue despite the fact that the charges against them are clearly false.

EUROPEAN UNION, May 31 A Sudanese refugee, supported by Front-Lex and Refugees in Libya, brought Frontex before the European Court of Human Rights on charges of complicity in crimes against humanity.

NIMOS, May 1. 10 people arrived independently at Nimos, Greece. Greek authorities rescued them and transferred them to the larger island of Symi.

CIVIL FLEET, May 1. Geo Barents (Doctors Without Borders) rescued 52 people on a boat in distress and disembarked them in Bari, a port assigned by Italian authorities.

CRETE, May 1. 45 people who left Libya were rescued off Crete by a merchant ship, which landed them on the island.

LESBO, May 2. A boat carrying 18 people was violently attacked, intercepted near Lesvos and pushed back into Turkish waters. The people disembarked in Ayvalik, Turkey.

CIVIL FLEET, May 3. Life Support (Emergency) rescued 87 people aboard a boat in distress and landed them in the distant port of Naples, assigned by Italian authorities.

FARMAKONISI, May 3 19 people who arrived independently at Farmakonisi were rescued by Greek authorities and transferred to the island of Leros.

CIVIL FLEET, May 3. Nadir (ResQShip) assisted 41 people on a boat in distress that set sail from Sfax, Tunisia, until the Italian Coast Guard arrived to rescue them.

KORBA, May 4. Twenty-three people died in the sinking of a boat that set sail from Korba, Tunisia. Tunisian authorities arrested five people and they are still searching for two other people accused of "criminal conspiracy" and "aiding and abetting illegal immigration."

CIVIL FLEET, May 4

Nadir assisted 40 people on a boat with a broken-down engine off Lampedusa until the arrival of the Italian Coast Guard, which rescued them and landed them on the island.

CIVIL FLEET, May 5.

Maldusa rescued 20 people on a boat in distress that had set sail from Tunisia after a Colibri (Pilotes Volontaires) aircraft warning. The Italian Coast Guard transshipped and disembarked them in Lampedusa.

PANTELLERIA, May 5-6.

80 people landed independently on the island of Pantelleria in a few days. Italian authorities transferred them to Trapani.

LAMPEDUSA, May 7.

One person died in a shipwreck south of Lampedusa. The 50 survivors were rescued by Nadir, which reached the boat in distress thanks to an Alarm Phone warning.

GAVDOS, May 8

The Greek Coast Guard rescued 47 people on a boat in distress off Gavdos, an island south of Crete.

AUGUSTA, May 8.

32 people who set sail from Libya on a boat adrift southeast of Sicily were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard and landed in the port of Augusta.

NIMOS, May 10.

19 people who arrived independently on the island of Nimos were rescued by Greek authorities and transferred to Symi.

TILOS, May 10.

One person was found lifeless on the island of Tilos after making the Aegean crossing. The 25 survivors were rescueðə by Rhodes authorities.

CIVIL FLEET, May 13.

Geo Barents rescued 43 people who had set sail from Libya on a boat in distress. Italian authorities assigned Civitavecchia as the port of disembarkation despite it being nearly 1,000 km from the rescue site.

CRETE, May 13.

A boat capsized 50 km from Crete, causing at least 3 people to go missing in the wreck. The Greek Coast Guard rescued 42 survivors.

CIVIL FLEET, May 14

Reporting from Seabird aircraft (Sea-Watch) and Alarm Phone, Aurora (Sea-Watch) assisted 2 boats with 51 people on board until the Italian Coast Guard arrived.

LAMPEDUSA, May 14.

The Italian Coast Guard rescued a boat in distress south of Lampedusa with 50 people on board and landed them on the island.

CIVIL FLEET, May 15

Reporting from Alarm Phone, Nadir rescued 33 people aboard a drifting boat and landed them in Lampedusa.

CIVIL FLEET, May 15

Nadir assisted 22 people aboard a boat in distress south of Lampedusa until the Italian Coast Guard arrived.

SIMY, May 16.

18 people who arrived independently on the island of Symi were rescued by the Greek Coast Guard.

LAMPEDUSA, May 16.

56 people who set sail from Libya aboard a boat nearly out of fuel were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard and landed on Lampedusa.

