

MED REPORT

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MAERSK ETIENNE CASE INDICTMENT

WE RESPOND WITH
A NEW SHIP



Six of our Mediterranea Saving Humans activists have been charged with “aggravated aiding and abetting illegal immigration,” in reference to what happened on September 11, 2020, when the ship Mare Jonio rescued 27 migrants who had been on board the Danish tanker Maersk Etienne for 38 days. Here is our response.

Today meanwhile, to this attempt to criminalise solidarity, we respond with facts: Mediterranea Saving Humans has a new, large and wonderful ship ready to set sail.

This new ship will continue to rescue those who call for help at sea. It is the strongest and most concrete answer we can give to those in the Italian government and in the European institutions who work relentlessly to prevent the lives of migrants from being saved. We are part of the Civil Rescue Fleet. We work together to save lives, while others plot to repel them, causing suffering and death every day.

The new ship was born out of a deep conviction: in a Mediterranean sea turned into a giant mass grave, against the EU-funded prison camps in Libya, against agreements with dictators and traffickers, we raise our solidarity and commitment. Thanks to the cooperation between Sea-Eye and Mediterranea, this ship is also a symbol: it shows that another Mediterranean is possible, that another world is possible.

They would want us silent and afraid. They find us more determined and happy than ever.

At the request of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the GUP of the Court of Ragusa decided to indict six activists of Mediterranea Saving Humans on charges of 'aggravated aiding and abetting illegal immigration.'

The decision refers to what happened on 11 September 2020, when the ship Mare Jonio intervened to rescue 27 migrants who had been on board the Danish tanker Maersk Etienne for 38 days, abandoned in the middle of the sea without any possibility of disembarkation, despite their serious physical and psychological conditions. Mediterranea once again chose to be on the side of life, bringing those people to safety in the port of Pozzallo, where they disembarked with the authorisation of the Italian authorities. Three months later, the Maersk Tankers company made a transparent donation to support civil rescue activities at sea. A political-judicial fabrication was built on this affair, which we are ready to dismantle at trial.

They will not stop us with defamation, espionage, lawsuits. They have called us a “threat to national security”, they try to slander us, to isolate us, to intimidate us. But they will not succeed. The power of those who save lives is greater than the power of those who let them die.

Today Mediterranea doubles. The ship Sea-Eye 4 becomes MEDITERRANEA and continues its mission as a ship of care, solidarity and dignity.

They would find us silent and afraid. They find us more determined, happier, more alive than ever.

BORDER STORIES

**EU MEMBER
STATES CONTINUE
TO PUSH BACK
MIGRANT PEOPLE**

THE CASE OF GERMANY

Defying the Berlin Administrative Court, which had declared the pushbacks of three asylum seekers from Somalia to be unlawful, the German government insists and even asserts its goal of defending Germany's borders.

Germany asserts the “right” of defending its borders.

“The ruling may have slightly narrowed the scope, but it has not eliminated it” stated German Chancellor Merz in response to a recent ruling by the Berlin Administrative Court, calling for continued pushbacks to be allowed to “protect public safety and avoid overloading the country”. The ruling, issued at the beginning of June, concerned the case of three Somali citizens who arrived at the border between Poland and Germany and were rejected by the latter before they could apply for international protection in the country or before they were subjected to the mandatory procedure provided for by the Dublin regulation, which determines its jurisdiction. This practice, unfortunately common to the management of many borders within the European Union, was deemed illegitimate by the Court, which did not consider it in line with European regulations that provide for complete investigation to ascertain which state is responsible for analyzing the applications of asylum seekers.

Faced with this harsh sentence, the government of Chancellor Merz and his Interior Minister Dobrindt asserted its right to continue its commitment to border defense, supporting harsh policies that have drawn criticism not only from opposition parties but also from national and international law experts and members of the governing coalition. The government's defense is based on the fact that all the countries surrounding Germany are safe countries and therefore able to accept and process applications for international protection.

