



MEDREPORT
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BORDER STORIES

BALKAN ROUTES

In the mountains along the Austrian-Slovenian border, a 14-year-old Syrian migrant was found severely hypothermic and barely responsive. According to Austrian authorities, the mountain road between the two countries could represent a new Balkan route. Yet another irregular route born because of rejections by states and European bodies, which prefer a closed approach over welcoming and integration policies.

Not one but many, lots of passage routes

It is not easy to describe what is commonly called “Balkan route” a major migration route towards Europe that has become infamous for the hundreds of thousands of people who crossed it in 2015. Starting from Turkey, the Balkan route articulates through the Balkan countries, such as North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia, until it reaches the countries of the European Union, mainly Austria and Italy.

The Balkan route, however, cannot be considered as one route only, but is made up of different passage routes that are opened, crossed, and possibly closed according to particular situations that may occur (e.g. intensified controls on a certain route, or the creation of a wall by a government), thus forcing people on the move to reconsider their movements and leading to a continuous search for and production of new and diverse routes to Europe.

That was the background in which rescuers in Austria found a 14-year-old Syrian migrant in the mountains along the country's border with Slovenia in early March. The boy, "severely hypothermic and barely responsive" when he was found on the forested trail at 1,200 meters above sea level, was taken to safety at Klagenfurt hospital. Rescue workers operated in the Bärengraben area near Rosenbach, in a mountainous area where the boy had reportedly come from Slovenia.

According to Austrian authorities, the mountain road between the two countries may represent a new route identified by traffickers to obviate intensified border crossing controls and temporary closures decided by Austria. Authorities are currently investigating how the boy reached that particular stretch of mountain, that is, whether he arrived on his own or was brought by a network of smugglers. Gerald Tatzgern, a member of the Austrian police authority in charge of investigating human trafficking gangs, said that traffickers usually prefer to organize trips by car, limiting the distances to be covered on foot to just a few kilometers, and that is precisely why they are trying to reconstruct the dynamics that led the boy to find himself alone at that spot. A migrant family, also in serious condition, had been found earlier this year in the same section of the mountains.

The one passing through Austria is not the only new route identified by people on the move. For example, the number of people seeking asylum has also increased in Bosnia and Herzegovina since last fall. Starting from October 2023, a special police

operation in the Subotica area of Serbia and the closure of the border with Hungary led thousands of people to change their route and try to reach Europe via another country, then take refuge in Temporary Reception Centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and continue their journey.

Frontex, the European Union's border control agency, estimates that after the Central Mediterranean route (which accounts for 41 percent of irregular arrivals), the Balkan route is the most active and the one most traveled by people on the move in an attempt to reach Europe (26 percent). In 2023, more than 99,000 irregular crossings were recorded; although this represents a 31 percent decrease from 2022, it is still a very high number, considering that it could be even higher.

Frontex operations in the Balkans continue to intensify, with the creation of a new mission in Moldova during 2023 and new operations also launched in Northern Macedonia. In October 2023, the agency announced, with pride, that it had, for the first time in its history, carried out border checks on a border outside the EU, namely between Moldova and Ukraine.

Once again, we are faced with flows of asylum seekers being managed with violent rejections, border closures, and other actions to counter irregular migration that not only disregard the fundamental right to seek asylum, but also provide yet another confirmation that European states and governments prefer a closure approach over welcoming and integration policies.

MSH MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS

What happened in March on the migration routes of Europe, the Mediterranean, the world? What measures did governments take? Who provided relief? Who, on the other hand, sanctioned, detained, or turned away? Let's take stock.

WORLD

LIBYA, Feb. 2 - The Italian government and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) handed over four ambulances and other technological equipment to Libyan authorities as part of the European project “Integrated Border Support and Migration Management in Libya.”

LEBANON, Feb. 14 - A boat that set sail from Lebanon with 116 Syrian citizens on board was rescued off Cyprus. Despite being in danger of being deported to Syria, The Cypriot government decided to return the rescued people to Lebanon, but Lebanese authorities prevented their return.

NIGER, Feb. 19 - Following the coup d'état, the Niger government repealed the law enacted to counter smugglers who provide aid to people on the move, causing an increase in migration flows transiting the country.

LIBYA, Feb. 26 - The IOM estimated that in 2023, more than 700,000 people on the move transited or lived in Libya, a figure slightly up from 2022 numbers.

