



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily – Part 1
Palermo, 24.03.2021



Scirocco borderline-europe, Sicily – Part 1

Palermo, 24.03.2021

Scirocco [ʃiˈrɔkko-Sherocco] is a south-easterly, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean to Sicily and Italy's north for often only a few hours. This short info in the age of the pandemic will be published from March 2021 in an approx. bi-weekly rhythm. The Scirocco replaces the Corona Update Italy.

Political and Social Situation

Together with ministers from Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Malta (Med5), the [Italian Minister of the Interior](#), Luciana Lamorgese, called for the establishment of an EU-wide return mechanism at a meeting in Athens in mid-March in order to relieve the burden on the EU border states. This mechanism is already part of the proposal for a migration and asylum pact presented by the EU Commission in September 2020 and includes the possibility for other EU states – under the name of solidarity – to carry out repatriations for the Mediterranean states. Apart from the cooperation within the EU, Lamorgese also contacted the [Libyan Minister of the Interior](#) Khaled Mazen to discuss the departures from Libya. [Asked](#) how she intends to deal with the strong increase of autonomous arrivals, Lamorgese said that this is exactly why they met in Athens and demanded that the EU Commission extends the agreements with the countries of departure. In this way, departures could be prevented and deportations facilitated. The direction of the new government thus leaves no doubt about a continuation of the policy of separation.

In these weeks in which (as we [have already reported](#)) one NGO after another is being criminalised, for once there is also good news. The trial of [two activists](#) investigated for aiding and abetting illegal entry has been

dropped by the court in Imperia, northern Italy, near the French border. The events date back to June 26, 2017, when a precarious camp where 400 people were living was evicted. These then homeless people subsequently made their way towards France, accompanied by some volunteers and activists who offered material and medical support. The two activists on trial had been accused of helping migrants cross the border into



Commemoration of the dead at sea, Palermo, 2021

France. However, due to very weak evidence, the preliminary hearings in this case were not followed by an indictment, as it is often the case, but by a dismissal of the case.

[Action Aid](#) published an interesting investigation in March 2021. The NGO examined 317 European tenders and tracked what happened with the funds. From 2015 to 2020, one billion 337 million euros were spent in Italy on migration across the central Mediterranean route. Italy contributed 60 %, the EU 40 %. But: almost half of the money went to border control, "while only 1 % was used for the implementation of legal entry routes, i.e., the authorised arrival of migrants on Italian and European territory."

About Rescue at Sea

In March, we had to record over 100 deaths in the Mediterranean again. On March 9, two boats capsized off the [Tunisian coast](#). 39 people, including four children, did not survive. But it is feared that even more people lost their lives. 165 survivors, however, were

brought back to Tunisia. As the economic and social situation in Tunisia worsened, there have recently been more and more attempts to reach Europe from the Maghreb state.

On March 18, another tragedy occurred. The outboard engine of a boat with over 100 people on board caught fire off the Libyan coast. The [Alarm Phone](#), alerted by people on board, reported the boat to the so-called Libyan Coast Guard to enable a quick rescue. However, the Coast Guard did not react, nor did the rescue centres in Malta and Rome. It took almost 10 hours before a fishing boat rescued 45 survivors, several with severe burns. At least 60 people died due to the inaction of the authorities.

Meanwhile, something very unusual happened: the rescue ship Ocean Viking was asked by a [Libyan patrol boat](#) to rescue [11 people](#) from a boat filling with water 40 nautical miles off the Libyan coast. Among the refugees were two women, a baby and three children who were vomiting repeatedly. When the Ocean Viking arrived at the boat, the Libyan patrol boat was already on the scene but did not intervene. While the people were being brought on board the rescue vessel, the Ocean Viking crew again experienced something extraordinary. One person asked to go back to Libya with the patrol boat. Never before has anyone wanted to return to Libya voluntarily, where people face imprisonment, torture and other human rights abuses. But we don't know the personal reasons of this person, many also have to leave their wives, children or other relatives or friends behind, which is hard to bear. One day later, the Ocean Viking rescued another [106 people](#) from distress at sea. With 116 rescued people on board and increasingly bad weather conditions, it was only on March 23, after five days and [five requests](#) for a safe harbour, that the ship was allowed to dock in [Augusta](#), Sicily.

The Sea-Watch 3 had arrived in Sicily in early March with 363 rescued people. As soon as the quarantine period (of 16 days) was over, the Coast Guard was at the dock where the ship was moored to carry out a Port State Control. The result: once again the Sea-Watch 3 was [seized](#) for administrative reasons. It had too many people on board (sic!). In addition, the ship was not registered as a sea rescue ship and therefore not for sea rescue. [Sea-Watch](#) rightly asked: "Should we have let 363 people die because of the indifference of the authorities who continue to offer no alternative to our presence at sea?" Another accusation against Sea-Watch had been the lack of communication about the entry into port, which had jeopardised maritime safety.



Sea-Watch 4 in the port of Palermo 2021, Photo: Giuseppe Mazzola

With these and other complaints leading to the arrest, the Italian coast guard contradicted the regional administrative court in Palermo, which had released [Sea-Watch 4](#), which had been arrested for similar reasons, from its blockade during the rescue operation of Sea-Watch 3.

Situation of Refugees

Little is reported about [women refugees](#). It is true that mainly male migrants come to Europe via the Mediterranean. But behind them is often the family, since migration to Europe is usually a family project – and thus also affects women, who question what happens to their relatives when they disappear on the Mediterranean. Jalil, mother of two

drowned Tunisians, asked to be allowed to travel to Palermo with her daughter and the girlfriend of one of her sons for the exhumation and transport of the bodies to Tunisia. She is just one of many mothers and sisters who are searching for missing persons in the Mediterranean, on quarantine ships or detention centres. [Donatella and her husband Hussein](#), who has been distributing flyers to find his 19-year-old brother who has been



91 dead – Alarm Phone remembrance of those who died in a tragedy in February 2020

missing since a shipwreck at the end of February, are among those who get no answers to their questions. "No institution helps us, nobody tells us where he is, we don't know anything more about him," they say.

We also know little about the mentally ill Souad, who saw [no way out](#). When she was finally taken from the quarantine ship to a centre, she threw herself out of the window. What is certain, however, is that no attention was paid to her special need for protection because of her mental situation.

In the meantime, reports about the situation of refugees in Sicily are also arriving in Germany. A man in Hamburg, for example, reported about the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea and the subsequent quarantine in Sicily, which lasted [almost 40 days](#): "It was one of the most miserable times in my life, I think. Too many people in a place that was not clean, the food was very bad. There were no rooms, only halls, each with about 30 people. Yet the hall was not very

big. It was overcrowded and we could hardly sleep at night because of the noise. There were migrants from different countries and different cultures, which sometimes led to verbal or even physical arguments. Sometimes it was cold. I was on my own." As 20 out of about 400 people were tested positive for the Corona virus after the first 20 days of quarantine, everyone had to stay for another 15-20 days. "The security staff did not treat the migrants fairly. Some migrants were beaten up. Sometimes it was because migrants were fighting with each other, or because they were trying to escape because the conditions were really miserable, but they were caught. I saw people being beaten by the security staff and by the police. Despite the security forces in the camp and everything, some people managed to escape from the camp. One tried to escape and was hit by a car and killed."

Unfortunately, conditions at the facility have not improved to date. Most recently, on March 21, a group peacefully [protested](#) on the roof of the centre to be transferred.

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

Contact

[borderline-europe](#)
Menschenrecht ohne Grenzen e.V.
<https://www.borderline-europe.de/>
mail@borderline-europe.de
jg@borderline-europe.de