

borderline-europe, Sicily

SCIROCCO

News from Italy



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Schirokko] is a southeastern, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and up to Italy's north often for a few hours only. This newsflash has been published on an approximately bi-weekly basis since March 2021.

Political and social situation

According to a chamber of the Catania District Court presided over by Judge Iolanda Apostolico, the new government decree, according to which asylum seekers from supposedly "safe third countries" must undergo an accelerated border procedure in custody or alternatively have the option of paying a deposit of approximately €5,000, is **unlawful**. The court ruled on September 28th, that this decree violates European law. This sentence specifically concerned four asylum seekers in [the detention center for asylum seekers in Modica-Pozzallo](#), whose detention was ordered by the police chief of Ragusa. The judge rejected the detention and ordered the immediate release of the asylum seekers. This is an [important sentence](#) because it shows that Italian legislation must comply with European legislation in any case. In particular, the decree [violates](#) Article 8 of Directive 2013/33/EU, which states that detention may only be ordered on a case-by-case assessment and as a last resort.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and other members of the post-fascist party Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) attacked this court decision in a corresponding Facebook post. Judge [Iolanda Apostolico](#) replied that it was **a question of law and not a personal decision**. It could be challenged legally. The Italian Ministry of the Interior has since announced the [appeal of the decision](#). In the meantime, three other chambers of the court in [Florence](#) and [Catania](#) have [joined](#) the decision. They ordered the release of a total of 11 more Tunisians.



Olive fields in Campobello di Mazara

New migration decree

The Council of Ministers has approved the [new draft of the migration decree](#). It now has to be confirmed by parliament. The revised version contains only 12 of the original 13 articles – the possibility for the coast guard to intervene in hotspots in case of large arrivals has been removed. But apart from that, **the decree seems to be largely confirmed in its original structure**. It includes the possibility of expelling migrants for serious security reasons or for false statements about one's own age or identity and of accommodating 16-year-old (minor) protection seekers in adult reception centers if no other ad hoc facilities are available. In addition, it is planned to introduce more stringent verification of the age of migrants claiming to be minors, for example through the use of dactyloscopic (fingerprints, palm or sole prints) and anthropometric (measuring the dimensions of the human body) data. In general, the possibility of declaring oneself as a minor should be restricted.

The Council of Ministers also [decided](#) to extend the state of emergency due to migration for another six months. It was declared most recently by the government in April 2023.

Lampedusa

After more than [7,000 migrants](#) arrived on Lampedusa within two days in September, [many politicians](#) visited the hotspot Contrada Imbriacola on

Lampedusa in recent weeks. Among others, as reported [in the last Scirocco](#), the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen met there in mid-September. A few days later, former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte also came and participated in a public event organised by a group of citizens who had been holding a **sit-in in front of the town hall** since September 12th. On September 28th, a delegation from the Agrigento Bar Association, accompanied by European lawyers and their national president Francesco Greco, visited the hotspot, which was almost empty again at that point. "We heard money was coming. Some is already here, but it is unclear where it has gone", commented [Professor Giovanni Fragapane](#) on the 45 million euros in financial aid that the Italian government had promised the island. "We need facilities that promote culture, not superficial visits that sweep the problems under the rug. We need infrastructure, cinemas, multi-purpose spaces!"

Anniversary of the UN Convention against Organised Crime

On September 29th, the Italian government invited representatives from 34 different countries to Palermo. Under the [guise of the 20th anniversary](#) of the UN Convention against Organised Crime, an exchange took place on "legal and operational tools to fight criminal activities in the Mediterranean". By this, the government means the "fight against human traffickers", which Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni had described as necessary only a few days ago at the UN. Further **repressive migration policies** are expected. Therefore, a large number of associations and groups as well as trade unions demonstrated in Palermo against the meeting under the slogan "You are the criminals".



Demonstration on the occasion of the anniversary of the UN-Convention

Misuse of EU funds to shut down the borders

Oxfam has revealed that EU funds intended to fight poverty in countries of the Global South are being misused for measures to "control migration". According to the organisation's [detailed report](#), this includes supporting Libya, Tunisia and Niger to stem migration flows and the associated human rights violations against migrants and refugees. In total, around **667 million euros from the European budget** have been misappropriated for the period between 2021 and 2027.

