

borderline-europe, Sicily

# SCIROCCO

*News from Italy*



Scirocco [ʃiˈrɒkko-Scirocco] is a southeasterly, hot strong wind that carries dust and sand across the Mediterranean Sea to Sicily and Italy's north for often only a few hours. This newsflash has been published on an approximately bi-weekly basis since March 2021.

### Political and social situation

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Italian head of government Giorgia Meloni emphasized future **joint action against migration movements** during a visit to Tunisian President Kais Saïed: the meeting focused, among other things, on "combating smuggling" and "supporting Tunisia's border management." In practice, these approaches result in **violence against and mistreatment of refugees**, who are then forced to take even more dangerous and often deadly escape routes. German Interior Minister **Nancy Faeser** also visited the Tunisian president to negotiate agreements aimed at facilitating so-called "labor migration" from Tunisia to Germany.

We reported on the intensification of cooperation between Tunisia and Italy [here](#) and in [Central Med Info May](#) (as of 28.06.2023, only available in German, translation forthcoming). During a meeting with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during the Paris summit for a new global financial pact, Tunisian President **Kais Saïed** declared – contrary to the EU's stated goals of blocking migration movements already on African territory – that **Tunisia is not a space the EU can rent or buy**. Tunisia would never agree to control the borders of another country, nor accept the settlement of migrants on its own territory. This statement contradicts the optimistic statements of European politicians regarding increased cooperation between the EU and Tunisia on migration control and the de-facto closure of borders (so-called externalization of the EU border, see: [new EU asylum law](#)), which is supported by financial incentives for Tunisia. The EU agreed to immediately mobilize €150 million in budget support and €105 million for the so-called "management of migration flows". Of the latter, €60 million is spent on border controls on Tunisian territory if it successfully blocks the departure of refugee boats and facilitates the deportation of migrants and refugees.



*The banner in Arabic: We women, children and men want the immediate evacuation from Tunisia. No to racism, no to the violation of rights, no to eviction. Evacuation from Tunisia. Liberation of the prisoners. Photo by Nicoletta Alessio detto Grassi.*

Tunisia currently fights a strong economic and social crisis and authorities act increasingly racist and misanthropic. It is therefore **neither a safe country of origin nor a place of safety for those rescued at sea!**

### Bilateral relations between Italy and France

After the last disagreements (see: [Scirocchi](#) of the first half of 2023), Italy and France apparently got closer to each other again. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and French President Emmanuel Macron now emphasized the **friendship between the two countries** and agreed on strong cooperation in the future, including in the areas of migration policy and defense. The two countries happen to share common goals now in terms of bilateral agreements with Tunisia. Meloni explained, "President Macron has talked about Tunisia, but also about Libya. We are working on convergent goals. But we also agree on European defense and sovereignty strategy most of the time." With diplomatic crises now resolved, the **EU's security and control paradigm**, which guides current negotiations on migration and military policy, is also visible in the contact between France and Italy.

### EU representatives visit Lampedusa

A delegation of eleven MEPs from the EU Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee traveled to Lampedusa to discuss the Central Mediterranean refugee route as well as the reception conditions of migrants and refugees in Italy with Italian authorities and other stakeholders. Among those who participated in the

discussions were the Mayor of Lampedusa, Filippo Mannino, the Prefect of Agrigento, Filippo Romano, and the Prefect Francesco Zito, Director of Immigration and Asylum Policies of the Ministry of Interior. The delegation participated in a search and rescue demonstration by the Guardia Costiera (Italian coast guard), a meeting with Frontex, and a guided tour through the hotspot on Lampedusa. The delegation also met with representatives of civilian sea rescue associations and other international organizations. The visit took place against the backdrop of the European Parliament's work on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, a further erosion of European asylum law, and only days after the tragic shipwreck in Pylos, Greece, in which up to 600 people lost their lives. **"So far, the European Union and its Member States have shown no intention to learn from the past years and end deaths in the Mediterranean"**, explain more than 180 human rights organizations and initiatives together with Tima Kurdi, aunt of Alan Kurdi (the pictures of the two-year-old who washed up dead after a shipwreck went around the world in 2015) in an [open letter](#). "Instead, they tighten their deadly policies of isolation. Only last week, on 8 June, the Council of the European Union agreed on a reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) leading to a massive deprivation of fundamental rights, such as the right to asylum or the right to move freely."

### Open Arms vs. Matteo Salvini

The [Open Arms trial](#) against former Italian minister Matteo Salvini, charged with omission of official acts and kidnapping in 2019, continued. Salvini, as then Minister of the Interior, had forced the Spanish NGO Open Arms with 147 migrants and refugees on board to wait more than two weeks before it could finally embark in a safe port. Now Oscar Camps (founder of Open Arms), Inas Urrosolo Martinez De Lagos (doctor on board Mission 65) and Ricardo Barriuso Leoz (first officer on the ship at the time of the events) have been questioned as witnesses. In search of a safe haven, the NGO Open Arms has also been **in contact with German and French authorities** in order to be able

to get the people on the boat to safety on Italian territory, so that they could then be distributed within the EU. This EU distribution mechanism can only be activated at the request of a Member State. Camps' full letters to then German Chancellor Angela Merkel can be read [here](#).



