Central Med Info
October 20 – November 12 2019

About our Central Med Info: borderline-europe started in March 2019 to put together information about the situation in the Central Mediterranean Sea for internal research reasons. In 2020 we decided to publish these info-letters. You will also find sources of right-wing newspapers and twitter quotations of “friends” of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. This does not reflect our opinion, but some information is only available here.

LIBYA- INFO

10.11.2019
171 Bangladeshis will be deported from Libya
A government move is underway to repatriate 171 Bangladeshis who were rescued at the Mediterranean coast, said officials in Dhaka. The Bangladesh embassy in Libya in cooperation with the concerned agencies in Libya completed the registration of the rescued migrants. They are likely to be repatriated on November 19, they said. [...] http://www.newagebd.net/article/90324/repatriation-of-171-bangladeshis-rescued-at-mediterranean-coast-underway

10.11.2019
DEAL MALTA-LIBYA
Malta has deal with Libya coastguard over migrant interceptions – report
Malta’s armed forces have started cooperating with Libya’s coastguard to turn back migrant boats heading into Malta’s search and rescue zone, a newspaper reported on Sunday, citing a secret government deal.
The government declined to comment directly on the report in the Sunday Times of Malta, but told Reuters the Mediterranean state had been working with the Libyan coastguard for many years and always operated within the law.
Under the terms of the deal, when a migrant boat is spotted sailing towards Malta, the island’s armed forces seek the intervention of the Libyan coastguard to intercept them before they enter Malta’s territorial waters, the paper said.
Non-governmental organisations have denounced previous deals by which Italy has directed the Libyan coastguard to pick up migrant boats in Libyan territorial waters, saying refugees face torture and abuse in the lawless north African country.
The Malta deal appears to go a step further by encouraging the Libyan coastguard to intervene beyond its own coastal waters, which extend some 22.2 km (14 miles) from its shore, and into the broad search-and-rescue zone operated by Malta. [...] https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-malta/malta-has-deal-with-libya-coastguard-over-migrant-interceptions-report-idUKKBN1XK0BH?fbclid=IwAR2srj9qOgyQFOQS2CyS6_DGjMVry9YFYuuR3i8u_2PH4wME7UveFT1374

10.11.2019
Exposed: Malta’s secret migrant deal with Libya
Malta has secretly negotiated an agreement with Libya that sees the Armed Forces of Malta coordinating with the Libyan coastguard to intercept migrants headed towards the island and returned to the war-torn North African country. The agreement for “mutual cooperation” was struck between members of the AFM and the Libyan coastguard, with government official Neville Gafà acting as an intermediary. [...] https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/exposed-malts-secret-migrant-deal-with-libya.748800

10.11.2019
Shots fired at sea rescuers: EU supports competing militias in Libya
A German public prosecutor’s office is investigating the shooting of the ship „Alan Kurdi“. Its crew could be caught between the fronts of two coastguards equipped and trained by different EU missions.
With the General Administration for Coastal Security (GACS) and the Libyan Coast Guard and Port Security (LCGPS), two authorities with overlapping functions exist in Libya. The Ministry of Interior Coast Guard is a law enforcement agency operating within the 12-mile zone and along the coast, while the Ministry of Defence Coast Guard is responsible for territorial waters.
In a „marine strategy“, the Libyan unity government in Tripoli intends to reorganise the responsibilities of LCGPS and GACS. The two
responsible ministries are supported in these efforts by the European Union in a „Maritime Sub-Working Group on Libya“ (MSWG). Central actors are the military mission EUNAVFOR MED, which cooperates with the Ministry of Defence, and the EUBAM Libya police mission, in which the EU cooperates with the Libyan Ministry of the Interior. […] 


07.11.2019  
Italy's dubious policies in Libya  
In pursuit of easy solutions for the refugee crisis and lucrative deals, Italy has become complicit in Libya's abuses.  
On October 4, Italian newspaper L'Avvenire revealed that the Italian government was working closely with Abd al-Rahman "Bija" Milad, the head of Libya's infamous Zawiyah coastguard, to stem the flow of refugees from the porous Libyan coast. Bija is a character well-known to human rights groups and United Nations workers. A June 2017 UN Security Council report identified him as someone heavily involved in "smuggling activities" and "the sinking of migrant boats using firearms". 

https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/italy-dubious-policies-libya-191101102013220.html  

28.10.2019  
Libya orders arrest of alleged trafficker who attended Italy migration talks  
Arrest warrant issued for Abd al-Rahman Milad, suspected of drowning dozens of people. The UN-backed government in Libya has said it ordered the arrest of a man described as one of the world’s most notorious human traffickers who was this month revealed to have attended meetings between Italian officials and a Libyan delegation to discuss controls on migration flows from north Africa.  
In a note released on Monday by the interior ministry in Tripoli, authorities said Abd al-Rahman Milad, described by the UN security council as a ruthless human trafficker suspected of drowning dozens of people, was “a wanted man and an arrest warrant was issued against him”. 

