



Scirocco
borderline-europe, Sicily –
Part 17/2022
Palermo, 24.10.2022



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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

Elections in Italy

After the elections in Italy, which were won by the alliance around the radical right-wing and post-fascist party "Fratelli d'Italia" (Fdi) (we reported [here](#)), the party leader of Fdi and probably the future head of government [Giorgia Meloni](#) has started to **announce appointments to important political positions**. [Ignazio Benito La Russa](#) was designated as the candidate for the presidency of the Senate and was eventually elected by a majority. La Russa is a well-known leader of the Italian right and publicly sympathizes with fascist dictator Benito Mussolini and well-known fascist symbols. Meloni probably does not envision a ministerial post for former Interior Minister and [right-wing populist Lega leader Matteo Salvini](#), according to daily newspapers La Repubblica and Corriere della Sera. [Salvini](#) still has to stand trial for deprivation of liberty and abuse of office in the case of the sea rescue ship "Open Arms" (as reported in [previous issues](#) of Scirocco). The two politicians already announced a "crackdown on immigration", a tightening of immigration policy and the possibility

of a renewed **naval blockade** ('**blocco navale**'). Countering these, [Francesco Creazzo](#), [spokesman for SOS Mediterranée Italia](#), said that civilian sea rescue organizations will continue their commitment to saving lives because sea rescue is a moral obligation that no state should shirk. Creazzo adds that in case of renewed sea blockades, NGOs and associations will be forced to compensate for the failures of states – even under the conditions of criminalization of civilian sea rescue – because it is unthinkable to let people die at sea.

The elections of the Senate and Camera ('Chamber') have been extremely chaotic. Before the Senate elections, there had been a dispute between Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia) and Giorgia Meloni (Fdi), as Meloni objected to the appointment of a Berlusconi confidante to a ministry. As a result, the deputies of the Forza Italia party would have abstained from voting for the future president of the Senate. Contrary to hopes that this would be used as leverage against Meloni, the La Russa candidate was elected anyway, even without the votes of Forza Italia – which opposition party supported La Russa [has not been clarified to date](#). Moreover, the ultra-Catholic right-winger, [Lorenzo Fontana](#), was elected as president of Camera. Fontana is a member of Salvini's inner circle. The elections showed that the parties of the right-wing alliance, which in all likelihood will form the government, have not managed to act as a unit, but are already entangled in **political power struggles**.

National Protests

On October 15, transnational protests against the renewal of the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** between Italy and Libya took place in many places across Europe. The protests were directed against the Italian-Libyan MoU, according to which Italy finances the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and provides it with patrol boats and training, thus making itself an accomplice to violence against migrants and refugees in Libya and pushbacks in the Mediterranean. With these financial resources, in the last five years, **more than 85,000 people** have been picked up at sea and returned to the hell of Libyan prisons, where they face violence, torture, rape, slavery, killing, and sexual abuse.

Also in numerous Italian cities, citizens, church representatives, and activists appealed to the government and demanded an end to the deadly agreement with Libya. Simultaneous protests took place in Bologna, Rome, and Palermo, among other cities. The national permanent assembly '[Diritto di Migrare, Diritto di Restare](#)' called for a **protest against the extension of the memorandum**, which was joined by numerous activists from various organizations. For example, Women in Black, Udi, Women's House, and Amnesty International protested with a sit-in.

The [Secretariat for Ecumenical Activities \(SAE\)](#) joined the national protests and published two requests in this regard. One to the Italian State to end the MoU and another to Monsignor Erio Castellucci, President of the National Committee of the Synodal Way of the Catholic Church in Italy, with the request to realize moments and occasions in

which the ecumenical dimension of the Church is lived and addressed.

In mid-October, in Tripoli, Libya, an award was given to "Bija", a [human trafficker and commander of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard](#), wanted internationally and sanctioned by the UN Security Council for his direct involvement in the sinking of boats carrying refugees and migrants. The award was strongly condemned by the UN, many states, and NGOs.