CIVIL FLEET, May 16

Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) rescued 28 people on an overcrowded boat thanks to an Alarm Phone warning and disembarked them in Marina di Carrara, a port assigned by Italian authorities more than 1,000 km away from the rescue site.

CIVIL FLEET, May 17.

SOS Humanity rescued 70 people on a boat in distress that set sail from Libya and landed them in Marina di Carrara, a port assigned by Italian authorities.

KALOLIMNOS, May 17.

38 people arrived independently on the island of Kalolimnos and were rescued by the Greek Coast Guard.

CRETE, May 18.

32 people on a boat with a broken-down engine were rescued by the Greek Coast Guard off Crete.

PORT SAID, May 18

21 people who had set sail from Libya on an endangered vessel were intercepted south of Crete by the merchant ship Athens Voyager, which landed them at Port Said, Egypt, on orders of the Greek Coast Guard.

SYMI, May 19.

3 people who arrived independently on the island of Symi injured themselves by slipping on rocks. Greek authorities rescued them and provided basic medical assistance.

AGATHONISI, May 19.

18 people who arrived independently on Agathonisi were rescued by Greek authorities and transferred to Samos.

CRETE, May 20.

33 people on a boat with a broken-down engine were rescued by Greek authorities southwest of Crete.

KALYMNOS, May 20.

The Greek Coast Guard turned back to Turkey two boats intercepted off the island of Kalymnos.

CIVIL FLEET, May 20

Thanks to an Alarm Phone warning, Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) rescued 35 people on a boat in distress and disembarked them in the port of Ortona, assigned by authorities despite being more than 2 days away.

CIVIL FLEET, May 21

Mare*Go assisted a boat carrying 52 people until Sea-Eye 4 arrived and rescued them. Italian authorities assigned the distant port of Ravenna 5 days away, despite the fact that there were people on board in poor physical condition.

CRETE, May 23.

Thirty-nine people on a boat in distress south of Crete were rescued by the merchant ship Juliet, but during operations one person died. After a long wait, the Greek Coast Guard took the rescued people on board and disembarked them in Crete.

SYMI, May 23.

20 people who arrived independently in Symi were rescued by Greek authorities, who provided basic medical assistance.

ALBORÁN, May 23.

After a week of waiting, 54 people who arrived independently on the island of Alborán were rescued by Spanish authorities and transferred to Motril.

CIVIL FLEET, May 24.

Reporting from Alarm Phone, Nadir rescued 42 people on a boat in distress and landed them in Lampedusa.

NIMOS, May 24.

Five people who arrived independently on the island of Symi were rescued by the Greek Coast Guard.

CIVIL FLEET, May 27-28.

The Ocean Viking rescued 67 people from two boats in distress, the second reported by Alarm Phone. The port of disembarkation assigned by Italian authorities is Ancona, 3 days at sea.

NIMOS, May 29.

The Greek Coast Guard rescued 10 people who arrived independently on the island of Symi.

CIVIL FLEET, May 30.

Sea Punk 1 (Sea-Punks) rescued 146 people who had set sail from Sabrata, Libya, on a boat in distress and landed them in Lampedusa.

CIVIL FLEET, May 31.

Geo Barents rescued 84 people on 2 boats in distress that set sail from Libya and landed them in the port of Salerno, Italy, assigned by Italian authorities.

ITALY

ROME, May 7.

100 refugees were evacuated from Libya thanks to a humanitarian flight organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio and landed in Rome.

ROME, May 8.

The Foreign Ministry has updated its list of safe countries of origin, adding Bangladesh, Cameroon, Colombia, Egypt, Peru and Sri Lanka. After this measure, there are 22 countries considered safe by Italy.

ROME, May 17.

The Italian Civil Aviation Authority (ENAC), controlled by the Ministry of Transport, has issued an order to ban Civil Fleet aircrafts operating in the Mediterranean. The charge is "circumventing the regulatory framework" and "compromising the safety of people on the move."

LAMPEDUSA, May 22

Sea-Watch was fined 2,000 euros for violating ENAC order following Seabird's unauthorized flight to monitor the central Mediterranean.

ITALY-FRANCE BORDER, May 19.

A decomposing body has been found in Valle Stretta, on the Alpine border between Italy and France. It is presumed to be a person on the move who attempted to cross the border during the last winter. French authorities transported the body to Briançon.

REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE

NEWS FROM CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

ARRIVALS

According to borderline-europe data, 4774 people arrived in Italy in May. Again, the majority of refugees (77%) arrived in Sicily, particularly in Lampedusa. However, arrivals via the Ionian route, from Turkey, to Puglia or Calabria also increased. Some boats also reached Sardinia.

Italian authorities rescued only around 72% of the people who arrived, while rescues by NGO vessels represented a bit less than 16%. According to borderline-europe data, Frontex was not involved in any rescues in May 2024. 5% of the refugees reached Italian waters independently (12 nautical miles from the coast) without first being intercepted/rescued.

DEAD AND MISSING

According to borderline-europe counts, 30 people died in the Mediterranean in May and 47 are still missing. As always, it can be assumed that the number of unreported cases is much higher, as deaths are only counted if a body is found and missing persons are counted only if they are reported missing by relatives or fellow travellers.

Letting people die at sea

A particularly dramatic case is the death of around 28 people who were travelling by boat from Sfax, Tunisia, to Italy. 42 people were on the boat, which was reached by the Tunisian coast guard after a short time. The rescuers created very high waves with their boat, causing many people to fall into the water, and then destroyed the boat's engine with metal rods. Survivors report that the coast guard left the people in the water to their fate and walked away. The EU-funded dehumanisation reached another climax at this point: Tunisian coast guard officers took videos of the dying people and laughed as they did so. Another boat from the Tunisian authorities then arrived to pick up the 14 survivors and the bodies. The lifeless bodies were buried in the desert after the 'rescue', while the survivors were deported to the desert on the border with Libya in their wet clothes, without water or food, and left to their fate.

There were reports of further deaths until the next morning, when the survivors were picked up in Libya and taken to different Libyan detention camps.

This once again demonstrates the cruelty of border regimes, which lead to people being left to die by choice. Incidentally, the survivors reported that they were later able to identify the boats of the Tunisian coast guard, again a gift from the Italian government.

The rescuers were only able to save the baby after after his/her death

On 28.05.24 the ship Humanity I rescued 183 people in distress at sea. However, the rescue boat arrived too late for a five-month-old baby. The baby died during the crossing from Tunisia to Italy due to malnutrition. In our article on the manipulation of information in Italy, we also talk about this story, commenting on the fake news around it.

Dead man identified after 11 years

11 years after the shipwreck off Lampedusa on 13 October 2013 with 368 victims, the body of Weldu Romel has been identified. The identification took place 'thanks to the valuable work of the Labanof Institute of the University of Milan and the Commissioner for Missing People' in Rome. The memorial ceremony with the correction of the plaque was attended by a large number of people and the activists emphasised: 'Our battle is to give the victims of shipwrecks a name and a dignified burial'.

New SAR zone in Tunisia

Tunisia is preparing to establish its own SAR (Search and Rescue) zone as of June, Defence Minister Imed Memmich explained. Responsibility is divided between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As soon as the new SAR zone is established, the EU could release additional funds to train the Tunisian coast guard and provide it with financial and material resources. This could lead to a further increase in human rights violations at sea, as in Libya.

ROUTES TO EUROPE

In May, the majority of the boats departed from Libya, while in March and April the majority of them departed from Tunisia.

Fleeing boats:

Since the beginning of the year, NGOs have observed a new phenomenon during rescues in the central Mediterranean: the so-called 'fleeing boats'. These are boats with refugees on board, but of better quality than most of the other boats (e.g. fibreglass boats with several engines). After the rescue, a person stays on board to take the boat back to Libya. So far, this has only happened in the Libyan SAR zone, as reported by SOS Mediterranée.

The news about 'runaway boats' may further increase the criminalisation of sea rescue. Politicians may start again with the narrative of sea rescue as a pull factor or taxi service and the portrayal of sea rescuers as 'scapegoats'. The right-wing media in Italy have already started talking about the fleeing boats, once again reinforcing the prejudice against refugees arriving by sea. One thing is clear: rescuers at sea have no connection with people returning to Libya. Sea rescue is neither a pull factor nor a taxi company. People will keep dying in the Mediterranean, with or without fleeing boats and NGO rescue vessels, as long as the EU continues its policy of isolation and does not create legal entry options for refugees.