So-called phantom arrivals  

06.11.2019  
Ghost landings, parliamentarians in Sardinia to study the phenomenon  
On 6th November the delegation of the Parliamentary Committee for the Control of the Schengen Area, composed of MEP Rosalba Cimino, Senators Tony Chike Iwobi and Elena Testor, visited Sardinia as part of the survey "Management of the phenomenon of migration in the Schengen area, with particular reference to the relevance of the Schengen Agreement and the control and prevention of cross-border activities related to the smuggling of migrants* and trafficking in human beings". The background is the increased number of arrivals of small boats in Sardinia (mostly departing from Algeria) and in Sicily (mostly departing from Tunisia).  
The arrival figures of the Ministry of the Interior reflect this: from 9,944 migrants who reached Italy by sea this year until 8 November, 2,557 people come from Tunisia in first place and 952 from Algeria in fourth place. So far, there have been more arrivals in the autumn months of
September and October than in the summer months. It should be noted that 1,268 people arrived in August while five civilian rescue ships were in operation, while in September only three civilian ships were at sea and some were confiscated at the beginning of the month, whereas 2,498 people arrived in Italy. Once again the argument of the so-called pull factor by civilian rescue ships is not tenable. https://www.unionesarda.it/articolo/news-sardegna/cagliari/2019/11/06/sbarchi-fantasma-parlamentari-in-sardegna-per-studiare-il-fenomeno-136-949355.html

Rescue Operations CM

OCEAN VIKING 104 migrants
18.10.2019
Ocean Viking rescues another 104 migrants
The Ocean Viking has reportedly rescued 104 migrants from a rubber dinghy off the coast of Libya. Among them are 40 minors, ten women and two babies, according to MSF, which operates the migrant rescue ship. The two organizations that jointly run the Ocean Viking ship, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and SOS Mediterranee, released a statement on Wednesday, the Ocean Viking had to wait for about 30 hours until the Italian government assigned them a safe port to land.

New government, new approach to rescue ships
Since the change in government in Italy in August, the country's ports are no longer blocking entry to civilian rescue ships. Under the former interior minister Matteo Salvini, there had been several prolonged stand-offs between migrant rescue ships and the Italian government. New interior minister Luciana Lamorgese seems to be taking a more conciliatory approach.

Sea-Eye sets sail
The Ocean Viking is not the only rescue ship patrolling in the Mediterranean. The organization Sea-Eye announced that its ship Alan Kurdi was resuming its operations on the night between Thursday and Friday.

MSF denounces migrant internment in Libya
Meanwhile, on Thursday MSF also denounced the transfer of more than 100 refugees and migrants in Libya from the Misrata detention camp to two other camps. The organization said the conditions in Libyan detention camps were dangerous and inhumane; with people having no prospect to be released.

MSF criticized that authorities were transferring people to yet another detention camp, instead of releasing them. The United Nations and human rights organizations have long criticized how refugees and migrants are treated in Libya. Many are not only detained, but also physically abused

https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/20260/ocean-viking

30.10.2019
Pozzallo, the 104 migrants on board of the Ocean Viking landed
11.20 Pozzallo: the Ocean Viking landed and the 104 people who were on board have been transferred to the hotspot of Pozzallo. They were rescued on October 18 at sea by the Ocean Viking, the ship of the NGOs SOS Mediterranee and MSF. Forty-one minors and 14 under 15 years. On board also two children aged 2 and 10 months, the first who could land and were taken to the hospital in Modica for breathing difficulties. Mothers with them. On board there were two other pregnant women. Migrants will be relocated according to the Malta agreement. In particular, 70 will go to France and Germany.