If European Union law provides that the request for protection is managed by the first safe country in which asylum seekers arrive, it is also evident that a consequence of these policies is an excessive burden on some maritime and land border countries;

in fact not only member states such as Italy, Greece and Spain, but also Poland, which has long complained about migratory pressure at its borders and with which the Merz government is working to resolve the tension. Germany and Poland recently issued a statement declaring that migrant people are victims of a hybrid war by Russia and Belarus who want to weaken Europe with the forced influx of migrants. Not to mention that the rejections themselves are part of a strategy in which people's lives fade into the background.

In this political climate, there is still one issue to be addressed within the border police authorities: Federal Police Commissioner Uli Grötsch pointed out that clear responsibility towards asylum seekers has not yet been defined. Grötsch called on the Interior Minister to clarify and ensure that pushbacks go unpunished to prevent border control officers from being held liable in the event of any legal disputes.

The Minister vindicated the government's choices, arguing that they are in fact compliant with European law. Even within the governing coalition there is disagreement on border management: Matthias Miersch, parliamentary group leader of the Social Democrats (SPD), believes that these are not sustainable, pointing out that there will be more and more frequent legal cases in the coming months if the pushbacks continue.

Despite the fact that it has been established in several venues by several national and international courts that pushbacks at the border, both on land and at sea, are illegitimate, European Union member states and their partners at their borders continue to push back migrant people, in an attempt to demonstrate that they are defending the borders and protecting the state, trying to find spaces of action left free by the sentences to pursue a completely propagandistic aim.



LET'S TAKE STOCK

MONTHLY REPORT ON MIGRATIONS

What happened on the migratory routes of Europe, of the Mediterranean, of the world?

What measures have governments taken?

Who provided assistance?

Who, instead, sanctioned, detained or rejected?

Let's take stock.

Libya, May 1st

Libyan Red Crescent rescued several bodies of non-identified migrant people on the beach of Tajoura. They were victims of wreckships in the Mediterranean.

Tunisia, May 5th

In a meeting with the Director General of OIM Pope, tunisian president Saïed demanded more funds to be directed to the voluntary repatriations of migrant people who are currently in the country.

Libya, May 13th

The killing of al-Kikli, head of one of the most powerful Libyan militias and accused of crimes against humanity committed inside of the lagers he controlled, fuelled armed conflict in Tripoli.

Portugal, May 7th

The government announced the implementation of a deportation plan for foreigners with no valid identification documents: 18.000 expulsion decrees will be sent and the recipients will only have 20 days to appeal the government's decision, otherwise they will be detained in repatriation centres.

Germany , May 7th

The german government reinforced border controls, making it harder for migrant people coming from other EU countries to get into the german territory and ask for asylum. Luxembourg strongly criticized this decision as it hinders the movements fo cross-border workers travelling between the two countries.

Germany, May 16th

An Afghan family complosed of 14 people filed a lawsuit against the german fovernment in order to speed up the arrival of the VISA they were promised in the context of the federal reception programme. Despite their request was accepted in october 2023, the family is stuck in Pakistan since then, risking the expulsion as their Pakistani visa are not valid anymore.

France, May 19th

A person died in the English Channel while trying to reach british coasts. French authorities rescued 62 people in the same area, coming from three different boats.

Lithuania, May 20th

Lithuanian government has filed a complaint against Belarusian government at International Court of Justice, accusing hit of favouring illegal immigration for political purposes.

Poland, May 21st

Polish Parliament approved with large majority the prolonging, for 60 more days, of the measure implying the suspension of asylum requests coming from Bielorussia, after the measur was already taken in March.

Greece, May 23rd

After a two-years long investigation, 17 members of the Greek Coastal Guard were sent to trial for the wreckship occurred off Pylos, which caused the death of at least 600 people in June 2023.

Spain, May 28th

Seven people died during the disembarkation operation in El Hierro port, Canary Islands, due to the overturning of the ship on which they were travelling. Moreover, two children in serious conditions were evacuated by helicopter.

Germany, May 28th

The German government proposed a law to suspend family reunification for the beneficiaries of subsidiary protection for two years.



Civil Fleet, May 1st

Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) rescued 69 people travelling on two different fiberglass boats and landed them in La Spezia, the port assigned them by Italian authorities, which was around 1200km far from where the rescuing occurred.

