

MED REPORT
AUGUST 2025



FREE
MEDITERRANEAN

INDEX

03

MISSION N. 22

Cronicle of a rescue between libyan threats and the Piantedosi Decree's ship detention

05

THE SPANISH HOPE

Spain's migration policies, despite the EU

08

LET'S TAKE STOCK

Monthly report on migrations

13

REPORT BORDERLINE EUROPE

News from the central Mediterranean

MISSION N. 22

CRONICHL E OF A RESCUE
BETWEEN LIBYAN THREATS AND
THE PIANTEDOSI DECREE'S SHIP
DETENTION



In August, the *Mediterranea* ship was involved in a dramatic mission in Central Mediterranean. In little more than a week, indeed, its crew went through armed threats, carried out an incredible rescue operation and challenged an order spread by the Italian government, which came with the following detention of the ship. This is the mission 22 chronicle, a case that perfectly summarizes the conflict between the duty to assist and the border control policies currently in force.

Threats, and a brutal rescue (18-21 August)

The rescue operation began in a climate of extreme hostility. As a matter of fact, on August 18th, the *Mediterranea* was intercepted in international waters by libyan rubber boats carrying armed militia ordering the crew to leave. The tension grew on the following day, when the libyan patrol boat “Zawiyah”- a unit kindly gifted from the Italian government to Libya - repetitively threatened the *Mediterranea* crew, starting a 25-hours tail.

During the night between the 20th and the 21st of August, the threats turned into a humanitarian emergency. Indeed, the crew rescued ten people who were previously thrown into the sea by a military rubber boat 30 miles off Tripoli. According to testimonies, the victims were beaten before being thrown among the waves, in an act that the NGO described as an attempted multiple murder. The prompt action of the *Mediterranea* rescue team saved all of the ten people’s lives, turning the crew in a group of witnesses of a heinous crime.

The Trapani choice: an act of disobedience (August 23rd)

After the rescue, Italian authorities assigned Genova as disembarking port, imposing additional long days of sailing to a group of already traumatized people, among which three non-accompanied minors. Considering the order against human rights and maritime law, both of which impose to disembark in the closest safe port, the *Mediterranea* crew decided to disobey and travelled towards Trapani.

On the night of August 23rd, the ship entered the Trapani port and the ten survivors were disembarked and entrusted to the care of the reception facilities. Laura Marmorale, president of *Mediterranea*, justified this choice stating that “human life and dignity come before of any other consideration”.

The State’s response: Administrative detention (August 25th)

The choice to disembark in Trapani had immediate consequences for *Mediterranea*. On August 25th, indeed, Italian authorities notified the commander and the shipowner a report referring to the “Piantadosi Decree. The ship was sanctioned with a fine up to 10.000 euros and, most importantly, with administrative detention which prevented it from going back to its rescue operations.

Laura Marmorale stated that the measure was “obscene” and defined it as a “revenge” for having saved human lives and taken them in a safe place. To the NGO, the administrative detention actually did what the Libyan militia hoped to obtain: to remove an important witness of their crimes from the Mediterranean Sea. Mission 22 ended with a bitter symmetry: it started with Libyan threats operating with tools furnished by the Italian government, and ended with a sanction imposed by such government on who saved the victims of their tortures.

BORDER STORIES

THE BULGARIAN BORDER

THE TIGHTENING OF
MIGRATION POLICIES



Bulgaria has recently been witnessing a tightening of policies towards migrant people. A story we have unfortunately heard before, one of collective measures taken, regardless of the specific circumstances of individuals, of more or less obvious attempts at closures and rejections, of political decisions taken at the expense of individuals.

Despite daily attempts to cross, Bulgaria has seen a decrease in migrant flows through its borders in recent years, especially compared to 2023, a year that saw a record number of migrant people transiting the country, also taking into account the migration flows caused by the war in Ukraine. According to the Chief of Police, the sharp decline recorded is attributable to increased cooperation with the authorities of neighboring countries and improved border security.