50 migrants INTERCEPTED FROM LIBYA IN SAR MALTA - AP-CASE
18.10.2019
AP Twitter: BREAKING: so-called Libyan coastguard intercepts boat from Maltese SAR!
At 21:32 CEST we talked to the coordinating authority, RCC #Malta, who told us that the LYCG had intercepted the boat from Maltese SAR at 34°47’N, 012°37’E - a clear violation of international law!

https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/118530638340878593
AP Twitter: RCC #Malta delegated the operation to an EU-financed militia, who is intercepting the people to a war zone. Malta is fully responsible for this violation of
international conventions - unless the LYCG are going to hand over the people to a vessel going in to a Port of Safety.

https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1185307883552022528

Following the complete thread:

We just alerted @Armed_Forces_MT about a boat in distress in their #SAR zone. On board 50 ppl - reportedly including 10 women & five children. We urge the authorities in #Malta to send a vessel quickly & not delay SAR operations again like at the beginning of this week.

We repeatedly called @Armed_Forces_MT between 15.55 and 17.25 CEST to communicate the new GPS positions of the boat in distress & to ask whether they are taking responsibility for the case but they are again not reachable. We urgently ask the authorities in #Malta to take action!

The #migrants have been at sea for 17 hours & they are urgently asking for help. Our last contact with them was at 17.00 CEST, when they said: „The boat is leaking.” It’s getting dark in the #Med and we still do not know if #Malta is organising a rescue. Don’t let them drown!

https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1185190846565703686

22.10.2019

UNHCR probes Libya-Malta interception in migrant rescue

The U.N. refugee agency is investigating why Malta last week allegedly asked the Libyan coast guard to intercept a migrant boat in a zone of the Mediterranean under Maltese responsibility, in possible violation of maritime law, a U.N. official said Tuesday.

Vincent Cochetel, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees’ special envoy for the central Mediterranean, told reporters in Rome that “there’s some evidence that Malta requested assistance (from) the Libyan coast guard to intervene” in its own search and rescue region on Oct. 18. He said that “we are looking into the reasons of Malta’s request,” including that Malta may have asked Libya to intervene for technical reasons. “The problem is that the migrants were disembarked in Libya. That’s certainly a violation of maritime laws ... It’s clear that Libya isn’t a safe port,” he added.

The Oct. 18 interception was reported by Alarm Phone, an independent hotline for migrants in need of rescue at sea.

The group first received a call and GPS position from the boat carrying 50 migrants, including 10 women and five children, early that afternoon and informed Malta about the case, as it was in the country’s search and rescue region.

“We will take care of everything” a Maltese officer on duty told an Alarm Phone activist at 2:40 p.m., according to a transcript of the call provided to the Associated Press by Alarm Phone.

But in the hours following the first contact, Malta’s rescue and coordination center stopped answering calls from Alarm Phone, which attempted to follow up on the rescue. By 5 p.m. the boat reported it was leaking and later that a helicopter was flying over it.

At 9:30 pm, nearly seven hours later, Malta informed Alarm Phone that the boat had been intercepted by the EU-trained Libyan coast guard, some 41 nautical miles from the Italian island of Lampedusa and 110 nautical miles from Tripoli. The Libyan coast guard did not answer repeated requests from AP about the case. The Maltese government declined to comment about the case, which could also raise human rights issues.

According to international maritime law, people rescued at sea should be taken to the nearest port of safety. But migrants rescued by the Libyan coast guard are returned to the war-torn country and sent to EU-funded detention centers where many are victims of extortion, sexual abuse and human trafficking.

According to the UNHCR there are currently 650,000 migrants in Libya.

According to the transcript, Maltese authorities justified the interception saying that the Libyans “had (taken) the case earlier, outside the Maltese Search and Rescue region.”

Ever since Libya registered a massive search-and-rescue area of the Mediterranean Sea last year, the European Union left the task of migrant rescues largely to the nation currently at war. As a result, sea arrivals to Italy dropped dramatically from 21,426 from January 1 to October 9 of last year, to 7,939 in the same period this year. The same did not happen in the tiny European archipelago nation of Malta, which continued being responsible for search-and-rescue in waters close to the Italian island of Lampedusa and north of Libya’s search-and-rescue area. So far this year Malta has seen
nearly 3,000 migrant arrivals by sea compared to 989 in the same period last year.

UNHCR’s Cochetel said it was not the first time Malta was allegedly accused of delegating a rescue to the Libyan coast guard. But he warned against seeing this as a new level of outsourcing of migrant rescues.

“We had some allegations that this had already happened in the past,” he said, but added that there was “no evidence for now that this is becoming a common practice.”

https://apnews.com/24b51f7a5aa54441bedb9a04fa9d6eb9b

23.10.2019
UNHCR to investigate Malta over allegations of ignoring distressed migrants

Malta is being investigated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for asking the Libyan coastguard for help in saving a migrant boat in an area that falls under Malta’s responsibility. The alleged incident took place on October 18 and is potentially a violation of maritime law.