SENEGAL, Feb. 28 - A shipwreck off the northern coast of Senegal killed 24 people as they tried to reach the Canary Islands. There were an estimated 200 to 300 people aboard the sunken vessel.

TUNISIA - Protests continue by family members of people who sailed from Tunisia on Feb. 10 and disappeared while trying to reach Italy. Throughout the month, demonstrations have been held in Tunis, particularly in front of the Italian Embassy, and in El Hencha.

EUROPEAN UNION, Feb. 1 - Frontex accuses Italy of failing to act to prevent the shipwreck off Cutro that claimed at least 94 lives on the night of Feb. 25-26, 2023. Frontex says Italy was aware of the information the European agency made available to it and failed to respond to a Frontex aircraft's offer to help during the rescue phase.

POLAND, Feb. 6 - Poland has increased control measures at its border with Slovakia “because of the continued threat of illegal immigration.” In one week, more than 18,000 people and nearly 8,000 vehicles were checked by border police.

EUROPEAN UNION, Feb. 10 - Der Spiegel and Lighthouse Reports uncovered thousands of emails sent by Frontex, starting in 2021, to the so-called Libyan coast guard to report the location of boats in distress in the central Mediterranean and facilitate captures and deportations to Libya.

UNITED KINGDOM, Feb. 20 - Volker Turk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the British government's proposed law to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda pending consideration of their applications undermines human rights.

SEA

SPAIN, Feb. 20 - The Spanish government has introduced a visa requirement for the Senegalese citizens transiting Spanish airports directed to a third country. The rule was introduced to avoid the numerous asylum applications filed by Senegalese at Barajas Airport in Madrid.

EUROPEAN UNION, Feb. 22 - Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Dunja Mihatović said that individuals and organizations in solidarity with people on the move are increasingly experiencing violence and criminalization in the European Union, particularly in Hungary, Greece, Lithuania, Italy, Croatia and Poland.

UNITED KINGDOM, Feb. 22 - The British government has ruled that all migrant workers employed in the care sector in the United Kingdom will no longer be able to ensure that partners and children can legally stay in the country on their visas.

SERBIA, Feb. 22 - A few videos document the violence suffered by people on the move by Serbian police. People are forced to strip in the cold and illegally deported to North Macedonia.

CIVIL FLEET, Feb. 1 - On its way to the assigned port of disembarkation in Marina di Carrara, Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) assisted a boat with about 40 people on board until the Italian Coast Guard arrived and rescued them and disembarked them in Pantelleria.

LAMPEDUSA, Feb. 1 - A boat that set sail from El Amra sank off the coast of Lampedusa. The Italian Coast Guard rescued 49 survivors, an unspecified number of people missing.


LIBYA, Feb. 2 - As documented by Seabird (Sea-Watch) aircraft, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard intercepted and deported back to Libya 125 people aboard a boat in distress.

CIVIL FLEET, Feb. 5 - Thanks to a report from Alarm Phone, Geo Barents (Doctors Without Borders) rescued a boat carrying 134 people and disembarked them in Ravenna, more than 1,600 km far away from the rescue site.

CANARY, Feb. 5 - 13 boats carrying about 400 people off various islands in the Canary Islands archipelago were rescued by Spanish authorities within a day.

CIVIL FLEET, Feb. 7 - Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) rescued 261 people aboard four boats in distress and disembarked them in the port of Brindisi.

TUNISIA, Feb. 8 - Tunisian authorities reported that in a shipwreck of a boat that set sail from Tunisia, 13 people died and 17 are missing.



TUNISIA, Feb. 8 - A boat carrying 105 people was intercepted by the Tunisian Coast Guard, which deported them back to Tunisia.

LESBO, Feb. 8 - Forty-nine people aboard a boat in distress were intercepted off Lesvos and pushed back into Turkish waters by the Greek Coast Guard.

CRETAS, Feb. 10 - A merchant ship rescued a boat in distress with about 60 people on board off Crete, where disembarkation later took place.

ZARZIS, Feb. 15 - A shipwreck off Zarzis left five people dead, while one person is in serious condition and 48 survivors were returned to unknown locations in Tunisia.

CIVIL FLEET, Feb. 16 - Aita Mari (Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario) rescued 43 people aboard a boat in distress and disembarked them in the port of Ortona.

CIVIL FLEET, Feb. 19 - Geo Barents rescued 121 people in 3 operations and landed them in the port of Bari. During the first two rescues one person was found dead, a second person died aboard Geo Barents, and 3 are missing.