In Bulgaria, in fact, there has recently been a tightening of policies towards migrant people, taking as an example the case of Syrian migrant people, one of the most frequent nationalities in the country. Since the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, asylum applications from Syrians have been systematically rejected by Bulgaria, even though it is currently unthinkable for many people to even consider returning to live in Syria. There are also a very large number of asylum seekers who have left their fingerprints in Bulgaria and are brought back there, on the basis of the Dublin Regulation, after having requested asylum in another European country.

Repatriation centers are described by migrant people as dirty places, full of disease and filth. According to Diana Radoslavova, a lawyer with the Voice in Bulgaria Legal Aid Center, the systematic rejection of asylum applications has led to hundreds of legal challenges in recent months; most of the decisions, however, including those issued by the Supreme Court, have confirmed the rejection of requests for international protection.

From January 1st to April 30th, 2025, Bulgaria rejected 1,292 asylum applications out of a total of 1,834 submitted, a rejection rate of 70%. In 2024, the rejection rate was 19%. Migrant people thus remain in limbo, without documents, unable to work or go to school, in a social and cultural context that often leads to racist and discriminatory behavior against foreigners.

Bulgarian authorities close their borders

Bulgaria is not one of the countries most often mentioned when discussing migration routes to Europe, but it is actually an important transit country for flows from countries such as Afghanistan and Syria. Around 32% of all registered migrant people in Europe in the first quarter of 2025 arrived via the route passing through Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria, by land or by sea, for a total of over 10.000 arrivals.

Bulgarian authorities have recently reported daily arrests of migrant people, as confirmed by Chief Police Commissioner Anton Zlatanov. At the end of August, 24 migrant people from Afghanistan were found, by the police inside a van in Lozenets, on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, about 60 km from the border with Turkey.

Most of the people were dehydrated and in some cases even unconscious. An Afghan migrant person stated that the two Georgian smugglers had charged up to €4.000 per person to cross from Turkey to Western Europe. In recent months further incidents of arrests for smuggling have been recorded in the country.

Close to none of the migrant people in Bulgaria actually intended to stay in the country when they were in transit to Europe: many dreamed of reaching France or Germany. But those who, when arrested at the border, declare themselves asylum seekers are directed towards the procedures for requesting international protection to end their detention, thus forcing them to remain in the country.

In December 2024, No Name Kitchen (NNK), a humanitarian organization working with refugees in the Balkans, published a report exposing how Bulgarian authorities had attempted to force Syrian asylum seekers to leave the country after al-Assad's ouster. Around 200 Syrian people were reportedly forced to sign voluntary repatriation documents, and were even subjected to physical violence.

The Bulgarian border tells us a story we have unfortunately heard before, one of collective measures, not counting the specificities of individual people, of more or less obvious attempts at closure and rejection, of political decisions made at the expense of people trapped with little hope.



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.

MOROCCO, August 14

Around 42 people who set sail from Tan-Tan were intercepted by Moroccan authorities and deported to Morocco.

MOROCCO, August 18

The Moroccan Navy intercepted and deported to Morocco 57 people who came from Tan-Tan.

LIBYA, August 23

A video shot in Tripoli shows Almasri, leader of the Rada militia and wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, killing an unarmed man on the streets of the city.

MAURITANIA, August 28

A watercraft from Gambia sank off Mhajibatt, Mauritania. Only 16 people managed to reach shore.

POLAND, August 3

The Polish government has extended border controls at the borders with Germany and Lithuania for an additional three months, saying it wants to fight illegal immigration to Poland.

FRANCE, August 11-12

A Somali woman drowned off the coast of Dunkirk while attempting to reach Britain by crossing the English Channel in a makeshift watercraft.

GREECE, August 12

The Greek government has announced that undocumented foreign people on deportation lists will have to wear an electronic ankle monitor to monitor their whereabouts.

AUSTRIA, August 12

The European Court of Human Rights has temporarily blocked one of the fights to Syria used by the Austrian government to deport Syrian migrants. By September 8, Austria must respond to the Court's concerns that some people due for deportation are at risk of being killed and tortured in Syria.

POLAND, August 25

Polish President Nawrocki has said he wants to cut benefits for Ukrainian refugees, granting family allowances only to people working in Poland.

GERMANY, August 25

Dozens of German organizations have urged the government to keep its promise to grant Germany visas to approximately 450 citizens following the Taliban's takeover. These people have now taken refuge in Pakistan, but the country's government has imprisoned them and is threatening to deport them to Afghanistan.

