

# Rescue at sea - The situation in the Sicilian Strait

borderline-europe, August 2014



## The Mare Nostrum operation

The Mare Nostrum operation was established by the Italian government after the two shipwrecks of October (3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) 2013 in which more than 600 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea.

The operation, financed only by the Italian government and not implemented in other European missions/operations in the Mediterranean Sea, like Frontex or others, started on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2013.



Arrival of the LIBRA, Italian Navy, in the harbor of Palermo, 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, 2014

The objectives of the Mare Nostrum operation are, on the one hand, to control the movement of migrants coming towards Europe by sea and to stop illegal migration by detaining traffickers (thus the operation is a reinforcement of the Constant Vigilance mission, created in 2004 and operated by the Italian Navy with one ship and some airplanes, controlling the Straits of Sicily). On the other hand, according to the Italian government's statement, Mare Nostrum is a mission to stop the state of emergency in the Central Mediterranean and, at the same time, wants to be a humanitarian mission against traffickers and terrorists – a somehow difficult intention. Mare Nostrum is rescuing lives, but at the same time it is a military operation to protect the Italian sea frontiers. This operation involves five Navy vessels, two helicopters, two airplanes, radar systems and 920 marines.

## Case 1- Palermo, Pakistani, rescued by Mare Nostrum

A man from Pakistan, who now lives in Palermo in a Caritas refugee centre, came to Italy on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2014. He arrived by boat from Libya and paid the trafficker 1,000 Libyan Dinar (600 €). The trafficker he paid was also the captain of the big wooden boat he came with. The trafficker told him that it would take about 15 to 20 hours to arrive in Italy. With him there were about 225 other refugees, approximately 100 from Pakistan and the others from African countries like Gambia and Nigeria. There was also one Syrian family and some unaccompanied minors. He did not have a phone but the captain had a GPS. They spent about three days on the boat and had enough to eat and to drink. For him it was the first attempt to reach Italy.

After a while the captain switched off the motor: they were waiting for rescue. A helicopter detected the boat and a little later an Italian military vessel came to help them. They did not call for rescue, they only waited at sea. They were transferred from their boat to the big Navy vessel. The Italian Navy made the identification but did not take his fingerprints. They talked to him in English. They remained on the rescue vessel for two days. The Navy gave them food and drinks and they could sleep. He said that the assistance was fine. The ship arrived in the port of Augusta on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January. His fingerprints were taken there, and then he was transferred to Palermo and brought to the accommodation centre of the Caritas. He was given a stay permit for three months, but it expired on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. He is waiting now for his documents.

## Case 2 - Arrival of 887 migrants from different nationalities at the port of Trapani. Statements of the conditions on the Navy vessel and the merchant ship that rescued them

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of May a wooden boat carrying



887 migrants from Syria, Palestine and Sub-Saharan Africa was rescued by the Italian Navy in the frame of the Mare Nostrum operation. The migrants were transferred from their boat to a big Navy vessel and a cargo vessel 35 nm off the Libyan coast. The hygienic-sanitary conditions on the cargo vessel were disastrous, considering that the ship is made for a crew of 10 people but not for 343 migrants.



Trapani, arrival with a cargo vessel, 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2014

But even on the Navy vessel, which should have been prepared to receive migrants in distress, after more than six months of the Mare Nostrum operation, the conditions were very bad: There were no quiet places to rest or to sleep; two toilets were installed on deck but only separated by curtains; there were no chemical toilets and the migrants were not allowed to use the sanitary facilities of the crew.



Toilets on the "Aliseo", Italian Navy ship

The rescued migrants stayed 48 hours on

deck: in the heat of the day and the cold of the night.

## Death of migrants despite of Mare Nostrum

The Central Mediterranean Sea is one of the best controlled areas in the world. Nevertheless migrants are dying every day. A really big problem is the conflict of competences between Malta and Italy about rescuing people in the different SAR (search and rescue) zones. The Maltese SAR zone is one of the biggest existing ones, but the Maltese Government does not want to accept more migrants and often refuses to rescue them. The shipwreck of the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, which had provoked about 200-250 fatalities, was caused by a conflict of competence of who had to rescue, Malta or Italy. And there are lots of other such cases.



Cover of the ESPRESSO after the catastrophe of 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 2013

## Case 3 - About 181 deaths in 65 nm from Lampedusa – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014: Migrants' desperation

About 181 migrants died 65 nm from Lampedusa. The testimonies who arrived in Messina (Sicily) said that they were in 715 people on board, but only 569 were rescued, so 181 died. They drowned when the Danish

cargo vessel Torm Lotte tried to rescue them. There was no Mare Nostrum vessel nearby. One survivor reports: "We were herded up on deck like animals. One over the other. Then the boat capsized, a small boy, Mohamed, fell into the water. He lost his lifejacket. I got him out of the water but it was too late." The survivors are reporting, too, that this journey was a real horror trip. Under deck there were 29 corpses. Some of them suffocated, but many of them were stabbed or beaten to death.

A Syrian migrant: "There were quarrels between the people below deck, who wanted to get out, and the migrants on the upper deck. There was no place up there, so they killed each other." Below there were mostly Ghanaians and Nigerians who could not pay much for the journey, so they had to accept the more dangerous places in the engine room.

From the beginning of 2014 officials count 800 dead in the Mediterranean Sea between North Africa and Italy in the Straits of Sicily. According to our counts only from May 2014 and today, 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 648 people have died (counting only the dead bodies and not all the people who have drowned and are missing.) When counting even the people who were never found and most likely lie at the bottom of the sea there are about 1,403 people who have died in the attempt to cross the sea and arrive in Italy. 296 have died in May, 517 in June and another 590 in July until the 27<sup>th</sup> of July. Most of them died before the Italian Navy came to rescue them and they mostly drowned because their boat was sinking; other people were suffocated by the exhaust fumes in the engine room of the boat.