Civil Fleet, May 1st

Sea-Watch 5 rescued 109 people, among which 41 were minors: 104 of them were travelling on a wood board, while the remaining 5 jumped in the water from the deck of a patrol boat of the so-called Libyan coast guard in the same area, and were then rescued by the Sea-Watch crew.

Lampedusa, May 2nd

Almost 700 people were rescued in a timespan of 24h by Italian authorities off Lampedusa, and were then disembarked on the island.

Malta, May 2nd

The sailship Conscience (Freedom Flotilla Coalition) was attacked by an Israeli drone while off the coast of Malta to prepare an expedition aimed at bringing humanitarian aid in Gaza. Only after two days of troubles for the vessel, the crew received support and rescue.

Civil Fleet, May 5th

Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) rescued 108 people on two different fiberglass boats in the Libyan SAR zone and landed them in the assigned port of Ortona, almost 1300km further.

Misurata, May 5th

According to the Libyan Red Crescent, six dead bodies were found off the Libyan coast following a shipwreck.

Civil Fleet, May 8th

Sea-Watch 5 rescued 190 people from two different boats and landed them in the far Civitavecchia port, assigned by Italian authorities.

Civil Fleet, May 9th

Humanity 1 rescued 125 people and landed them in Ravenna port, 1500km further from the place of rescuing.

Civil Fleet, May 12th

Following the signal given by Alarm Phone, Sea Punk helped 69 people on a dinghy boat until the arrival of Nadir (ResQShip) which rescued them. On board, two dead children were found.

Alger, May 15th

10 people who left from Algerian coasts were intercepted and deported to Tunis by local authorities.

Tunisia, May 15h

48 people who left from Tunisia were intercepted by the Tunisian Garde National and deported in the desert on the Tunisia-Algeria border.

Civil Fleet, May 16th

The Seabird plane (Sea-Watch) intercepted 6 imbarcations in distress in the Mediterranean, but the informed authorities did not intercede. All of these imbarcations were then assisted by Aurora (Sea-Watch) until the arrival of Sea Punk and Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée), rescuing more than 200 people. In the following hours, Ocean Viking completed two other rescue operations and landed the 26 people in the assigned port of Ancona, around 4 days of navigation further.

Sicily, May 22nd

After three days at sea, 32 people who left from Bengasi, among which 5 children, were rescued from the Italian Coast Guard in the Ionian Sea.



Civil Fleet, May 22nd

Aurora rescued 50 people in distress and landed them in Lampedusa.

Civil Fleet, may 22nd

In a coordinated operation between Astral (Open Arms) and the Italian Coast Guard, 51 people were rescued and landed in Lampedusa: 10 of them were rescued by the civil sailing ship, and the others by the patrol boat.

Libya, June 24th

The merchant vessel MV Bobic rescued 35 people in serious distress due to severe weather conditions in international waters, but deported them to Libya instead of taking them to a safe port.

The other 75 people who remained on board were rescued by the Italian Coast Guard, which landed them in Lampedusa.

Civil Fleet, June 24th

26 people were rescued by the merchant vessel Eco One, which could not complete the rescue operation due to weather conditions. Ocean Viking rescued the remaining 53 people, among which there were 34 minors. All of them landed in Lampedusa, telling the rescuers that 3 of them fell in the water and are now missing.

Civil Fleet, May 28th

Aurora rescued 50 people and landed them in Porto Empedocle.



Rome, May 22nd

The Italian Senate definitively approved the so-called Albania decree after the approval of the Chamber of Deputies. The measure allows the government to use the Italian centre of Gdader, in Albania, as a CPR.

Rome, May 28th

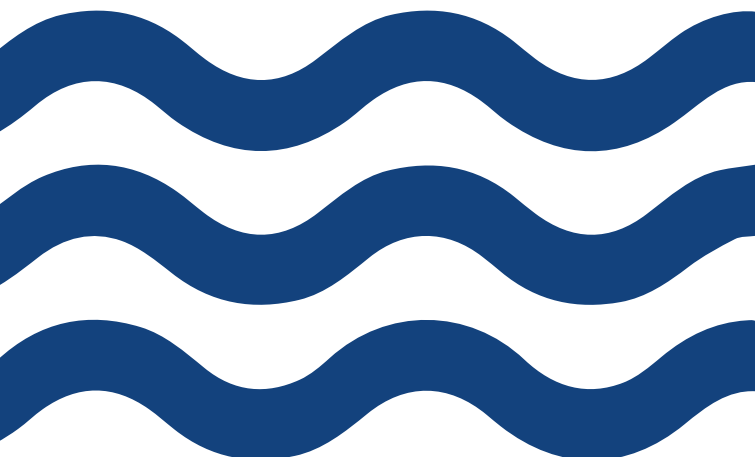
The Italian government approved the moving of additional 26 people with an expulsion order against them in the Gdader CPR.