**CIVIL FLEET, August 6-7**

Life Support (Emergency) rescued 147 people in 3 operations. All -except one man who was urgently evacuated by a Coast Guard helicopter because of his critical medical condition were disembarked in the port of Savona.

LIBYA, August 8

The Sea-Watch 5 crew witnessed the capture and deportation to Libya of dozens of people aboard two watercrafts by six patrol boats of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. During the capture, several people ended up overboard.

CIVIL FLEET, August 11

Sea-Watch 5 completed 2 operations, rescuing 73 people. One pregnant woman was urgently evacuated, while the others were disembarked in Lampedusa.

SAMOS, August 11

Off the coast of Samos, the Greek Coast Guard fired at a watercraft carrying around 20 people who were trying to reach the Greek island.

SYRIA, August 13

The Cypriot Coast Guard intercepted and pushed back to the Syrian coast a watercraft carrying 21 people who had set sail from Syria itself.

CIVIL FLEET, August 13

Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée) rescued 7 people thrown overboard by a patrol boat of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and disembarked them in the port of Ortona, assigned by the Italian authorities, more than four days' sailing away.

LAMPEDUSA, August 13-14

The sinking of two watercrafts off the coast of Lampedusa caused at least 27 deaths, while between 20 and 40 people are missing. 60 survivors have been transported to safety on the island.

CIVIL FLEET, August 16

Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity) rescued 2 watercrafts in international waters carrying 130 people who had departed from Libya. The port of disembarkation assigned by Italian authorities is Naples, which is more than 750 kilometers away from the rescue site.

CIVIL FLEET, August 16

Astral (Open Arms) rescued 51 people in distress in the center Mediterranean.

LESBOS, August 18

15 people were intercepted off the coast of Lesbos, in Greek international waters, by the Turkish Coast Guard and deported to Turkey.

SICILY, August 19

41 people were rescued off the southeastern coast of Sicily by the merchant vessel Coe Anna & Bernhard Schulte and safely disembarked on the island.

CIVIL FLEET, August 19

Sea-Watch 5 rescued 100 people aboard 2 watercrafts and disembarked them in the port of Catania.

LIBYA, August 20

A watercraft carrying around 42 people was intercepted in the Maltese SAR zone and the people on board were deported to Libya by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

MAJORCA, August 20

A watercraft remained at sea for 7 days between Algeria and Spain. A body was found on board, while 19 people were rescued by Spanish authorities, and 3 are missing.

CRETE, August 21

About 62 people were rescued by the Hellenic Coast Guard off the coast of Crete and safely disembarked on the island.

CIVIL FLEET, August 21

The new civilian ship *Mediterranea* rescued 10 people thrown into the water by a Libyan smugglers' watercraft. The day before the rescue, the rescue ship had been surrounded by 8 patrol boats from the so-called Libyan Coast Guard in an intimidating manner. The people were disembarked in Trapani after *Mediterranea* refused the distant port of Genoa, previously assigned by Italian authorities.

MAJORCA, August 23

Salvamento Marítimo rescued 14 people off the coast of Maiorca, but 12 are missing.

CIVIL FLEET, August 23

Humanity 1 rescued 51 people with the assistance of the *Colibri* (Pilotes Volontaires) aircraft and disembarked them in the assigned port of Ravenna, over 1,600 kilometers away. *Colibri* documented the capture of a second watercraft by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

CIVIL FLEET, August 24

Ocean Viking rescued 87 people who had set sail from Libya in 2 operations. While sailing north in international waters, the SOS Méditerranée crew was attacked by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, who opened fire on the rescue vessel.

CIVIL FLEET, August 25

Nadir (ResQ Ship) assisted 60 people, who were later rescued by the Italian Coast Guard and disembarked in Lampedusa. The ResQ Ship crew also recovered the lifeless bodies of 3 Sudanese little girls.

LAMPEDUSA, August 25-28

Mediterranean Hope reports that 1252 people have landed in Lampedusa in less than 4 days.

