



**COVID19 – CoronaUpdate Italy
borderline-europe, Sicily – Part 20
Palermo, 15.02.2021**



COVID19 – CoronaUpdate Italy borderline-europe, Sicily – Part 20 Palermo, 11.02.2021

Note: as the corona situation currently determines all aspects of life, in future we will also include important events in these two-weekly short updates that are not directly related to the disease and its consequences.

Political and social situation

In January 2021, the Italian government broke up with the **resignation of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte**. Matteo Renzi of the small party Italia Viva had called for the break. But what happens now remains to be seen (as of 11 February). The right-wing Matteo Salvini (Lega) unexpectedly gave the green light for the new **Draghi government**.

This has put the Democratic Party in the position of having to accept an uncomfortable alliance that only a few days before had been opposed by practically the entire leadership. Indeed, the presence of the Lega seems to imply a shift to the right of the political-programmatic axis of the government led by Mario Draghi, forcing the other parties of the majority to compromise on important points of their programme. The Democratic Party (PD) reiterated that it considers the Salvini decrees inhumane and unsafe: "They had the undeclared purpose of making international protection for tens of thousands of people fleeing hunger and war effectively impossible, with the aggravating circumstance that many people were expelled from structures and reception routes and thus became 'invisible'. In addition, there was the clear symbolic charge of these decrees: the migrant was the intruder to be rejected who "sacrificed humanity and justice" for it. It now seems certain that Matteo Salvini will be part of the new government. What this means and whether the PD will actually maintain its somewhat more pro-migration stance remains to be seen. We will have a closer look at the new government in our next newsletter "Streiflicht" at the beginning of March.

About Rescue at Sea

Since 4 February not only the spring-like weather, but also political changes in **Libya** and **Italy** have led to the **most intense days on the Mediterranean in many months**. Sea Watch's **Moonbird** monitoring aircraft spotted eight boats in distress in one day alone, each with several hundred people on board. The Alarm Phone repeatedly informed the authorities about precarious emergencies at sea, such as a boat with 20 people that was only rescued by a **merchant ship** after five days in the Mediterranean and brought to Sardinia. The civilian rescue ship Astral of the NGO **Open Arms** rescued 47 people on 5 February, who were subsequently taken over by the **Italian coast guard** and brought to Lampedusa.

After rescuing 424 people in four operations, the NGO SOS Méditerranée's ship **Ocean Viking** has been given the green light to dock in the port of **Augusta**, Sicily. Two people, a **pregnant woman** in critical condition and her partner, were evacuated to Malta. The 422 people on board, with the exception of the unaccompanied minors, are transferred to the quarantine ship GNV Rhapsody. 71 minors are transferred to the initial reception centre in Pozzallo, Sicily. There were 49 Covid-19 positive persons on board, including 8 unaccompanied minors. The crew on the Ocean Viking will also undergo an obligatory **quarantine of 14 days**. Some of the survivors are in a precarious state of health: a particularly dramatic case under observation is a young **Sudanese** man who suffered a severe head injury after being violently beaten in Libya a week ago. His wound is infected and half his face is deformed, he can only see with one eye. Hopes of escaping the violence in the civil war country of Libya have been dashed for many people; according to official IOM figures, **1,487** people were returned to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard between 2 and 8 February. Survivors repeatedly report the **human rights violations** they have to endure in Libya; torture and sexual violence.

On 4 February, a [new ministerial decree](#) was issued that **determines the procedures for sea rescues (Decree No. 45)**. The last decree of this kind dates back to 1996. It is now clearly stated that rescues do not end with the boarding of the rescued persons, but with their transfer to a safe port (with access to the asylum procedure). Particularly important and a real novum in the new Italian Maritime Rescue (SAR) Plan is paragraph 240 on activities outside the area of interest of the IMRCC (International Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, which is based in Rome for the central Mediterranean), according to which the Central Command of the Italian Coast Guard maintains contact with foreign control centres that are called to search and rescue operations in the areas of their respective jurisdiction.