Ragusa, May 28th

Under request of the Prosecutor's Office, the Judge for preliminary hearings of the Court of Ragusa sent for trial six activists of Mediterranea Saving Humans with the accusation of "favouring illegal immigration".

Ragusa, May 29th

Mediterranea Saving Humans announced they are buying Sea-Eye 4, re-named Mediterranea, which will be soon available for Search and Rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea.





REPORT

BORDERLINE EUROPE

NEWS FROM THE CENTRAL
MEDITERRANEAN

Arrivals

The beginning of summer in the northern hemisphere brings with it an improvement in weather conditions. Consequently, the number of crossings on the Central Mediterranean route increased in May compared to the previous month, as in previous years. At the same time, the ongoing situation of precariousness and violence against people on the move (PoM) in Tunisia and Libya continues to deter people from making the crossing.

According to *borderline-europe's* counts, 7,021 people reached Italy by sea in May 2025. Most people on the move (5,144 people, equal to 73.3%) arrived in Sicily, particularly in Lampedusa. In three cases, the crossing to Italy occurred through the Ionian route, the central-eastern Mediterranean, arriving among other places in Calabria. Overall, *borderline-europe* can demonstrate that boats departed from Libya for approximately 62.4% of arrivals, but the percentage is very likely higher. The percentage of departures from Tunisia this month is 5.3%, slightly up from the previous month (3.7%). According to our counts, Italian authorities rescued approximately 39% of those who arrived, while initial assistance was provided by NGO ships in 10 cases. 27% of rescues were carried out by NGO ships, with 1,904 people rescued at sea. According to *borderline-europe* data, Frontex participated in the rescue of 438 people in May. 729 refugee people (10.4%) reached Italian coastal waters (12 nautical miles from the coast) autonomously without being intercepted or rescued. In some cases, they were brought to safe harbor by Frontex or the Italian Coast Guard after reaching territorial waters. For 10.6% of arrivals, no rescue information was available.

According to official data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, 7,178 people arrived in Italy in May. We managed to verify similar figures for this month's arrivals, but we would like to emphasize that it is not possible to access details or sources of the figures published by the Ministry of the Interior.

It should be noted that the northern route to Sardinia was used much more frequently in May. A total of 94 people reached the EU through Sardinia, unlike in March and April, when *borderline-europe* recorded no arrivals. Sixteen of them were rescued by a cruise ship - a rarity on the Central Mediterranean route.

A dramatic example of government agencies refusing to take responsibility occurred in Libya's sea rescue zone last weekend in May. Alarm Phone informed authorities of two wooden boats where people were in distress at sea due to a storm. While people aboard the first boat were rescued by the Italian coast guard and brought to Lampedusa, authorities abandoned the people aboard the second boat, just a few nautical miles away. Survivors reported that three others had ended up in the sea. Some time later, a merchant ship approached and, in compliance with international obligations, took the people aboard before losing visual contact with the boat due to poor weather conditions. The subsequent rescue attempt was made by an Italian-flagged oil platform supply vessel, which had to interrupt the mission after taking 26 people aboard. The remaining 35 people had to wait anxiously on the boat for more hours, until they were rescued by the civilian rescue ship *Ocean Viking* (SOS Méditerranée), which had meanwhile rushed to the scene. While people aboard the supply vessel and *Ocean Viking* reached Italian mainland, the fate of people aboard the merchant vessel is unclear: in obvious violation of the non-refoulement prohibition, they were not brought to a safe port but handed over to the so-called "Libyan coast guard." This case makes it evident that the intentional refusal of EU member states to take responsibility for the situation in the Mediterranean is costing human lives and causing unnecessary suffering.