CIVIL FLEET, August 27

Sea-Watch 5 rescued 65 people, including several who were immediately evacuated to Lampedusa due to their medical conditions. The remaining people were disembarked in the port of Ortona, three days of sailing away from the rescue site.

LOUZA, August 30

A watercraft from Sfax with 47 people aboard sank off the coast of Louza. Despite the failure of Tunisian and Italian authorities to provide assistance, the people were rescued by some Tunisian fishermen.

ROME, August 1

The European Court of Justice has questioned the legitimacy of the list of safe countries and the accelerated border procedures on which Italy bases its selection of asylum seekers for detention in the Gjader CPR in Albania.

AGRIGENTO, August 4

The Court of Agrigento has revoked the administrative detention of the Aurora (Sea-Watch), which had rescued and disembarked 70 people in Lampedusa instead of the distant port of Pozzallo, assigned by the Italian authorities.

LAMPEDUSA, August 8

The civilian aircraft Seabird 1 (Sea-Watch) was placed under administrative detention at Lampedusa for 20 days pursuant to the migrant flow decree.

A week earlier, Seabird had documented a case of failure to rescue by Italian authorities, which had caused the deaths of two children.

ROME, August 8

The Tribunal of Ministers has asked the Italian Parliament for authorization to proceed against Ministers Piantedosi and Nordio and the Secretary of the Council of Ministers Mantovano for trial in the case of Almasri, a Libyan war criminal wanted by the International Criminal Court, who was released by the Italian government shortly after his arrest in Italy.

PALERMO, August 19

A 6 years old Guinean girl died in Palermo hospital after being admitted in serious conditions following the Mediterranean crossing.

TRIESTE, August 21

Several associations report that, despite reports to the Prefecture, 113 asylum seekers are sleeping and living on the streets near the Old Port without any assistance or decent accommodation.

TRAPANI, August 25

Mediterranea was sanctioned with a 60-day administrative detention and a €10.000 fine for violating the so-called Piantedosi Decree by refusing to disembark 10 people rescued in the distant port of Genoa.

LAMPEDUSA, August 26

Trotamar III (Compass Collective) was placed under administrative detention in Lampedusa for violating the so-called Piantedosi Decree. Italian authorities accuse it of failing to coordinate with Libyan authorities during the rescue operation.

AUGUSTA, August 28

Despite the armed attack, the Ocean Viking crew was unable to disembark due to a case of tuberculosis among those rescued. Italian authorities have placed the crew in quarantine despite there being no risk of the disease spreading.





REPORT

BORDERLINE EUROPE

**NEWS FROM THE CENTRAL
MEDITERRANEAN**

Arrivals

According to [borderline-europe](#) counts, 5,289 people reached Italy by sea in August 2025. Of these, 4,296 (81.2%) arrived in Sicily, mainly on Lampedusa. This month, we counted three arrivals with a total of 150 people via the Ionian route. In two cases (41 and 30 people), the boats departed from eastern Libya, and in one case from Turkey (79 people). Boats are increasingly reaching the coasts of the island of Sardinia, both in the east and in the southwest. Media reports confirm that there are again more arrivals via the so-called 'Algeria-Sardinia route'. According to [borderline-europe's](#) counts, 151 people reached the coast of Sardinia in August, 80 of whom departed from Algeria.

Overall, [borderline-europe](#) can verify that approximately 60% of arrivals departed from Libya. The percentage of departures from Libya is most likely higher. In approximately 26% of cases, we were unable to verify the point of departure. The proportion of departures from Tunisia this month is approximately 10.2%, which is a significant increase compared to the previous month (7.4%). In recent months, we have observed an increase in departures from Tunisia.

According to our calculations, the Italian authorities brought 51.1% of those who arrived (2,702 people) ashore. A total of 1,073 people (approx. 20.3%) were rescued by civilian sea rescue services. In the previous month, we counted 12.4% of rescues by NGOs. Frontex rescued 370 people, which corresponds to 7% of the overall number of rescues. In August, 174 people reached Italian coastal waters autonomously (3.3%). One case in particular made headlines: three Palestinian men were stopped by Frontex just off the coast of Lampedusa. They were travelling on a jetski that they had bought online for €6,000. For around 18.3% of arrivals, we had no information about who carried out the rescue.