“We are looking into the reasons of Malta’s request,” said the UNHCR’s Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean, Vincent Cochetel from Rome. “...including that Malta may have asked Libya to intervene for technical reasons.”

“The problem is that the migrants were disembarked in Libya. That’s certainly a violation of maritime laws. It’s clear that Libya isn’t a safe port.”

“Lack of Communication”

The incident was first highlighted by Alarm Phone, a volunteer group that helps those in trouble at sea find the nearest coastguard.

It says it received a call in the early afternoon of October 18 as well as a GPS position from a person on a boat carrying 50 migrants, including 10 women and five children.

Alarm Phone says it informed Malta about the case as it was in the country’s search and rescue region and - according to a transcript of the call - was told by the Maltese officer on duty that “we will take care of everything.”

When Alarm Phone tried to follow up on the rescue, it says Malta’s search and rescue facility stopped answering its calls and seven hours later Alarm Phone was told that the boat had been intercepted by the Libyan coastguard, around 41 nautical miles from the Italian island of Lampedusa and 110 nautical miles from Tripoli.

Speaking from Germany, founder of Alarm Phone Hagen Kopp said: “This is not the first time that Malta has delayed its operation after receiving information about migrants in distress. Sometimes we’ve had people waiting for up to 17 hours before they are rescued. In the past few weeks, I know of four cases myself where this has occurred. We are now in the process of contacting other organisations such as UNHCR and compiling a file to put pressure on the Maltese government to react to distress calls quicker.”

“Our main reason for anger, is the lack of communication. The Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) will not talk to us or give us information or confirm they are taking over responsibility of the situation. So, for this reason we feel we need to scandalise it. When we try and reach AFM or the government by phone or email, they ignore us and will not respond. They also give us a lot of push back when it comes to the definition of what a boat full of people in distress actually means.”

“Often, they will tell us that the boat is still moving, and people are alive onboard, so there is no need for a rescue. But Malta is not even complying with its own agreement and promises to the European Union by taking care of its own waters. Sending people back to Libya and to the hell of detention camps is a strong violation of human rights.”

“What is also frustrating is that, if the Maltese worked with us, people in need would be processed quicker and then relocated out of Malta. We are not suggesting that all people who land in Malta, should be taken care of by the Maltese government. But logistically it is in a position where this will condition to happen, so if we can create a strong, quick relocation process and move people out quickly it will be easier. And that comes from good communication from all sides, which is not happening now.”

A spokesperson from the AFM said it had “no comment” when approached by the Times of Malta, while the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security failed to return phonecalls.

UNHCR’s Mr Cochetel said it was not the first time Malta was accused of delegating a rescue to the Libyan coastguard and said this is not necessarily a new level of deflecting migrant rescues.

He did confirm that there have been allegations in the past, but added there is “no evidence for now that this is becoming a common practice.”

Regarding the Malta case and Libyan SAR find here in GERMAN some important information by the German scientific service, which investigates the law concerning certain topics
https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/525660/e43d2ccfb3b06c933f9276a86e696c8d-2-2075-17-pdf-data.pdf

ALAN KURDI - 91 migrants – attacked from so-called Libyan CG
28.10.2019
Libya authorities 'fire warning shots' at migrant rescue ship
Libyan authorities fired warning shots in the air and pointed mounted guns at rescuers and migrants, according to the humanitarian group Sea-Eye. A group spokesman said the act was unprecedented.

German NGO Sea-Eye said one of its vessels was threatened by masked Libyan security forces who fired warning shots as it rescued 90 migrants from a lifeboat on Saturday.
The crew aboard the NGO ship, named Alan Kurdi, rescued the migrants after receiving a distress call from people aboard the lifeboat off the coast of Libya.
Sea-Eye spokesman Gorden Isler said the Libyan boats arrived as the rescuers were handing life jackets to men and women on a white dinghy off the coast of Libya, hampering rescue efforts. He said the masked men fired "warning shots" and pointed mounted guns at the rescue crew and the migrants, some of whom had jumped into the water, before retreating.

Shock at sea
"We are in shock, we have never been threatened in this way," Isler told AFP, adding that EU member states were allowing this "brutal behavior". "We were able to get 90 people on board, including two women," Isler said. He added that a pregnant woman rescued from the dinghy may have suffered a miscarriage during the incident. Saturday's operation comes a week after 104 people were rescued just off the coast of Libya by the Ocean Viking ship, run by NGOs SOS Mediterranee and Doctors Without Borders. The route through Libya to reach Europe is a popular path for migrants from East Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East. Last month, Italy, France, Germany and Malta proposed a system for automatically distributing asylum-seekers across the EU to prevent rescue ships from being stranded at sea.