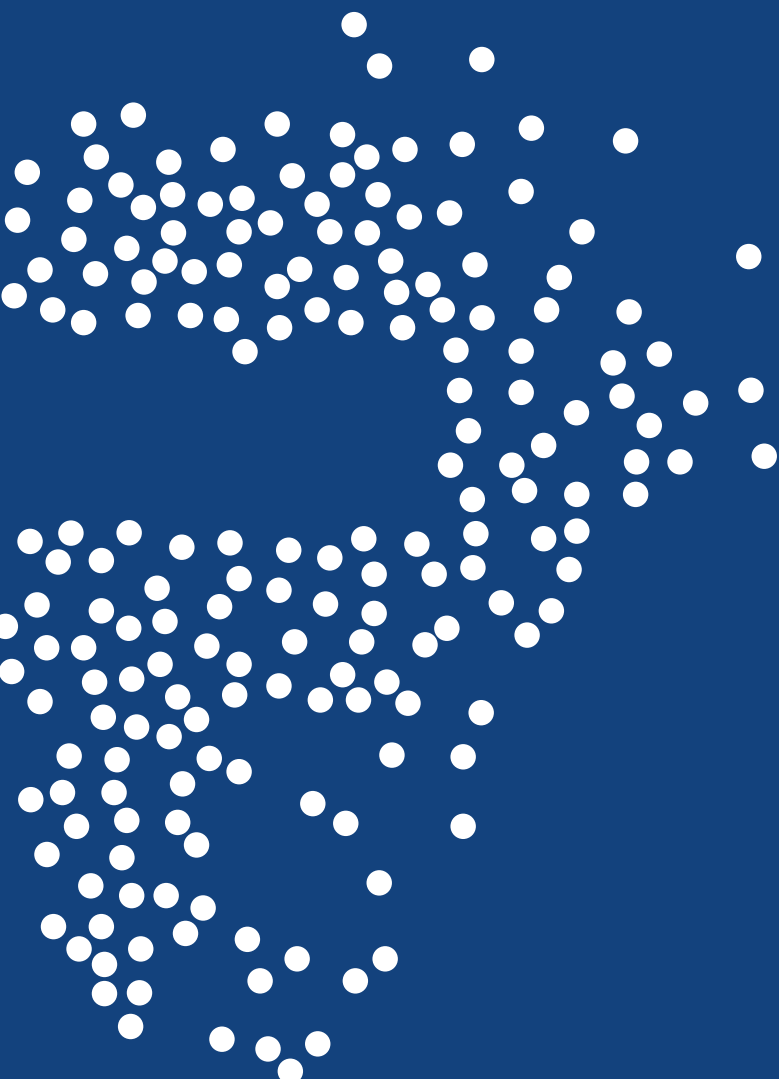
Pushbacks

This month we recorded 821 pushbacks in the Central Mediterranean, where boats carrying refugee people were pushed back toward the North African coast. 578 people were pushed back to Libya and 197 to Tunisia. These figures are not certain, as the number of unreported cases is likely much higher. In May, Tunisian authorities continued the practice of abandoning people intercepted in the Mediterranean in the desert at the border with Algeria. Alarm Phone reported a case where a hundred towed people were abandoned far from civilization and without their mobile phones. It is unclear what happened to them.

Dead and missing

The number of people who have died and gone missing in the Central Mediterranean continues to increase each passing month. According to [borderline-europe](#) data, in May 44 people lost their lives fleeing through the Central Mediterranean and this month five people are considered missing. The fate of another 112 people is uncertain. Here too, the number of unreported cases is probably much higher. Among the victims are two small children, who died of thirst during the crossing from Libya. When the civilian rescue ship Nadir (RESQSHIP) arrived, they and another person were already dead.