Pushbacks

This month, we recorded 1,993 interceptions (pullbacks or rejections at sea) in the central Mediterranean, in which boats carrying refugees were pushed back to the North African coast. This figure is slightly higher than last month, when we counted 1,970. In August, 1,946 people were returned to Libya and 47 to Tunisia. However, we would like to emphasise that any statistical recording of pushbacks, pullbacks and deaths can only be a rough estimate and should be treated with caution. The actual number is likely to be much higher. Our figures roughly correspond to those of the IOM, which counted 1,861 interceptions between 3 and 30 August.

Particularly alarming this month was a documented case by Alarm Phone: 41 people fleeing Libya were intercepted by the supply ship *Mardive 208* in the Maltese SAR. Instead of being taken to a safe harbour, the authorities planned to transfer them to Tunisia – a country that has been proven to be unsafe for those seeking protection. Alarm Phone called it a 'deportation in the making,' as Tunisia systematically disenfranchises refugees and then systematically sends them back to Libya. After six days at sea, the odyssey finally ended thanks to civilian sea rescue: *Sea-Watch's Aurora* was able to evacuate all 41 people from the *Mardive 208* and to bring them to safety. The case is a prime example of how European authorities prepare illegal pushbacks – and how only the intervention of NGOs prevents those seeking protection from being pushed back into life-threatening situations.

Dead and missing

The number of dead and missing in the central Mediterranean continues to rise with each passing month. According to data from [borderline-europe](#), 37 people lost their lives fleeing across the central Mediterranean in August, and 139 people are considered missing this month. The fate of another 7 people is uncertain.

On 13 August, a tragic shipwreck occurred just 14 nautical miles off Lampedusa, killing at least 27 people and leaving many more missing to this day. The deceased came from Somalia, Egypt and Ethiopia, including a one-year-old girl. This was not an accident, but a preventable tragedy: Italian authorities and Frontex once again disregarded the right to sea rescue and sacrificed human lives by failing to provide assistance. One thing is already clear: the boat could not have reached the Italian coast so close without being noticed, as the Mediterranean area is strictly monitored by Frontex. The boat was probably seen but deliberately not rescued. The civilian sea rescue fleet also criticises the authorities, as no one was informed about the boat in distress. The exact events that led to this massacre must be thoroughly investigated. Our thoughts are with the survivors and family members who had to watch their loved ones drown.

On 23 August, during a rescue operation by the NADIR (Resqship) team, survivors found the bodies of three sisters aged 9, 11 and 17 who had drowned inside the overcrowded and already waterlogged dinghy. The medical team attempted to resuscitate them, but it was too late for the three Sudanese siblings. Their mother and brother were among the 65 survivors who were rescued in the middle of the night amid 1.5-metre-high waves and taken to Lampedusa.

After five days at sea without food or water, a six-year-old girl from Guinea, accompanied by her mother, was taken by helicopter to the children's hospital in Palermo immediately after the rescue. She died in hospital on 19 August as a result of the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean.

Routes to Europe

Libya: Escalating violence on all fronts, on land and at sea

At the beginning of August, Libya once again became the focus of European migration policy. At a trilateral meeting in Ankara, Italian Prime Minister Meloni, together with Turkish President Erdoğan and Libyan Prime Minister Dbeiba, attempted to reach new agreements on 'migration control'.

At the same time, increasing signs point to a possible escalation in Tripoli. For years, Libya has been divided between an internationally recognised government in the west (Tripoli) and areas in the east controlled by General Khalifa Haftar. While Turkey maintains close relations with the government in Tripoli, Haftar receives political and military support primarily from Russia and Egypt. Haftar's son's trip to Moscow shows that the east is consolidating its alliances – a renewed push by Haftar against Tripoli cannot therefore be excluded.

For migrants, this fragile political situation continues to pose an existential threat. A UN report confirmed 22 cases of conflict-related sexual violence: 20 women and two Libyan girls were victims of rape, sexual exploitation and human trafficking – perpetrated not only by militias, but also by state agencies and in camps with which Europe cooperates in its 'migration control' efforts.

