



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily - Part 5
Palermo, 20.05.2021



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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

The Gregoretti case (we reported [here](#) and [here](#)) was closed on May, 10. As expected, there will be [no trial](#) against the former Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini. The Italian coast guard ship was not allowed to enter an Italian port from July, 27 to July, 31 with 130 rescued people on board because Salvini had not given the permission. Because of that he was accused of deprivation of liberty and abuse of office. The behaviour of the [judge](#) responsible for the trial, Nunzio Sarpietro, was much criticised, including by the Area Judges Association. Sarpietro gave an interview to the Italian daily Corriere della Sera even before the reasons for the decision were published. There he said, among other things: "I have not found any violation of international and national law. Salvini has complied with conventions by arranging the rescue of migrants in distress and delaying disembarkation by two or three days, an option granted to him by an administrative measure of February 2019." Moreover, Sarpietro said, an indictment against Salvini would also have led to charges against former prime minister Giuseppe Conte and then-ministers Luigi di Maio and Danilo Toninelli, who did not object to Salvini's closed ports. So that means that a case is simply dropped because they did not want to take action against these members of the government as well? Furthermore, Sarpietro is said to have said that this case should not be handled by young colleagues because it is very complex and media-sensitive. He thus publicly belittled

the competence of younger colleagues who are very much involved in demanding processes. It remains to be seen how Sarpietro will justify his decision, which must be made within 30 days. How can an "administrative order" carry more weight than laws and international conventions?



Porto Empedocle awaiting the arrival of the Sea-Watch 3, photo from Borderline Sicilia's stock.

The legal proceedings against [Carola Rackete](#) are closed. This was announced on May, 19 by the investigating judge Alessandra Vella (Agrigento). Vella accepted the request of the public prosecutor Luigi Patronaggio to close the case. The commander of the Sea-Watch had been arrested two years ago for resistance and violence against a warship when, after 17 days of waiting with 42 rescued people on board, she finally sailed into the port of Lampedusa without permission. Safety on board could no longer be guaranteed. The court thus recognises the necessity of sea rescue and bringing rescued persons to a safe port.

Criminalisation through phone tapping has taken on even greater proportions than first thought. We reported [here](#) on the illegal wire-tapping of lawyers and journalists in the case of the rescue ship Luventa, which was established in Trapani in August 2017. Within the framework of the "Xenia" investigation, in which mainly the former mayor of Riace, Mimmo Luciano, was investigated, it has now become known [that 33 journalists were wiretapped](#). Luciano had set up a project in Riace to welcome refugees, which was a thorn in the side of the authorities. He was arrested, but then rehabilitated, but only after he lost his position as mayor. The 33 intercepted journalists, like some of those intercepted in the Luventa case, are not

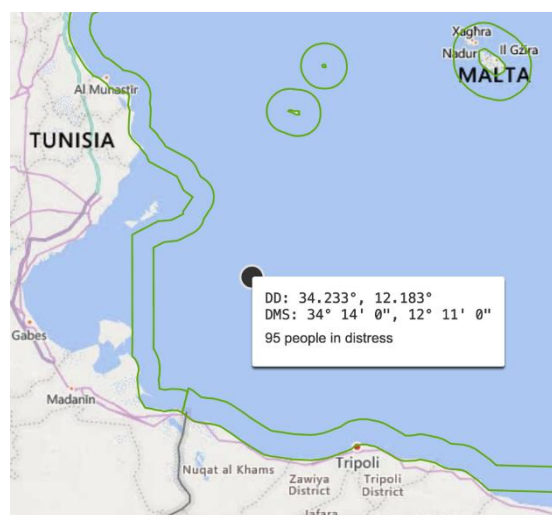
among the accused. Nevertheless, all their data is in the files in order to discredit them. In this way, politics and the judiciary have been playing into each other's hands for years and promoting an anti-migration attitude among the population. People are criminalised because they are interested in how the authorities and states deal with refugees.

About Rescue at Sea

At the beginning of May, the [Sea-Watch 4](#) brought 455 people to Trapani and had to undergo the usual quarantine. But as it happens so often, the regional administrative court decided on the administrative seizure and thus immobilisation of the ship. It was only on March, 2 that the Sea-Watch 4 was liberated after [six months](#) of blockade. Once again, alleged deficiencies in safety and maritime protection were found.

Shortly afterwards, it was again shown that the narrative of the pull-factor by sea rescue NGOs is not true. Within 24 hours, [more than 2,200 people](#) arrived on the island of Lampedusa on a total of 21 boats, while not a single sea rescue vessel was operating in the central Mediterranean. The Italian coast guard and the financial police brought the people ashore. Most of the time they waited until the respective boat had made it into Italian waters. Only once they sailed out [25 nautical miles off the coast](#) for the rescue. Not all of those who left Libya that day made it to Europe. [More than 700 people](#) were intercepted by the so-called Libyan coast guard and taken back to the civil war country. In [Tunisia](#), 345 people have already been stopped on land from making their way. The [Alarm Phone](#) also reported six boats in distress. It is not clear what happened to all of them.

In mid-May, Doctors without Borders (MSF) announced that they would soon be in a mission with the new sea rescue ship [Geo Barents](#). With a length of over 75 metres, it is a particularly large civil sea rescue ship.



Boat in distress, source: Alarm Phone

The [Aita Mari](#) and the [SEA-EYE 4](#) also set out for the central Mediterranean. In six operations, the latter rescued 415 people (150 of them minors) in its first mission. After the Palermo mayor [Loluca Orlando](#) had announced the willingness to let the people land in Palermo, the SEA-EYE 4 had set off towards the Sicilian capital. But late in the evening, the responsible authorities ordered the port of [Pozzallo](#) to dock. This means that people will have to spend two more grueling nights at sea. The reason for this should be clear: no attention is to be paid to Palermo, which is welcoming.

Situation of the refugees

Even though arrivals of refugees on [Lampedusa](#) are nothing new, the small Sicilian island was completely overtaxed. Not for two years had so many people arrived in such a short time. The authorities provided neither (adequate) accommodation nor food. The hotspot was overcrowded with 999 people, four to five times its actual capacity, and over 700 people had to [spend the night on the pier](#) where they had arrived. They did not get water until around 10am the next morning.

[Medical care](#), which is of particular importance in pandemic times, was not provided either.

Only four people are responsible for medical check-ups and a facility for isolation in Covid-19 cases is non-existent.

In the days following the arrival, the people were eventually transferred to unacceptable quarantine ships or centres in Sicily. A proper arrival in Europe should be different.

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

Contact

borderline-europe
Menschenrecht ohne Grenzen e.V.
<https://www.borderline-europe.de/>
mail@borderline-europe.de
jg@borderline-europe.de