The judicial case of the naval incident that occurred off Cutro on February 26, 2023, in which at least 94 people on the move lost their lives, took a new turn in May. The Calabria Region surprisingly withdrew the previously declared joint action. If at the beginning of the trial it had symbolically sided with the victims, it has now reversed its position, apparently under political pressure from Rome. The affected municipalities of Crotone and Cutro have also decided not to participate as joint civil parties, drawing public criticism. At the same time, the Crotone court decided to admit co-plaintiffs in the trial against six military personnel from the Guardia di Finanza and Coast Guard, accused of failing to provide assistance with fatal consequences. Despite defense attempts to exclude numerous parties, all survivors of the incident, relatives of victims, and some major sea rescue organizations (including Sea Watch, SOS Méditerranée and Emergency) were recognized as co-plaintiffs. The next trial day is scheduled for June 9, 2025.



Routes towards Europe

European cooperation with militias in the context of armed conflict in Libya

Following the assassination of Libyan militia chief of the Security Support Authority (SSA) Abdelghani al-Kikli, known as “Gheniwa,” on May 12 by “Brigade 444,” fighting broke out between various militias in Tripoli, in which an estimated at least 75 civilians were killed. The government of Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeiba - “Government of National Unity” (GNU) - lost support and several ministers resigned. Until now, the GNU government based in Tripoli was supported by various armed groups that acted as a “state within a state” and which are now creating units against Dbeiba. During demonstrations in western Libya, protesters called for the government’s resignation and the dissolution of armed militias. Reportedly, protesters were hit by bullets.

Since 2014, Libya has been divided between two rival authorities: Against the GNU, which controls western Libya, stands the House of Representatives led by Prime Minister Ossama Hammad in eastern and southern Libya, supported by warlord Khalifa Haftar. Observers see the strategic attacks by Brigade 444, affiliated with Dbeiba, against the SSA and “al-Rada” militia as an attempt by Dbeiba to expand his control over militias. The GNU government “needs” armed militias to implement the migration agreement with Italy. As confirmed to Amnesty International by the Libyan Ministry of Interior, the SSA intercepts and detains refugees and migrants. Under Gheniwa’s command, the SSA militia committed serious human rights violations, such as forced labor and torture of migrants. For years, the Italian government and EU have worked closely with the Tripoli government, particularly on “border protection.” Migration agreements make detention and suffering of migrants in Libya a political strategy.

The changing political situation in Libya also impacts the case of Libyan police chief Osama Njeem Elmasry, for whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for war crimes and crimes against humanity

while he was in Italy in January. Since Italian authorities nevertheless allowed the wanted man to return to Libya, the ICC is also investigating the Italian government for possible violations of the duty of international cooperation. Meanwhile, GNU Prime Minister Dbeiba has declared his willingness to have Elmasry extradited to the ICC. This could also have repercussions for Italy, if the accused revealed his relationships with Western countries to the ICC.

Tunisia: systematic violence against migrants

Although Tunisia is “safe” according to the European Commission, violence against people seeking protection and particularly against Black migrants continues in the North African country. After evictions of informal refugee camps north of the coastal city of Sfax, displaced people have been protesting since mid-May demanding improvement of their situation. The fires, deportations and systematic violence against migrants living in olive groves began in early April - according to Tunisian activist Majdi Karbai, “a real hunt for Blacks, fueled by a state campaign of xenophobia.” The destruction of tents and informal health centers and the killing of Mustapha Tarawallie and Alseny Togbodoun by Tunisian police in May follow the agreement between the Tunisian government and EU in July 2023: In exchange for containing migration to Europe - regardless of the means chosen - the EU invests in Tunisia’s development. While xenophobic discourse about an alleged “ethnic exchange” prevails in Tunisian society (as reported by an artist from Tunis), refugee solidarity organizations have been closed and at least 10 people are in prison for supporting migrants, migrants’ lives have become hell due to repression by the Tunisian government led by President Kais Saied. The options for people in self-managed camps should be only two: Either they are deported to their country of origin with the help of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or they are forcibly abandoned in Libya or Algeria.

According to a nurse's report, Tunisian police also pretend to be IOM employees to leave people - who would have been willing to return to their country of origin under intolerable conditions - in the desert without shoes, phones or food. While Tunisian National Guard spokesperson Houssemeddine Jebabli emphasizes that 3,400 migrants have left the country "voluntarily" since the beginning of the year, people fleeing Tunisia tell of being intercepted at sea by the Tunisian National Guard and sold to Libyan militias. Despite this, 30% more people from Tunisia arrived in Lampedusa in April compared to the previous year. According to a doctor working in temporary camps, "[the] daily dangers in their country of origin [...] are more discouraging than those they experience on the journey to Europe. I don't understand why we are not at least treated as human beings."