"Let minors go ashore!" - Poster of Open Arms showing M. Salvini (left) and G. Conte (former Prime Minister).

### Soumahoro calls for parliamentary committee of inquiry

On the occasion of World Refugee Day, Italian MP [Aboubakar Soumahoro](#) has submitted a bill to establish a parliamentary committee of inquiry into the Italian reception system for third-country nationals, asylum seekers and/or beneficiaries of international protection. Soumahoro explained that he chose the World Refugee Day for this purpose "to focus once again on the **value of human life**, in particular, those lives that 'Fortress Europe' considers expendable in the name of protecting its borders (...)"

### Situation of the refugees

The [Ciac \(Center for Immigration, Asylum and International Cooperation\)](#) in Parma issued a warning on the consequences of the so-called "Piantadosi Law", which severely restricts the right to asylum and practically dissolves the public reception system, thus **pushing thousands of people into invisibility**: Due

to this law, the number of socially and legally vulnerable migrants in the Parma region has risen from 350 to over 700 people in the last few months alone.

[Seven managers of a cooperative](#) that hosts migrants in Ancona are currently being investigated for fraud: They allegedly lied about the whereabouts of their guests in order to continue to receive funds provided by the state and get rich on the money themselves. According to estimates, the evaded sum amounts to €1 million. The business of reception apparently seems still to be a good source of income.

### Reception in Northern Italy

With a joint agreement, the Caritas Ambrosiana Foundation of Milan and the Prefecture of Lecco have agreed on the **flexible reception of migrants and refugees under humane conditions who are assigned to the province** (it should not be necessary to emphasize human conditions of an official reception system, however their common absence is a sad truth about the European migration regime). Basic services such as food, shelter, clothing and medical care will be provided by Caritas in the future. This agreement creates a [clearing house for the temporary reception of migrants and refugees](#) in emergency situations, but it is not a long-term solution. The Prefect of Lecco, Sergio Pomponio, described the agreement as "a tangible example of the importance of cooperation between public institutions and third sector organizations".

### Hotspot of Lampedusa

The Italian Red Cross (CRI) has announced to deploy **more staff to the Contrada Imbriacola hotspot in Lampedusa** after it took over the management of the initial reception facility on June 1, 2023. The Badia Grande cooperative, which had been responsible for managing the facility during the previous 15 months, was stripped of its management due to leadership incompetence and poor treatment of residents (we reported [here](#)). "We've tried to organize the shelter to help restore [arriving] people's dignity from the very



*Ferry from Lampedusa brings migrants to Sicily. Photo by Luca Ramello, Tunis.*

start. This is a pillar of the Red Cross: working to re-establish family ties" explained [Francesca Basile](#) of the CRI. During a press conference on June, 7, the CRI spoke of staffing up to 80 people at the hotspot in the future, including employees, volunteers and professionals from the medical, health and cultural mediation sectors. These new additions are to be welcomed. However, it remains to be seen how they will be implemented and whether they will actually (re)structure daily life in the Lampedusa hotspot.

Around the same time, the [Prefect Valerio Valenti](#), appointed commissioner for the so-called "immigration emergency", decided that there will be **additional boat connections between Lampedusa and Porto Empedocle and Pozzallo (both Sicily)** in the future. He announced a transfer of up to 400 people per day. With these ferry connections, it should be safeguarded that arriving migrants and refugees only stay for a short time – a maximum of one week - on Lampedusa before they are transferred to the mainland. Contrary to the assumption that Italy is currently facing a state of emergency, the arrival of people seeking protection has been a normal and not an exceptional situation for many years, which would not pose a problem if the Italian state care for appropriate planning and logistics (see [here](#)).

## New UNICEF Report published

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than 100,000 unaccompanied foreign minors have arrived in Italy via the Mediterranean Sea since 2014, 6,000 of them this year alone. However, UNICEF noted, these figures are incomplete because they do not take into account underage refugees from Ukraine or unaccompanied migrant minors who arrived in Italy through land borders, mainly via the Balkan route. "On the central Mediterranean route alone, which is one of the world's most dangerous, **more than 21,000 people are estimated to have died since 2014**, more than 1,000 this year alone, including many children," the new report "[The State of the World's Children 2023](#)," explains. Minors and women continue to be most vulnerable to exploitation and violence at all stages of their flight.



*Hands of some people in front of the IOM headquarters in Tunis who participated in the collective writing of a banner denouncing and protesting European migration policies and racist violence in Tunisia. Photo by Luca Ramello.*

## Tunisian Diary, Part 3

This new diary entry by our staff member Ludovica Gualandi, who is in Tunisia herself, recounts the [protests of refugees in front of the IOM headquarters in Tunis](#) and their demands to be either evacuated to safe countries or taken back to their home countries due to the massive racist attacks.

Further information on the situation in Italy can be found under „Projects“ on our [homepage](#) and in previous issues of [Scirocco](#).

Contact

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