Nine years ago, 368 people died in a tragic shipwreck off the coast of the island of Lampedusa. On October 3, the annual "[National Day of Remembrance and Reception](#)" was held to remember those who die and disappear while fleeing.

Jalila Taamallah and Hajer Ayachi are two survivors of the October 3, 2013 incident, who lost their children on the Mediterranean Sea. They have traveled to Palermo together with other migrants and activists to commemorate the victims of the shipwreck and the tens of thousands of people who have lost their lives on the Mediterranean. The association of young migrants 'Stra Vox' had called for the **day of remembrance in Palermo**, which was also joined by other groups of the "anti-racist forum" Palermo (Forum Antirazzista).

On October 7, in Treviso, the prayer vigil "[Let's listen to the silence](#)" was held for the deceased and missing of the **second terrifying shipwreck in October 2013**. Just a few days after the shipwreck off Lampedusa, another 280 Syrian refugees died on an overcrowded fishing boat shot by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, after waiting in vain for five hours to be rescued by the Italian or Maltese Coast Guard. Since there were many children

among the deceased, this tragedy is also called '[Naufragio dei Bambini](#)' ('Shipwreck of the Children').

The right-wing Italian party Lega wants to have the **artwork 'Gate of Europe', a memorial to deceased and missing migrants on the Mediterranean Sea**, which stands on Lampedusa, removed. The former mayor of the island and current leader of the PD (Partito Democratico) group in Lampedusa and Linosa, [Totò Martello](#), vehemently opposes this dangerous initiative. It is a disgrace to the memory of all the innocent victims, he said. Moreover, this malicious proposal is motivated by feelings of intolerance that the Lampedusa community does not deserve, Martello said.

Reception - Accoglienza

Those associations responsible for the reception of asylum seekers in Tuscany oppose the construction of a center for the repatriation of migrants (Centro per i rimpatri - CPR). There are political, but also technical and operational reasons for this, explains [Mauro Storti from the cooperative Il Girasole](#), which manages part of the reception facilities in Tuscany. Giulia Capitani, a migration policy advisor for Oxfam, adds that CPRs violate the principles of international law because they provide for detention without a crime. CPRs, he said, are places where people enter whose freedom-restricting measures are ordered by a justice of the peace and not by an ordinary judge.

In the [port of Reggio](#), an **equipped reception facility was closed**, although landings by the sea in the region are still at high levels. Not only was 1.4 million

euros worth of public money used to build these structures, but the finished and equipped facility is also urgently needed.

Court ruling

In a **historic ruling** by the court of Ragusa, it was confirmed that insults and hostility on the net are punishable by law. This is due to an initiative of our [sister organization Borderline Sicilia](#), which filed a lawsuit against racist and anti-migrant hate speech on the net and was thus able to send an important signal in the fight against all forms of discrimination. According to Art. 414 of the Italian Penal Code, three people from the Ragusa region, including a former member of the Modica municipal council, were subsequently convicted of (online) incitement to crime.

Situation of Refugees

Conditions of seasonal workers

In [Campobello di Mazara](#) (Trapani/Sicily) the olive harvest has begun. Every year, the harvest relies on the labor of up to 1000 migrant farm workers ('braccianti'). However, the housing modules provided by the UNHCR are already fully occupied, wherefore there – between the remains of an abandoned cement factory and the former oil mill "Fontane d'oro" – **a new informal camp may arise**, under inhumane and dangerous conditions. "There is neither light nor water" reports [Jonny Affun, a translator](#) who himself came to Italy from Nigeria 16 years ago. There is also no electricity, toilets or showers, so the workers have set up

makeshift tents and their own improvised supply structures. Last year, a fire broke out in one part of the camp, killing a young person named Omar Baldeh. His body was found burned at his sleeping place (we reported [here](#)). The authorities have not only failed in terms of infrastructure in Campobello di Mazara, but also left the agricultural **workers in the dark about their basic and labor rights**; many of them do not even have an employment contract. The head of the Office for Migration in the Region of Sicily, Michela Bongiorno, is already working with municipalities in western Sicily to alleviate the situation in Campobello di Mazara. Some migrant farm workers have been able to be housed in a SPRAR reception center nearby and, in collaboration with UNHCR, [50 housing modules](#) have been delivered to be built and made available to farm workers by the Sicily Regional Administration.