Civil resistance

In May 2025, 27% of all rescues were carried out by NGOs. The "civilian fleet," the civilian sea rescue service, was able to save a total of 1,904 people. NGO ships were involved in rescuing 559 people before they were brought to shore by state authorities or Frontex. Six multiple rescues were carried out this month.

One of May's multiple rescues was by the NGO ship *Solidaire*, which docked in the port of Genoa on June 5, 2025 with 263 rescued migrants - the northernmost disembarkation point for civilian sea rescues of this size to date. The people had been rescued off Sicilian coasts in two missions. Despite the enormous logistical effort, many of the rescued people were subsequently returned to regions like Calabria - in other words, pushed back to southern Italy. This case is part of a series of distant port assignments to civilian sea rescue ships - most recently Ravenna or La Spezia - which NGOs and observers have criticized as a deliberate strategy to make humanitarian operations more difficult. The current case of returning to southern Italy invalidates the official argument that northern ports are intended to ensure better distribution and organization. The return of many refugees to the south demonstrates that the procedure is neither efficient nor justifiable in humanitarian terms.

The criminalization of sea rescue

Two key proceedings are currently underway in Italy that are exemplary of state repression against civilian sea rescue organizations. The fact that these proceedings exist seems absurd in light of the humanitarian necessity of civilian sea rescue - yet the pending verdicts could have far-reaching consequences for the European migration regime and NGOs' room for maneuver at sea.

The Mare Jonio case

In October 2025, an unprecedented trial begins against seven members of the NGO *Mediterranea Saving Humans*, including founder Luca Casarini and the captain of the rescue ship *Mare Jonio*. The Ragusa court decided to open proceedings on May 28, 2025, accusing those involved of facilitating unauthorized entry, in some cases with the addition of economic gain. The background is a 2020 incident, when *Mare Jonio* picked up 27 refugees who had previously been rescued at sea by the Danish tanker *Maersk Etienne*. The people remained at sea for over a month, as Malta, Italy and Libya refused to grant them safe harbor. Finally, *Mare Jonio* brought them to Pozzallo, Sicily. A payment of 125,000 euros that *Maersk Tankers* transferred to *Idra Social Shipping*, *Mare Jonio*'s owner, plays a central role in the accusation. For the Prosecutor's Office, this is a commercial agreement; *Mediterranea* and *Maersk*, instead, speak of a transparent donation to cover rescue costs after the ship's detention. From a legal perspective, the case is of particular importance as it is the first main proceeding against civilian rescuers currently operating in Italy. Although other NGOs like *Jugend Rettet* have been investigated in the past, for example in the *Iuventa* case, no charges have ever been filed.

Immediately after the court's decision, *Mediterranea* reacted with a clear signal: The NGO announced the deployment of a new, larger rescue ship, the *MEDITERRANEAN*. *Mediterranea* explained that it "will not be stopped by slander, surveillance and lawsuits" and sees the *MEDITERRANEAN* as part of a civilian fleet that demonstrates "that another Mediterranean is possible."

The Constitutional Court examines the Piantadosi Decree

On May 21, 2024, the Italian Constitutional Court began examining the controversial *Piantadosi Decree*, which since January 2023 has imposed severe conditions on civilian sea rescue organizations. Failure to observe instructions, particularly from the Libyan coast guard, could result in fines and administrative detention of ships. International organizations such as the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have submitted amicus curiae briefs. They consider the decree a violation of the non-refoulement principle of international law, which prohibits repatriation to states where there is risk of torture or serious human rights violations. Libya, in particular, is not a safe place: migrants are systematically subjected to detention, abuse, exploitation and sexual violence. According to ECCHR, Italy could even be complicit in crimes against humanity by collaborating with the Libyan coast guard. *SOS Méditerranée* has also criticized the fact that Libyan authorities are not a legitimate authority under the rule of law to issue binding instructions. The verdict is expected in the coming days.



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