To understand what is behind the 'fleeing boats', it is important

to stress that the extremely dangerous trip to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe is made even more dangerous by the intervention of Frontex and the so-called Libyan coast guard. Fleeing people are increasingly violently turned back by the so-called Libyan coast guard and then taken to inhuman detention camps in Libya, where torture and violence are every day businnes. Libya is not a safe country! Survivors repeatedly report arbitrary detentions and a cycle of exploitation, extortion and violence following interception and (repeated) repatriation by the so-called Libyan coast guard. All this is happening with 'friendly' EU and Italian financial support to the Libyan border regime.

A Libyan NGO has produced a frighteningly comprehensive map of Libyan detention centres. According to those involved, refugees in these camps can only buy their freedom by paying a ransom. Frontex also monitors the Mediterranean with drones and planes and cooperates with the so-called Libyan coast guard, alerting them in case of boats with fleeing people, so that there is always some sort of competition between NGOs and the so-called Libyan coast guard as soon as a boat in distress is declared. This situation of a violent border regime leads people seeking safety to look for new ways to reach Europe. It is therefore a logical conclusion that the smugglers offer fleeing people new opportunities in the form of 'runaway boats'.

The EU has created this situation of illegal immigration networks through its refoulement policy. This, in return, leads to the conclusion that safe entry options into Europe will make the smuggling networks redundant. The civilian MRCC puts it in a nutshell: 'No Frontex, no clandestinity. No violent regimes at EU borders, no market for business [...] Safe entry is not an utopia, it is simply a political decision. We are aware that illegal immigration and even death at sea could be history if the border and visa regime was abolished and all people were granted freedom of movement. (Civil MRCC, ECHOES)

PUSHBACKS

According to borderline-europe's count, 2571 people heading to Europe were intercepted in May. Of these, 1902 were returned to Libya and 669 to Tunisia. As always, these figures give no guarantees, as the number of unreported cases is likely to be significantly higher.

The hypocrisy of Italian symbolic politics

In his post on X, Sergio Scandura, an Italian journalist, describes the macabre absurdity of Italian politics. The journalist criticises Interior Minister Piantedosi for laying a wreath in memory of the late Falcone (former public prosecutor and symbolic figure in the fight against the mafia in Sicily) and at the same time collaborating with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. This organisation is itself involved in criminal activities and illegal practices, but receives financial resources and equipment from Italy.

Lighthouse report on human rights violations in North Africa

In a recent investigation by Lighthouse Reports, it was also revealed that these human rights violations take place throughout North Africa (Mauritania, Tunisia and Morocco). Migrants, mainly of black origins, are driven into the desert in trucks and abandoned to their fate or death near the borders of neighbouring countries, without food or water. These crimes often occur directly after the coast guards have intercepted the people at sea.

There was also evidence that the EU was not only aware of these human rights violations and financed them, but in some cases was also involved by providing personnel. For example, Lighthouse Report documented statements by employees of the EU Trust Fund: 'You have to make life difficult for migrants. Make their life difficult! If you abandon a migrant from Guinea in the Sahara [in Morocco] twice, the third time he will ask you to bring him home voluntarily'.

Meanwhile, the Tunisian coast guard and the Italian government boast of their 'successes': between January and April 2024, 21,000 people have already been prevented from reaching Italy.

The 'rescue' in Egypt

Another unclear case was the behaviour of the Greek authorities: A boat carrying people from Libya to Italy deviated from its route and got into difficulties near Crete. A civil merchant ship was in the vicinity, rescued the people and boarded them. The merchant ship was told by the Greek authorities that it had to take the rescued people to Egypt and that they could only disembark there. Although international maritime law does not stipulate that rescued people must be taken to the nearest port (Crete), it is very clearly stated that people must be taken to a 'safe port' where there is no risk of human rights violations. Regardless of the 'safe haven' issue, it is clear that the people were seeking protection in Europe and had no intention of reaching Egypt.

CIVIL RESISTANCE

In May, a total of nine civil fleet ships were deployed in the central Mediterranean and rescued people or assisted with rescues. The Geo Barents (MSF) rescued 95 people in two missions, the Life Support (Emergency) rescued 87 people, the Nadir (RESQSHIP) was involved in six rescue missions, in four of which the crew provided assistance, while in two other rescue missions they rescued people and brought them safely ashore. The Aurora (Sea-Watch) rescued people in distress at sea until the arrival of the Italian Coast Guard. The Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) managed to bring a total of 213 people to safety in five rescue missions this month. The Ocean Viking (SOS Mediterranée) rescued a total of 103 people in three rescue missions. The Mare*Go assisted in one rescue. The Sea Punk 1 (Sea Punks) and the Sea Eye 4 (Sea Eye) brought 146 and 52 people safely to shore in one rescue each.