LA VALLETTA, Feb. 23 - While being rescued by the Maltese Armed Forces, a boat carrying about 30 people sank, causing 5 deaths. The survivors were disembarked in Valletta.

CIVIL FLEET, Feb. 27 - Sea-Watch 5 (Sea-Watch) rescued 45 people aboard a boat in distress and disembarked them in Catania harbor.

CEUTA, Feb. 27 - At least 100 people swam from Morocco to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta in 24 hours. Many were knocked off rocks, bitten by dogs and affected by the cold.

CIVIL FLEET, Feb. 28 - Sea-Eye 4 (Sea-Eye) rescued 57 people in distress, but 4 were seriously injured and 2 died. The survivors were disembarked in Porto Empedocle.

ITALY

ROME, Feb. 5 - Ousmane Sylla, a 22-year-old Guinean, committed suicide in the Porta Galeria CPR in Rome. The psychologist who examined him in the Trapani CPR, where he was previously held, had reported serious mental problems and recommended the transfer to an appropriate facility.

FERRARA, Feb. 8 - In front of the Prefecture of Ferrara, various civil organizations established a sit-in to protest the plan to open a new CPR in the city and to denounce violations of the human rights of all people detained in all CPRs in Italy.

CALTANISSETTA, Feb. 10 - Senators Nicita, Iacono and Provenzano made an unexpected inspection of the Pian del Lago CPR in Caltanissetta, confirming that people detained in the facility live in inhumane and degrading conditions.

BRINDISI, Feb. 10-21 - The ship Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) was subjected to 20 days of administrative detention in the port of Brindisi by Italian authorities for violating the Pian-tedosi Decree during operations that rescued 261 people, but the Court of Brindisi suspended the measure.

MILAN, Feb. 10 - Despite the receivership and change of management last December, videos show how the conditions of people detained in the Via Corelli CPR in Milan have not changed significantly and remain very critical.

RAGUSA, Feb. 14 - Preliminary hearings in the investigation for “aggravated aiding and abetting illegal immigration” against seven crew members of Mediterranea, which rescued 27 people in September 2020, have begun in Ragusa. Mediterranea accuses prosecutors of violating the law through illegal wiretapping, infringing on the right to defense.

ROME, Feb. 16 - The Court of Cassation has definitively sentenced the captain of the merchant ship Ace 28, which in 2018 had deported 101 people to Libya after rescuing them. The reason given by the court was that Libya is not a safe port and therefore handing people over to the so-called Libyan coast guard is a crime.

TRAPANI, Feb. 28 - The Trapani Public Prosecutor’s Office asked for the acquittal of the 4 crew members of the ship Luventa investigated for “aiding and abetting illegal immigration” after as many as 7 years of investigation against them.

ROME, Feb. 28 - The Council of State upheld the appeal filed by the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI) and Circular Spaces on the legality of financing voluntary repatriations to Tunisia. The TAR will now have to schedule a hearing.

BRIANCON-CLAVIERE, Feb. 6-10 - Two Commemorations were held on both sides of the French-Italian Alpine border to remember and demand justice for the victims of border violence and Fortress Europe.

REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE

NEWS FROM
CENTRAL
MEDITERRANEAN



A TRAGIC ANNIVERSARY

A year ago, on the 26th of February, a boat carrying 180 migrants sank offshore the coast of Crotona (Calabria). 94 people died, including 35 minors. Ten individuals are still missing. One year later many questions have still to be answered, particularly who is responsible and if the accident could have been prevented. At the moment, two proceedings are going on. One of them is against five presumed smugglers who were on board and who allegedly helped guide the boat. Another person, who was suspected to be a smuggler, died during the shipwreck. The first among them, a Turkish guy of 29 years, was sentenced to 20 years in jail and a 3 million euros fine at the beginning of this month.

Moreover, six members of the Italian authorities (Coast Guard and Finance Guards) are under investigation in order to find out where errors were made in the chain of command. As far as this last aspect is concerned, there is some interesting news. Only recently, new documents from the European Border Guard Agency Frontex revealed that a reconnaissance plane saw the boat hours before the shipwreck and alerted the Italian coast guard. This fact has probably been underrated by the Italian authorities and classified as “not of particular interest”.