Violence on land remains omnipresent. In Tripoli, war criminal Al Masri – whom Rome released and returned to Libya despite the international arrest warrant issued against him – apparently continues to commit the same crimes for which he is wanted. According to a video that went viral in Italy, Al-Masri beats an unarmed man to death in the street.

The situation in the Directorates for Combating Illegal Migration, run by the Libyan Ministry of the Interior and co-financed by Italy and EU funds, is also continuing to deteriorate. In Tobruk, around 900 people are currently being held in appalling conditions – another example of the systematic disregard for basic human rights.

At sea, the brutality of the so-called Libyan coast guard reached new heights in August. Ten people seeking refuge were thrown into the water in the middle of the night by a speedboat equipped with military equipment, amid waves several metres high. Added to this is the phenomenon of so-called 'runaway boats' (RABs): boats that are deliberately sent out to sea by militias, often with the refugees being thrown overboard or forced to jump into the water at gunpoint. For the past year and a half, there has been an increase in the number of RABs, small, fast boats that position themselves alongside civilian fleet vessels and then throw migrants into the water and quickly escape.

Civilian rescue organisations also report a significant increase in violent attacks on their ships by the so-called Libyan coast guard.

In this context, SOS Méditerranée warns of a new and threatening development: unidentified speedboats that appear during rescues and endanger the lives of survivors and crew members alike. A detailed explanation of this can be found in the section on 'civil resistance'.

Libya thus remains the most visible expression of the catastrophic consequences of European isolationist policies: a place of extreme violence where those seeking protection and their rescuers are in mortal danger – legitimised by international cooperation.

Tunisia: Abandoned in the desert, 'voluntary' repatriation and repression

In August, the Tunisian authorities continued to abandon refugees in the desert. One survivor reported how he and his group were left at the Algerian border without food or water: 'No one thought we would make it.' For many, this practice means death.

At the same time, the IOM reported that since the beginning of the year, around 4,500–5,000 people have been returned to their countries of origin from Tunisia through 'voluntary return programmes'. The voluntary nature of these programmes is highly questionable: many refugees agree to them out of sheer desperation, because they face violence, poverty and a lack of prospects in Tunisia. The

treatment of vulnerable groups is particularly shocking: social media has documented how women have been arrested for begging and their children taken away by the authorities. In Sfax, there have also been renewed attacks on black people fleeing the country. Tunisia thus remains an example of a migration policy that systematically relies on deterrence – with the tacit approval of its European partners.

Niger: #KeepEyesOnAgadez

For 348 days now, refugees in the so-called Humanitarian Centre in Agadez, which is funded by Italy and the European Union, have been peacefully protesting against the inhumane conditions and the lack of prospects for resettlement. On 21 August, the Nigerien authorities resorted to harsh repression: six Sudanese refugees who were among the most visible organisers of the protest were arrested during a police raid: Nour Alhuda Musa, Zahra Dawood, Zubeida Abdelgabar, Abdallah Hashim, Mohamed Abdullah and Imad Yousif. Their whereabouts have been unknown since their arrest.

The Refugees in Niger platform regularly documents cases of abuse and arbitrary arrests. Niger thus remains a central hub for refugee routes to Libya – but at the same time a place of growing repression and insecurity for people in transit.

To draw attention to these ongoing human rights violations in Libya, Tunisia and Niger, self-organised refugee collectives – Refugees in Libya, Refugees in Tunisia and Refugees in Niger – launched the 'UNHCR is UNFAIR' campaign in September. In their manifesto, they accuse the UNHCR of ignoring refugees, treating them paternalistically and supporting Europe's isolationist policies. Instead, they demand recognition, respect, genuine participation and concrete improvements in care, documentation and resettlement.

We join the campaign and call on everyone to support and spread their demands.

Civil resistance

Criminalisation and endangerment of civilian sea rescue operations reaches new heights

In August, a civilian reconnaissance aircraft – the Seabird 1 belonging to the NGO Sea-Watch – was detained for the first time on the basis of the so-called Flussi Decree of 2024. In recent months, Sea-Watch has repeatedly observed and documented from the air how the Italian government is involved in human rights violations in the Mediterranean. The groundless detention can therefore only be understood as another attempt by the Italian authorities to drive civilian sea rescue operations out of the Mediterranean.