The IMRCC can coordinate the sea rescue until a competent control centre (in whose sea rescue zone the incident occurred) can take over. But what does this mean for rescues in the Libyan SAR zone, for example? What guarantees for the protection of human rights as well as the right to life do the Libyan authorities offer to those rescued? We know the answer to this question. But: The National SAR Plan 2020 specifies the obligations of cooperation between neighbouring SAR holder states. The Coordination Unit, which was informed about the SAR event, assesses the request for cooperation with other MRCCs in terms of the availability of their own SAR resources within the whole region, regardless of the existence of bilateral or regional agreements on the subject. This provision seems to be of utmost importance and is an important innovation also in view of the cases of conflict with the Maltese authorities that have arisen in recent years, and in particular after the case of 11 October 2013, in which hundreds of migrants lost their lives and on which a criminal case is currently pending before the court in Rome.



Commemoration of those who died at sea, Palermo.
Photo: Giuseppe Mazzola

The fifth chapter, in particular item 530, provides for the participation of foreign aircraft and ships in SAR operations. In this context, particular provision is made for the case of the cooperation of foreign non-military aircraft. Their deployment must be formalised in writing by the Italian Central Command (IMRCC) via the corresponding Central Command (MRCC) of the flag state. In this way, the Code of Conduct for SAR NGOs issued in 2017 by the then Italian Minister of the Interior Minniti is taken up again. In the future, it is foreseeable that the remaining search and rescue activities of the NGOs, insofar as they are still able to act freely, will increasingly be controlled by the coordinating commands of the Italian coast guard.

Some of the positive changes of the decree seem to have been demonstrated in the first week of February: the Italian Coast Guard rescued in two cases at a distance of **20** and **22** nautical miles (including the case of the Astral mentioned above). This has not happened since 2018, when under the then right-wing Interior Minister Salvini, it was decided that the coast guard could no longer rescue beyond territorial limits (12 nautical miles).

Across Europe, a [day of remembrance](#) for **91 people missing at sea** was held on **9 February** with many different actions. The migrants on the boat reported to the Alarm Phone exactly one year ago, but no one rushed to their rescue. 91 people drowned. Without the [Alarm Phone](#), we wouldn't even know about it. A commemoration throughout Europe of all "invisible boat accidents".



Commemoration of those who died at sea, Palermo.
Photo: Giuseppe Mazzola

Situation of Refugees

As in previous months, arriving refugees are taken to quarantine ships. Currently, two such ferries rented by the government are in operation. Only the unaccompanied minors are brought ashore to centres. But families, pregnant women and accompanied children still have to spend their quarantine on the ships (see previous Corona updates on this issue). At the end of the first week of February, 260 refugees were transferred from the quarantine ship to the [centre in Bari](#) (Puglia). There are now 660 (!) people in the centre, including 40 children. Even if only those who have tested negative are brought to the centres, the risk of infection in such large centres is enormous.

In August, the NIHMP (a public agency of the National Health Service) published a [first study on Corona in community shelters](#). It was conducted from 1 February to 12 June 2020. Overall, larger facilities naturally had higher rates of infection, with transitional emergency centres (CAS) and detention centres being the most affected. According to the survey, 0.38% of the residents had tested positive for the virus. The NIHMP survey involved 5,038 of the 6,837 reception centres surveyed by the Ministry of the Interior, i.e. three out of four centres. What happened from July 2020 onwards will only be known in the next survey, an agreement on which the NIHMP has concluded with the Ministry of the Interior.

A coordinated and centralised registration of Covid 19 cases in collective accommodation does not yet exist in Italy. The first study shows

that in most cases it was not possible to ensure 100% isolation and quarantine in the shelters. In 51% of the suspected cases, quarantine was ordered within the shelter, often with shared sanitary facilities. Instead, of the confirmed cases, three out of four experienced quarantine outside the home, one out of four inside the home and only half of them had a single room with a private bathroom, another 23% shared a room with other positives and 8.2% had a single room with a shared bathroom. It remains to be seen what the second survey will bring.

For more information on the situation in Italy, see our [Steiflicht Italien](#) and our previous [Corona updates on our homepage](#).

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