Could the shipwreck have been avoided if the coast guard took the alert seriously? Further investigations will examine who was responsible for this misjudgment. The fact that the alleged responsibility for the incident has been already found with one of the migrants, while there are still investigations about the involvement of the Italian authorities, shows the anti-migration position of the Italian government. What happened throughout this month shows that no lessons were learned from the tragic event.

ARRIVALS

According to data from [borderline-europe](#), in February 2,320 people arrived in Italy, almost the same number as last month (2,237 people). Compared to last year's February though, there has been a decrease of 38%. Also this month, the vast majority (65%) arrived in Sicily, particularly in Lampedusa.

Almost a third of the people who arrived had been rescued from the Italian authorities (746 people, 32%) and another third from civil rescue ships (792 people, 36%). Frontex carried out one rescue which involved 46 people. A minority (169 migrants, 7%) arrived in Italy autonomously, meaning that they managed to get into the Italian coastal waters (12 miles from the shore) without being rescued. We are not able to give information about how the remaining people reached Italy.

DEAD AND MISSING

The deaths in the Mediterranean continue this month. According to the data by [borderline-europe](#), 60 people lost their lives last month while trying to find safety in Europe. 67 people are considered missing. It can be presumed that this is only the tip of the iceberg. The number of cases which have not been reported is much higher. But even the numbers reported already show a significant increase in the number of deaths and missing compared to last month (114%) and the same month last year (76%). Also IOM shares this observation.

Despite the decrease of arrivals, IOM reports doubling of the number of deaths and missing persons. This also shows that, contrary to the political narrative, decreasing the number of arrivals through political measures of so-called "migration control" does not protect migrants. On the contrary, these measures make migration routes more and more unsafe and lead to more suffering and deaths.

At the beginning of the month, a tragic incident happened: when the Italian coast guard rescued a boat with 12 people, they found a dead man (a 20-year-old Egyptian) on board. According to the current information, he tried to restart the boat's engine after it broke down while crossing the Mediterranean. While doing so, he slipped, hit his head and died instantly. A si-

milar incident happened during a rescue by Geo Barents on the 21st of February. A person was already dead on the boat, which was carrying 67 people and, shortly after the rescue, another person died on board the civil rescue ship.

Moreover, several shipwrecks happened this month, in which many people died and the survivors were brought back to their departure countries, violating international law. On the 4th of February, a ship sank off the coast of Algeria on its way to Sardinia. Four people died and six were reported missing. The only survivor was brought back to Algeria by the Algerian authorities. Only four days later, on the 8th of February, a boat carrying 42 Sudanese sank near the Tunisian shores. 13 people died and 27 remain missing. There is no information about the 2 survivors. Probably they have been brought back to Tunisia. Only a week later, another shipwreck happened near the Tunisian coast: 9 migrants died and the 40 survivors were returned to Tunisia. On the 26th of February a similar incident happened: 63 survivors were intercepted by the Tunisian authorities and at least one person died. Before that, the migrants had already been in contact with Alarm Phone and reported problems with their engine.

This month also showed that rescue operations can be dangerous. Our partner organisation Maldusa underlined already in November the dangers when transferring people from their boat to a ship.

During a rescue operation by the Maltese authorities, the rescued boat capsized, killing at least five people and injuring eight. The 21 survivors were brought directly to Maltese detention centres.

The fact that behind these numbers are people with personal stories, desires, hopes, and that the deaths of these people have serious consequences, especially for their families and friends, is shown once again by the case of the missing boat that departed from Sfax, Tunisia, in January 2024. The boat left for Europe on the 11th of January. On board there were 37 teenagers and young adults, all between 13 and 35 years old, almost everybody coming from the city of El Hancha in Tunisia. Their families lost contact with the boat at around 10 pm. Since then, there has been no trace of the group. Even though the public prosecutor's office in Sfax officially opened an investigation, it remains inconclusive. The ongoing uncertainty and the anger at the lack of information from the authorities made the families of the missing people protest in the streets. They set up roadblocks and burnt tyres in order to draw attention to themselves. In response to their protests, the Tunisian National Guard promised to keep the investigations going and mobilise all of its forces to this end. At the same time, the ongoing protests in Tunisia have been condemning increasingly the poor economic conditions in the country, which push Tunisians to make the dangerous crossing across the central Mediterranean in order to find a better life in Europe.

JUDGEMENT FROM THE COURT OF CASSATION

The Court of Cassation in Rome (the highest court of ordinary jurisdiction in Italy) rules in a judgment on a pullback in 2018 that Tripoli in Libya was “not a port of safety”.