On Sunday 27, a Nigerian woman called Faith, who the organization reported is four months pregnant, was taken off the Alan Kurdi. The organization said they "feared for her unborn baby," the German news agency EPD (Protestant Press Agency) reported that she was "bleeding."

One pregnant woman evacuated

29.10.2019
Ocean Viking, Alan Kurdi given permission to dock
The two rescue ships Alan Kurdi and Ocean Viking were assigned a safe harbor at the Italian port of Pozzallo in Sicily. The nearly 200 migrants will be distributed to France, Germany and Italy, according to the private rescue organization SOS Mediterranee. A pregnant woman had been evacuated over the weekend, and one man remains missing since the Alan Kurdi rescued 91 migrants on Saturday.
104 migrants on board the Ocean Viking will be taken to the Sicilian port of Pozzallo, the French aid organization SOS Mediterranee reported on Tuesday. The permission by the Italian authorities comes 11 days after the Ocean Viking had rescued the migrants from a rubber dinghy off Libya on October 18.
The German-run ship Alan Kurdi has also received the green light for disembarkation of the 90 migrants it had taken on board Saturday. The Alan Kurdi will also head to the port of Pozzallo.

Threatened by Libyan authorities
The ship Alan Kurdi made the news after reporting that it had been “blocked and threatened by Libyan forces” during its rescue of 90 people on Saturday. The organization reported that shots were fired into the air and the water during the rescue; and later one young man reported that his brother was missing. It is not yet clear whether he drowned during the rescue or was taken by the Libyan authorities.

One pregnant woman evacuated

On Sunday 27, a Nigerian woman called Faith, who the organization reported is four months pregnant, was taken off the Alan Kurdi. The organization said they “feared for her unborn baby,” the German news agency EPD (Protestant Press Agency) reported that she was “bleeding.” It has not yet been reported what has happened
to Faith and her unborn baby since. Sea Eye had since then tweeted repeatedly that things are difficult on board, especially after the ship was hit by bad weather and that they urgently need a safe port. Among the 104 migrants on board the Ocean Viking rescued on October 18 are “two babies, six young kids, eight teenage girls and 10 women.” The NGOs that operate the Ocean Viking too had stated that “it is truly outrageous that European governments would think it’s ok to leave these vulnerable people stranded at sea for over a week.” The Spanish private rescue Organization Open Arms reported that it also rescued 44 migrants at sea over the weekend. They did however receive a safe haven in Malta within 24 hours.

'Left in limbo'

Louise Guillaumat the deputy director of SOS Méditerranée operations had released a press release on Monday. In it, she had called on a “broad coalition of European states to urgently facilitate the assignment of a port to the Ocean Viking and to finally put in place a predictable and coordinated disembarkation mechanism as discussed in Luxembourg earlier this month.” She said that the “104 survivors are once again left in limbo on the deck of a rescue ship with no solution for their disembarkation in sight.” On board the Ocean Viking, she said there were 41 children, the vast majority, 76%, “minors reported to be traveling unaccompanied, without a parent or guardian.” MSF head of Mission Michael Fark added that “every patient seen in the MSF clinic so far has reported to have suffered or been witness to violence or sexual violence at some point in their journey.

https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/20451/ocean-viking-alan-kurdi-given-permission-to-dock

11.11.2019
Request in the German Bundestag about the case of 18 October

The LINKE in the German Bundestag requested about the case of 18th of October with the interception by Libyans in Maltese SAR zone. The answer is quite nothing: The German government knows the reports about the case, but does not know more. Exterior Minister Maas was in Libya and saw differences between detention centers, but the general situation in Libya is not acceptable and the government is asking the Libyans to close down the DCs. Concerning sea rescue there are some open questions and the government condemns the intervention against Alan Kurdi and wants clarifications.


Glossary

AP: Alarm Phone

IOM: International Organisation of Migration
Migrant Rescue Watch: Account of R. Gowans, a person that seems to know a lot about the so called Libyan Coast Guard. We do not share his opinion about the so-called LCG and the SAR NGOs.
So-called LCG: so-called Libyan Coast Guard. These Coast Guard units since long time are the subject of criticism because of the human rights violations they have committed, their frequent unavailability and the impossibility of attributing them to a government or to militias, for this we call them "so-called" Coast Guards.