In March this year, Sea Eye 4 was detained for 60 days (the longest administrative detention ever imposed by Italy) for failing to comply with the instructions of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. The NGO's lawyers started a legal action against the administrative detention (based on the Piantedosi Decree). The main hearing was supposed to start on 29.05.24, but the first date was postponed to 05.06.24.

The civil fleet has grown: Maldusa, the vessel of the organisation bringing the same name, has been sailing in the central Mediterranean since the beginning of May. It was not conceived as a rescue boat, but more as small, fast and manoeuvrable asset, to be deployed as a monitoring boat: 'Our intention is certainly to monitor, to assist those in need, but above all to put pressure on those who are entitled to intervene to do so, and to report when this does not happen,' explains Jasmine Iozzelli, Maldusa activist and coordinator of the operations at sea.

However, the Maldusa monitoring boat has already been involved in a rescue operation this month: The crew picked up people in distress at sea and helped them until an Italian coast guard boat arrived on the scene to take them ashore.

In May, there were at least six cases in which a civil fleet aircraft reported a distress call, as a result of which, people in distress at sea were rescued. This clearly demonstrates how important the civil fleet is in the air and why the 'flight ban' will lead to even more deaths in the central Mediterranean, but more on this later.

Moreover, in seven (!) cases in May, NGO rescue ships were once again assigned to extremely distant ports (Bari, Civitavecchia, Marina di Carrara, Livorno, Ortona, Ancona, Ravenna), which kept the ships away from the rescue zone for days. The situation becomes particularly absurd when refugees from northern and central Italian ports are then transported south by bus, as has already happened several times. Here it becomes clear once again that the allocation of the distant port has nothing to do with logistical distribution problems and everything to do with political calculations. For example, in the case of a rescue by Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity): The NGO's ship was assigned

to travel 1170 km to Livorno with 183 people rescued; once there, almost all of the refugees were taken back to cities south of Livorno, some even travelling about 550 km to Campobasso.

Since the cases in which NGO ships assist with rescues do not appear in public statistics, it should be emphasised once again that in May alone, civil sea rescue ships were able to save refugees from drowning thanks to their presence until the arrival of the Italian authorities!

'Ban on flying':

In early May, the post-fascist Italian government dealt another blow to civil sea rescue. With ORDINANCE No. 2/2024 of ENAC (Ente nazionale aviazione civile - the national civil aviation authority - which is under the Ministry of Transport, under the control of Matteo Salvini), a new regulation came into force that effectively bans NGO planes from landing at airports in Sicily, Lampedusa and Pantelleria and bans 'the use of NGO planes and boats in the central Mediterranean'. The government is thus trying to keep NGO planes out of the Mediterranean rescue zone, just as it is already doing with civilian rescue ships. Now the planes, like the NGO ships, must also expect administrative detention if they do not comply with the regulation.

The NGO planes (Seabird from Sea Watch and Colibri from Pilots Volontaires) are essential for civil resistance, as they can spot people in distress at sea and immediately call for help, as well as document human rights violations in the Mediterranean. Crew members of the planes repeatedly witness pushbacks and other violent actions (e.g. shooting at people in the water, rescue boats or refugee boats) by the so-called Libyan coast guard. Sea Watch asks the right question: did the Italian government adopt the 'flight ban' to deliberately avoid documenting human rights violations?

At the same time, the NGOs emphasise that they will not be intimidated and will continue to fly over the Mediterranean, to report people in distress at sea and to document human rights violations.

Shortly after the regulation came into force, Sea-Watch collected its first fine of €2064 because the Seabird aircraft flew over the Libyan SAR zone and reported a ship in distress to the Sea Watch rescue vessel.

Sea Watch points out that civil aircraft are the 'only eyes of civil society in the Mediterranean' that can document and report on the results of the European policy of isolating people. The NGOs' lawyers are challenging the regulation in court.