In July 2018, the Italian tug boat Asso Ventotto saved 101 people from the Mediterranean and then handed them over to the so-called Libyan coast guard, who took the refugees back to Tripoli. The migrants had no possibility to report to the Italian authorities any information about their state of health or make it clear that they wanted to apply for asylum in Europe. According to the judge, this fact and the terrible conditions of refugee camps in Tripoli, the inhumane detention conditions and the possibility of torture constituted a violation of the principle of non-refoulement of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The question remains to what extent this ruling will also influence further trials or the cooperation of the European Union and, particularly, of the Italian government with the so-called Libyan coast guard. The Italian Minister of the Interior Matteo Piantedosi, for example, denies that the migrants who were rescued by Italy have ever been brought back to Libya.

He does not believe that the judgement influences his plan to cooperate with Libya and Tunisia in order to limit migration to Italy. Contrary to his statement, it has been proven that the Central Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Rome cooperates with the so-called Libyan coast guard and passes on information about migrants' position. This means that rescued migrants might not be returned to Libya but that interceptions by the so-called Libyan coast guard are made possible. The court ruling refers to the case of the Asso Ventotto, which happened 6 years ago, and so it is still unclear whether Libya will not be considered a “port of safety” entirely after this ruling.

PATHS TO EUROPE

This month, at least 290 people (12%) crossed the central Mediterranean from Tunisia. This month confirms the tendency of the decrease of departures from Tunisia. At the same time, 1,132 people (48%) have started their journey across the Mediterranean from Libya. We cannot determine the country of departure for 922 migrants (39%).

Only a small part of migrants present in Libya leaves the country in order to try reaching Europe. According to IOM, the number of migrants in Libya slightly increased. Between October and December, 706,369 migrants have been counted, which means there are 8,837 people more in Libya compared to the last data collection. Nonetheless, we can presume that the number of migrant people without documents is significantly higher. The Italian support for the so-called Libyan coast guard under the Italy-Libya agreement, for example in the guise of motorboats, also contributes to the fact that people seeking protection have no choice other than waiting in increasingly overcrowded refugee camps, or worse, in torture camps until they are given the opportunity to escape.

The route to Europe could soon become even more difficult for many refugees. In November, the Italian and Albanian governments signed an agreement which envisaged the building of two centres in Albania, for those migrants who want to seek protection in Italy. Like this, the Meloni government has the possibility of transferring people coming from the so-called safe countries to a third country, while they wait for their entry to be checked and for any residence permits to be approved. The agreement has now also been approved by the Parliament in Tirana; the Italian Senate already voted in favour almost 15 days ago, despite the protests from the opposition. It remains to be seen how the impact on refugees will be and if it will be lawful under European Union and international law.

PUSHBACKS

In February 4,226 people were intercepted on their way to Europe. Of these, 1,511 people (35%) have been brought back to Libya, 2,714 (64%) to Tunisia and one person to Algeria.

NGOs like the Spanish Proactiva Open Arms and the French SOS MÉDITERRANÉE, among the others, have repeatedly accused Frontex of collaborating with the so-called Libyan coast guard, and, thus, contributing to human rights violations in the Mediterranean. Leaked documents have shown that Frontex has transmitted information on the position of the boats of migrants which has led to them being brought back to Libya by the so-called Libyan coast guard against the refugees' will.

This month, Sea-Watch became witness to another incident of this kind. At the beginning of February, Sea-Watch observed 125 people being intercepted by the so-called Libyan coast guards in the Maltese search and rescue zone, being obliged to board the boat and head back towards Libya. It is certain that also Frontex already knew the migrants' position, as they were observing the area from the sky at the time.

CIVIL RESISTANCE

Nonetheless, the victims' relatives are not the only ones fighting against the racist and deadly EU migration policies; also many civilian sea rescue organisations and other NGOs are joining the resistance.

In February, seven ships of the civil fleet were deployed in the central Mediterranean: in addition to the Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée), the Humanity I (SOS Humanity), the Geo Barents (MSF), the Sea-Watch 5 (Sea-Watch) and the Sea-Eye 4 (Sea-Eye), also the Aita Mari (Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario) and the Sea Punk I (Sea Punks) have taken up their search and rescue operations again after several months of breaks and maintenance works. Together they saved 845 lives (35% of people who arrived).