The campaign "[Diritti negli Occhi](#)" ("[Human Rights in Sight](#)") of the Region Sicily aims to build a state-supported system of housing, transportation, and infrastructure and to prevent exploitation. The [programs Su.pr.Eme. and P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme.](#), carried out with the Red Cross ('Croce Rossa'), on the other hand, are to provide social services both inside and outside the official camp. The farm workers will be supported by doctors, cultural mediators, psychologists, legal experts, and social workers. However, a fundamental confrontation with the exploitative conditions that bring about these situations hardly takes place in the public sphere.

According to Jonny Affun, the situation on the ground would remain catastrophic

even with these provisions. "Some of the people work ten hours a day and barely receive 30 euros in compensation. (...) Again this year there was a fire. The government came, they talked and talked, but nothing was done. So far there is no solution. It is very depressing."

In Latina province, 24-year-old Jaspreet, a field worker of Indian origin, hanged himself near the farm where he worked. This information was published by [journalist Marco Omizzolo](#), who reports on forced labor and exploitation of field workers. In June 2020, a young man aged 25 took his own life – **exploitation, precarious living conditions, oppressive working hours and starvation wages** are structural reasons for such tragedies.

Care and accomodation

Last week, a helicopter was used to fly three people from the [initial reception center of the hotspot Contrada Imbriacola \(Lampedusa\)](#) to a hospital in Palermo. Among them was a pregnant woman with her husband and another woman who urgently needed dialysis surgery. The strong mistral wind and the resulting bad sea state make further landings on Lampedusa impossible right now.

Many people remain excluded from access to reception structures and safe and dignified accommodation in Italy. In [Ancona](#), many **people seeking international protection still have to live on the streets**. They continue to [camp near the police station](#), waiting for an institution to deal with their procedures or for the reception centers to have vacancies again. Also in

Agrigento, more and more migrants and refugees are currently forced to sleep in the open. They have built makeshift sleeping places in an empty parking garage; they are deprived of vital sanitary facilities, food, and medical support.

In front of the [Strada Cavestro office in Parma](#), about a dozen asylum seekers of Pakistani origin protested against the Italian reception system because they are not provided with any support and care structures despite having valid documents and being entitled to reception by the prefecture.

Furthermore, many people arrive in the northern Italian city of Trieste on the border with Slovenia, arriving in Italy via Eastern Europe. Many of them are forced to [sleep in precarious conditions and often in the open air](#).

In the neighboring region of Trento, the humanitarian emergency is also as catastrophic as in Ancona, Agrigento, and Parma. According to the Trento Antiracist Assembly, some **230 migrants are excluded from the Trentino reception system** and camp out in the open, many of them at the foot of the Adige River. When the river suddenly rose a few weeks ago, the sleeping places were [flooded](#) and some young people who had set up camp under a bridge were put in acute danger. A dramatic situation, not only because the people concerned should be admitted according to Italian and European law, but are illegally excluded from the Accoglienza by the Council of Fugatti, according to the activists of the Antiracist Assembly of Trento.

Due to [bureaucratic delays](#), asylum seekers are currently prevented from formalizing their application for international protection – the very process required by authorities for them to be legally entitled to basic care structures such as shelter or food.

While trying to cross from Italy to France, three young people from Iraq, Mali, and Mauritania suffered severe hypothermia. Thanks to [Alpine Rescue](#) in the Colletto Verde area, the affected people were rescued and provided with dry clothes and thermal blankets. Also in [Villatella in Ventimiglia](#), five missing migrants were rescued by helicopter by the fire department. They were then taken to the emergency room of the Croce Azzurra in Vallecrosia.

Find more information on the situation in Italy and previous issues of the [Scirocco](#) under "Projects" on our [homepage](#).

Kontakt

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