On 16 August, the Italian NGO Mediterranea Saving Humans launched its first mission with its new rescue ship Mediterranea (formerly Sea-Eye 4), which was previously operated by the German organisation Sea-Eye. The events of this mission are exemplary of the increasingly violent and dangerous situation in the Mediterranean. First, the crew was threatened by armed, unidentifiable Libyan militias on eight speedboats. The very next day, another boat, belonging to the so-called Libyan coast guard, approached and harassed the ship again.

This was a former patrol boat of the Italian financial police, which had been handed over to Libya by the Italian government. In both cases, the Mediterranea was ordered to leave the sea area under threat of violence – a clear violation of international maritime law. Shortly afterwards, another boat belonging to the so-called Libyan coast guard pursued the Mediterranea for a period of 25 hours. During the night, a military speedboat, a so-called ‘run-away boat’, approached and threw ten people into the water in waves over 1.5 metres high, after they had been beaten and kicked on board.

Under challenging conditions, the rescue team managed to save everyone. Convinced that the dignity and lives of those rescued should take precedence over bureaucratic requirements, Mediterranea defied the Italian authorities’ order to sail to the distant port of Genoa and instead brought the people safely to Trapani in Sicily. The crew declared that they were prepared to accept all the consequences of this decision. These consequences have since been imposed: the ship has been detained for 60 days in the port of Trapani and fined €10,000. Borderline-europe Palermo had the opportunity to take part in a solidarity visit to Trapani, organised by the local groups of Mediterranea Palermo and Alcamo.

The crew of the Ocean Viking (SOS MEDITERRANEE) was also threatened by a Libyan patrol boat demanding that they leave international waters while searching for a boat in distress reported by the Italian coordination centre. The situation escalated: without warning, the crew of the so-called Libyan coast guard boat fired several hundred shots at the Ocean Viking for over 20 minutes, which was carrying 87 previously rescued people in addition to the crew. The attackers deliberately targeted the ship’s bridge. Essential rescue equipment, windows and antennas were destroyed – the ship is now out of service until repairs can be made. Numerous bullet holes are located at head height – a clear indication that people on board were deliberately targeted. The crew documented the attack with photos and videos and sent an emergency call to NATO.



This was forwarded to the nearest unit – an Italian navy ship – but ignored. The boat from which the attack originated was one of the boats handed over by the Italian government to the so-called Libyan coast guard in 2023 as part of an EU programme to ‘support border and migration management in Libya’.

The Italian authorities’ shared responsibility for the brutal endangerment of civilian sea rescue operations is once again clearly evident here. And it did not end with the arrival in the safe harbour of Augusta, Sicily: due to a case of tuberculosis among one of the rescued persons (who was properly isolated and cared for by the medical crew), the crew was tested upon arrival and prevented from leaving the ship for several days – a procedure that was neither medically necessary nor ethically justifiable, but which placed an additional burden on them after the traumatic attack.

The sailing boat Trotamar III, belonging to the German sea rescue organisation CompassCollective, was also detained by the Italian authorities for 15 days after the crew rescued 22 people in distress at sea and brought them to safety in Lampedusa. They are accused of not informing the so-called Libyan coast guard in advance about the boat carrying refugees in distress. CompassCollective will appeal the detention and will not pay the €7,500 fine. The reason: Libya is not a safe place for refugees, and communication with Libyan authorities enables violent pushbacks and further human rights violations – a clear violation of international maritime law and the values of civilian sea rescue.

We stand in solidarity with all civilian sea rescue organisations that tirelessly expose themselves to increasing danger and criminalisation in the Mediterranean in order to save human lives. At this point, we would like to refer you to the crowdfunding campaigns of the organisations currently affected:

Donate now so that the Ocean Viking can repair its life-saving equipment and soon be able to rescue people in distress at sea again: <https://www.sosmediterranee.de/spenden>

Support CompassCollective to pay for lawyers to take legal action against the Italian government and free the Trotamar III: <https://www.startnext.com/freetrotamar3>

Support Mediterranea Saving Humans in paying their fine and continuing to protect human lives: https://donate.mediterraneaescue.it/multa_a_mediterranea_sn/~mia-donazione

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