Nevertheless, the obstruction of civilian sea rescue continues to be part of everyday Italian politics. As in previous months, we've observed that ships of the civil fleet have been assigned distant ports which - according to the Piantedosi Decree of January 2023 - must be approached immediately and without further operations. For example, the ports of Ravenna (Emilia-Romagna), Marina di Carrara, Livorno (Tuscany), and Civitavecchia (Lazio) have been assigned, which led to additional days of navigation. Moreover, the Italian government used administrative stops in order to keep the boats out of their areas of operation for as long as possible.

For example, the Open Arms (Proactiva Open Arms) was blocked in Crotona until the 13th of February because, according to the accusation, “it impeded the rescue operations of the [so-called] Libyan coast guard”. This alleged rescue operation was in fact an interception by the so-called Libyan coast guard in violation of international law, which was observed by a nearby Open Arms speedboat. After the Open Arms was able to leave Crotona, following the 20-day stop, it criticised the actions of the Italian government: “Libya can be in no way considered a port of safety [...]. Vulnerable people’s lives who flee from there are constantly at risk and the violence to which they’re subjected in detention centres is a serious violation of human rights that European democracies should strongly condemn”.

Other than the Open Arms, the Ocean Viking was also blocked this month after having rescued a total of 261 people from four boats in violation of the Piantadosi Decree. But there is some good news regarding this case: after a block of 11 days, a judge from Brindisi decided to temporarily lift the administrative block, saying that NGOs “have the irrevocable right to carry out their rescue activities at sea where they realise their social purpose”. They also questioned whether Italy was responsible for alleged violations of maritime law instead of the flag state, which was Norway in the case of the Ocean Viking. The judgement in the main proceedings is still pending. The judgement could be revolutionary if it established that the Piantadosi Decree is unlawful. It is to be hoped that the decision will set a precedent and that other tribunals will follow the judgement in similar proceedings.

Another strategy of impeding civilian sea rescue is that of criminal proceedings against those who provide assistance: four members of the crew of *Iuventa* and members of Save the Children, Doctors Without Borders and the shipping company *Vroom* are currently on trial in Trapani for “facilitating illegal entry”. If convicted, they could risk 20 years of jail time. Specifically, the case concerns three rescue operations between 2016 and 2017. Since then, police investigations and preliminary proceedings have been going on in order to decide whether charges will be brought against the people involved and whether a trial will be opened. But there is good news: on the 2nd of March, surprisingly, the prosecutor’s office asked for the dismissal of the trial because there was insufficient evidence to prove a criminal offence. After seven years, for the first time the defendants can breathe a sigh of relief. The judge’s decision is expected for the 19th of April. It is to be hoped they will follow the motion of the prosecutor’s office.

The situation at the moment is less favourable for the crew of the *Mare Jonio* (Mediterranea Saving Humans). On the 14th of February a trial was opened against them at the court of Ragusa, also concerning accusations of “facilitating illegal entry”. The case concerns a rescue operation in 2020, in which the *Mare Jonio* rescued 27 migrants off the Libyan shore. At that time, the people were already stuck for 38 days onboard the tanker *Maersk Etienne*, which had previously rescued them. Only after the *Mare Jonio* took the people on board, they were brought to Italy. According to the Prosecutor, the Danish shipping company allegedly paid 125,000 euros to the organisation for this,.

However the shipping company and Mediterranea Saving Humans have explained in detail that this is not true. Nonetheless, the trial has been opened and was accompanied by protests from a broad alliance of civil society organisations.

In a joint statement, 56 organisations, among them borderline-europe, have expressed their critique against political practices of assigning people to distant ports, administrative stops, and the criminalization of aid workers. They ask for the immediate stop of the obstruction of humanitarian aid in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, they call for the protection of migrants' rights at sea by allowing ships of the civil fleet to rescue boats in distress at sea without any restrictions and - in accordance with international law- to bring rescued people to the nearest safe port.

One last piece of good news: it is not only the crews of civil rescue ships that are helping to make the Mediterranean safer for migrants, IT experts are also trying to contribute: In the last five years, Nik Zemke, a German web developer, together with his team has been developing One Fleet, an application designed to help locate ships in distress. The app is about to be launched. It is hoped that it will make it easier for civil rescue ships to find vessels in distress at sea. It should also facilitate coordination between ships, making it easier to find out which vessel is closest in a rescue case. Other similar projects are in the pipeline. This month is thus further proof that not even a right-wing anti-migration policy can put an end to solidarity in the Mediterranean.



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