



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily - Part 3
Palermo, 22.04.2021



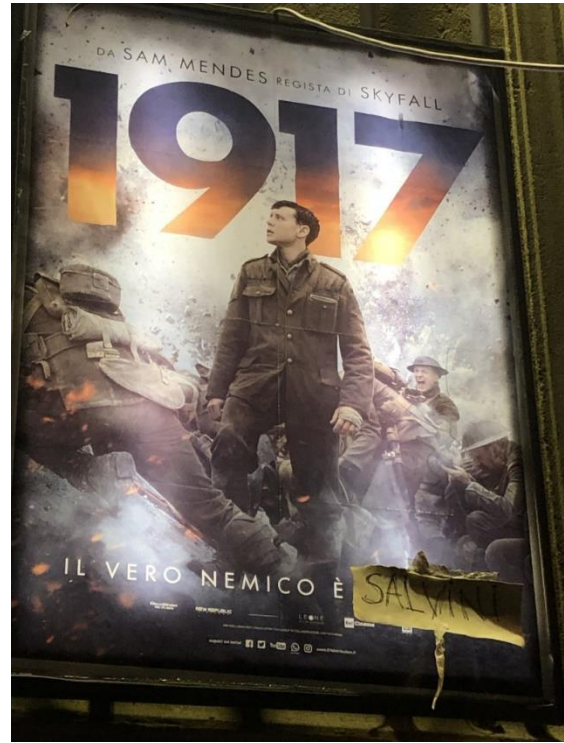
Scirocco borderline-europe, Sicily - Part 3

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

Political and Social Situation

Unlawful detention and abuse of authority are the charges against the former Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini in the trial of the Spanish sea rescue NGO Proactiva Open Arms in Palermo. On April 17, at the end of the preliminary hearing, the court in Palermo decided to [initiate the trial against Salvini](#). With the blockade of the Open Arms in August 2019, Salvini had wanted to extort a [quick redistribution of refugees](#) rescued at sea from the EU. Those who suffered were the refugees, who in the case of the Open Arms had to wait 21 days at sea until they could go ashore. Salvini condemns this decision of the court as a [political trial against him](#). But it is not the judges in Palermo, who are doing their job of clarification, who are making a political case out of it, but Salvini himself. A truly questionable political trial is the one of the coast guard ship Gregoretto, on which refugees were also stuck for several days due to Salvini's order to close the ports. The preliminary hearing is taking place in Catania at the same time. Here, the public prosecutor's office is calling for the case against Salvini to be dropped. But the Gregoretto is Italian territory, says lawyer Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo. The same rights should apply as in an Italian police barracks: no one may be held there for more than 48 hours without being charged. In the Gregoretto case, the judiciary may be gambling away the rule of law.



"The real enemy is Salvini" – pasted-over film poster at an anti-Salvini demo in Palermo

Just as in the case of the illegal wiretapping of journalists and lawyers in [the Luventa case](#).

After two visits by the Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio and the subsequent visit by Prime Minister Mario Draghi to Tripoli, [Minister of the Interior Luciana Lamorgese](#) has now also rushed to Libya for half a day. There she met with her Libyan counterpart Khaled Tijani and the President of the Presidential Council Mohamed Younis Ahmed al Menfi as well as with the new President of the country, Abdelhamid Dbeibah. Lamorgese reaffirmed the cooperation between the two countries, including the one in the field of migration. Italy would lobby the EU to provide more assistance to Libya, for example through the activities of the UNHCR and the IOM. The Libyan authorities are to be invited to Rome for a more detailed discussion. Libya, on the other hand, requested new funding for training and cooperation courses for "police aviation, coastal security and other specialised courses". So far, this aid, which has been going to Libya for a long time, has not contributed in any way to improving the situation of migrants and refugees in Libya. [More than 785 million euros](#) have not prevented the

deaths at sea. In 2020 alone, around 12,000 people were pushed back to Libya, where they are known to be locked up in official and unofficial detention centres. There is now to be fig-leaf-aid for this: Lamorgese has announced that there might be a humanitarian corridor to Italy that could be used to fly in "a considerable" number of imprisoned migrants. It is clear that Italy is afraid of the summer season, when more boats with refugees leave. This is the only explanation for Italy's four state visits to Libya since December 2020.

About Rescue at Sea

For a long time, it seemed quiet on the central Mediterranean. However, after two weeks of neither arrivals nor push-backs to Libya, there was once again terrible news. Only a few nautical miles off the Tunisian coast, a boat presumably carrying 100 people was [shipwrecked](#). Three survivors were rescued and [41 bodies](#) recovered. But it is likely that the death toll is even higher. Once again, too many people lost their lives at a border that should not exist.

Some of the civilian sea rescue vessels could be deployed again. The [Alan Kurdi](#), which had been blocked in the Sardinian port of Olbia for six months, was allowed to set off for



"Open for migrants". In front of the high security wing where the start of the trial against Salvini was announced. Photo: Silvia Di Meo

Spain, but only for maintenance and not yet for sea rescue operations in the central Mediterranean. The [Ocean Viking](#), on the other

hand, had already set off and only had to seek shelter in the Sicilian port of Syracuse due to bad weather. On 17 April, the [SEA-EYE 4](#) also set off from Rostock, northern Germany, on its first mission. However, on the same day, coinciding with the announcement that Matteo Salvini will be tried in the Open Arms case, a 17-hour port state control was carried out on this same [Open Arms](#) until something was found that led to an administrative seizure.

The seizure of the Open Arms seems to be an act of revenge for the trial opening against Salvini, according to Oscar Camps, founder of Proactiva Open Arms. If [every Italian merchant ship abroad](#) was subjected to a meticulous port state control as the NGOs, it would put a heavy strain on Italy's economy due to the massive deficiencies on many ships, says Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo.

Situation of the refugees

As reported in the last [Scirocco](#), unaccompanied minor refugees have recently been arriving in the southern Italian islands in increasing numbers. According to statistics, [unaccompanied minors](#) represent [14 %](#) of the arrivals. UNICEF and Save the Children have set up a project to provide psychological first aid, information on their rights, timely assessment of situations of vulnerability and specific protection issues, such as those related to gender-based violence. Thanks to this programme, these NGOs report that 404 unaccompanied minors (including 33 girls) have been assisted in Lampedusa. But whether this is really effective is questionable. After arrival, they are transferred to Sicily and have to spend a two-week quarantine period on land. After the quarantine period, many of them try to fend for themselves. This is not easy, especially in times of the pandemic. The advice centres keep hearing that the unaccompanied minors sleep unprotected at railway stations in the hope of getting further north, as was the case in Palermo. Often they are also picked

up at the northern borders; in 2020, for example, 200 unaccompanied minors were returned to Ventimiglia at the French border.

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

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#OpenPorts. Photo: Silvia Di Meo