EU migration agreement with Tunisia

The migration agreement between the EU and Tunisia will not be implemented for the time being. First, Tunisian President [Kais Saied](#) refused to receive EU funds amounting to 127 million euros. He stated that the financial aid for budget stabilisation (60 million euros) and for the "fight against irregular migration", i.e. for sealing off the borders (60 million euros) would be in **contradiction with the Memorandum of Understanding** between Tunisia and the EU. The Tunisian Minister of Interior [Kamel Feki](#) added that Tunisia will under no circumstances take over border control for other states. Now, due to the rejection of Germany and other states, the EU has also [put the agreement on hold until next year](#). Thus, the German government maintains that Tunisia is currently not a safe third country and democratic foundations must

be created before funds flow. Even the right-wing Dutch government, which had signed the agreement together with Italy in July, backtracked.

EU ministers of the interior agree on asylum crisis regulation

The EU has been negotiating an asylum reform for months. Its main aim is to limit migration. At the beginning of October, the EU interior ministers agreed on a so-called [asylum crisis regulation](#), which, among other things, is intended to **regulate that standards in asylum procedures can be temporarily lowered** in case of a large number of arrivals. Italy has already started building and opening the new "fast-track centers" where **refugees will be detained**. After the agreement of the ministers of the interior, negotiations between the EU Commission, the Parliament and the Council of Ministers can now begin. There has been a lot of criticism about this decision. [Erik Marquardt](#), migration expert and member of the EU Parliament, for example, said that there is a belief that "refugees should simply be treated a little worse than today; treat them a little worse every day than yesterday – and eventually, they will stop coming. I mean: one could, for example, also make agreements now that improve the situation in the countries of origin and create legal entry channels."

Indictment against ex-mayor of Riace

In the [trial of Mimmo Lucano](#) and his [Riace model](#), which has been ongoing since 2018, **the most serious charges have been dropped**. The former mayor was accused of abusing the reception system for his own political goals. In the first instance, Lucano was sentenced to 13 years and two months in prison. On appeal, his sentence was significantly reduced to one and a half years of probation. The trial was seen by many as [politically motivated](#). The [emeritus professor of legal philosophy and politics, Luigi Ferrajoli](#), describes the trial as a **biased process** "in

which the judge becomes the enemy of the defendant. A false judgment."

Situation of the refugees

We already [reported](#) on the Italian government's plan to build **new deportation centers** (CPR, Centro di permanenza per i rimpatri). Now the Italian Ministry of Defence has set a budget of [20 million euros](#) for the **construction of 13-14 new centers** for 50-200 people each and announced that at least one new facility will be built in each region. These new facilities should be as close as possible to airports in order to facilitate deportations. The first CPR is to be built in Ventimiglia. Many regional governors have already spoken out against the construction of the new CPR. There are currently 592 migrants and refugees detained in nine CPRs.

One of these centers is to be built at the [initial reception center in Sant'Anna \(Crotone\)](#). This is despite the fact that there have been scandals there for years, including the fact that the CPR management seems to have enriched itself with the financial resources for the care of the refugees. Therefore, the Red Cross took over the interim management before it was taken over again by a private provider. Since it has now become known that the new provider is also involved in **mafia-like business**, the situation remains unclear. This ultimately affects the unaccompanied minor refugees who are housed in Sant'Anna (we already reported in [edition 17/2023](#) of Scirocco).

Olive harvest in Campobello di Mazara

On September 30th, 2021, part of the former Calcestruzzi cement factory burnt down. Seasonal and other workers from Campobello di Mazara had been living there in precarious conditions due to a lack of alternatives. One worker, Omar Baldeh, died in the fire. Nevertheless, the camp continued to be the home of people affected by exploitation. Then, a few months ago, [the eviction of the entire area was ordered](#). As a result, people were [forced to live on the streets](#). To commemorate Omar, but also to demand

the reopening of the camp, different organisations gathered in Campobello di Mazara on [September 30th, 2023](#). In speeches, workers reported that they have been homeless since the eviction. They demanded, **"Open the camp immediately, those who harvest olives must not sleep on the street."** A few weeks later, however, the mayor declared that the camp would not be reopened because of a lack of funds. There also seems to be a lack of political will for a solution. The mayor even had the benches in the city removed to prevent workers from sleeping there. A detailed article about the situation in Campobello di Mazara can be found [here](#).



Commemoration ceremony 03 October

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of this day, a commemorative event organised by the migrant organisation [Stravox](#) took place in Palermo. In addition to speeches, the victims were commemorated during a minute of silence. The aim of the event was also to draw attention to the fact that the deaths in the Mediterranean continue: **"Every day is October 3rd"**.

Just a few days later, another dramatic shipwreck occurred: On **October 11th, 2013**, a boat carrying 450-500 migrants from Syria, Palestine and Tunisia got into distress after being shot at by Libyan militias. Water entered the boat through the bullet holes, and it began to sink. 268 people died, among them many children. Despite a call for help, the Maltese and Italian coastguards did not arrive at the scene of the accident until six hours later. The ship had already sunk by then. The reason was disputes over the jurisdictions of the EU coastal states. Although the [Court of Justice in Rome](#) ruled that the Italian coast guard was guilty of wilful failure to rescue and was therefore responsible for the deaths of 268 refugees, the two defendants, Captain Leopoldo Manna and Frigate Captain Luca Licciardi, escaped conviction because the case was already statute-barred. On the anniversary, the NGO ["Maldusa"](#), with which [borderline-europe](#) closely cooperates, invited people to Lampedusa to commemorate the dead people of October 11th. In four public evening events Lampedusan activists, for example, presented their work and the situation on the island.



Demonstration in Campobello di Mazara

Commemorazione - commemoration: 10 years after the shipwrecks of 3 and 11 October 2013

On [October 3rd, 2013](#), 368 Eritrean migrants died on a ship in distress near the coast of Lampedusa. After the captain unsuccessfully tried to draw attention to the boat with a burning rag, panic arose on the ship causing it to capsize. Although a call for help was made, the Italian coast guard did not rush to rescue the people. Only 45 minutes after the accident they arrived at the scene of the accident, even though it was not far from the port. Only 155 people could be rescued. In the days and weeks that followed the disaster, the survivors and relatives of the victims did not receive adequate care from the Italian authorities.

One of the initiatives on Lampedusa is the "Blanket of Yusuf - [La coperta di Yusuf](#)", which started in Lampedusa and collects blanket squares knitted by supporters from all over the world. The result is an "infinite" blanket. It is a symbol of remembering all those who have been victims of the racist EU border regime and for a community beyond categories.



One of Yusuf's blankets

Other discussion groups dealt with the situation in Niger, Libya, and Tunisia. Activists from Africa as well as from different European countries came to discuss with the Lampedusans and the still numerous tourists on site.

On October 11th, the dead people were commemorated in a public event with information from process facilitators, videos, the recitation of poems by a Sudanese poet who died shortly after writing them during the crossing, and prayers.

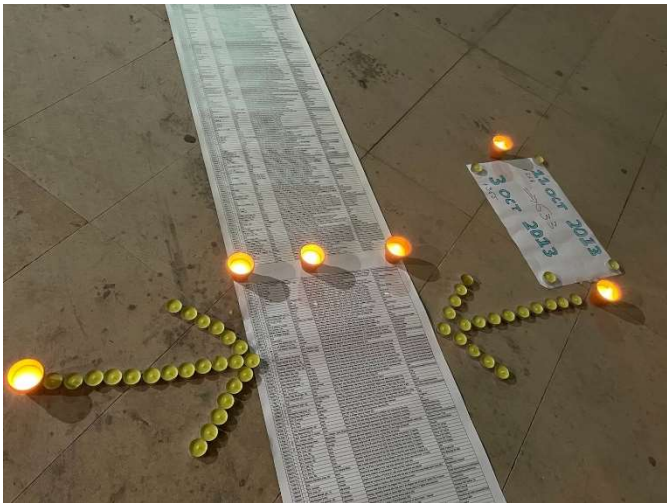
The Alarm Phone was launched one year after the disaster of October 11th, marking its [ninth birthday](#) yesterday.

The cemetery in Lampedusa also has memorial plaques for (un)identified migrants who died in the Mediterranean. Mediterranean Hope and Forum solidale take care of the graves, maintain them and organise tours and visits of the cemetery.



Memorial plaques for (un)identified migrants

Below are some photos of the "CommemorAction" on Lampedusa on October 11th, 2023



For more information on the situation in Italy, see „Projects“ on our [homepage](#) and previous issues of [Scirocco](#).

Contact

[borderline-europe](#)
human rights without borders
<https://www.borderline-europe.de/>
italia@borderline-europe.de

The Scirocco will be published in 2023 with the kind support of the kind support of the Evangelical Church of Rhineland (EKIR) and the “Förderverein Pro Asyl”.

Cover photo: Wolfgang Hasselmann, unplash

Translation: Alexa Vittur

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