***Case 4 – Emergency centre Catania, Gambian, rescued after shipwreck, 75 people died***

On Saturday, 12<sup>th</sup> of July, we (b-e) visited the PalaSpedini in Catania, a gymnasium which is now being used to accommodate migrants

due to the fact that there are no more places in the actual centres for refugees and asylum seekers in the region of Catania.



PalaSpedini, Catania. Foto: Rete Antirazzista Catanese

There we talked to a Gambian man who arrived in Catania on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July. He came by boat from Libya but the boat capsized. He told us that 75 people fell into the water and died. The ship sank and he remained clung for six hours to a piece of timber of the boat, waiting for rescue. At the end the Italian Navy arrived and saved 27 people including him in the frame of the Mare Nostrum operation. He was in bad physical conditions: he lost all his front teeth, his mouth was swollen, it was difficult for him to speak and he had a severe headache. He was brought to the hospital directly after his arrival where they discharged him after more than a week with a piece of paper written only in Italian, stating which medicine he needed to take, but he does not even have the money to buy it. When he came back from the hospital to the gymnasium all the people he had arrived with, the other 26 survivors, were gone, they had been moved to other centres.

He saw 75 people dying but there is no psychological support for him, no assistance at all, he cannot even call his family back home because he doesn't have the money to do so. He is all by himself with these horrifying pictures on his mind.

## **Push backs at sea**

The Italian government underlines that there is no obligation to take the rescued migrants to Italy but to the next port of safety. Because of the various treaties between Italy and Libya push backs to Libya are possible. When the Libyan Coast Guard rescues they put the migrants in most cases into their prisons for immigrants. In May 2014 the newspaper "The Telegraph" made some interviews with migrants closed in the detention centre near Gherian, 80 km south of Tripoli in Libya. The refugees, many of them from Eritrea, Gambia and Nigeria, were intercepted by the Libyan or Italian authorities at sea as they attempted to cross the Mediterranean. One man, who said he had fled Nigeria after he lost his boyfriend, has been there since April, 9<sup>th</sup>, when he was sent to this camp after being rescued from a boat by the Italian coastguard. We don't have information about push backs, but there is a rumour that some Italian Navy Officers are collaborating with the Libyan authorities (which is difficult to confirm for the moment).

### ***Case 5 – Catania railway station, different nationalities, narrations about their journeys across the Mediterranean – push-back to Libya***

Our colleagues of Borderline-Sicilia talked to refugees staying at the central railway station in Catania, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, in the hope to get on a train to bring them to Northern Italy. They talked about their journeys to Italy: Four of the refugees told them that it was not their first attempt to reach Europe. At the first attempt they were stopped by Libyan military forces on the open sea, they had knives and took all the belongings from their victims: money, cellphones, jeans and shoes. Then the military men brought them back to Libya and arrested them. They stayed in prison for one week before they tried again and reached Italy.

Another boat called for rescue but had to wait for three days until a ship came to

rescue them. The passengers said that they were in the "coordinates of inaction": Since a long time Malta and Italy disagree on the competence of rescue in their specific SAR zones of the Mediterranean sea. Others talked about the wind and the waves that tore away three passengers from the boat. They fell into the water but nobody looked back. For them it feels like a wonder that they survived this dangerous journey.

See also case 13.

## **Rescue zones and transfer to land, arrivals without Mare Nostrum**

Since the beginning of Mare Nostrum more than 80,000 migrants were rescued and brought to Italy. There are different kinds of boats (rubber boat, bigger wooden boats) and different numbers of migrants on the boats (from only a few people up to 700 migrants on board). If they start from Libya they mainly come from Eritrea, Syria, Gambia, Mali and Nigeria, but there are also migrants from different African countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Senegal. When arriving from Turkey or Greece, and arriving in Calabria and Puglia, then there are a lot of Afghan and Pakistan migrants, too. But Mare Nostrum is not operating in this area. Talking about the Sicilian Straits the rescue zones are defined by Italian government as "30-40 nautical miles (nm) off the Libyan coast", but normally they are rescuing in a radius of 10-100 nm south/south-east of Lampedusa and between Lampedusa, Malta and Sicily. A Navy Commander in January 2014 declared that they were controlling the whole Libyan coast - line at around 80 nm from Lampedusa and 60 nm from Libya.

In June and July more people at sea were rescued. The Navy ships normally collect migrants from different rescue operations so that the rescued persons have to stay for several days under very difficult conditions on these ships which are not equipped for transporting hundreds of people in a human



way. Mare Nostrum ships normally do not bring rescued persons to the mostly nearby island of Lampedusa but to Sicily, Calabria or Puglia where they will be transferred to emergency or governmental camps. That means a much longer journey for the Navy vessels from the south of Lampedusa up to these harbours on the mainland. In the meantime the area south of Lampedusa is not covered and because of more arrivals the cargo and merchant vessels with the assistance of the Coast Guard have to rescue. The lack of available vessels (Mare Nostrum did not increase the numbers of vessels operating in the mission) and more people who are starting from Libya could be one reason of more deaths in the Mediterranean Sea.

***Case 6 – Palermo, Ghanaian, rescued by a merchant vessel***

A 20 years old youngster from Ghana arrived on the 22th of July in Palermo on board of the oil tanker “Genmar Compatriot” from the Bermudas, together with 60 other migrants and five corpses.



Genmar Compatriot; photo: Sakis Antoniou, MarineTraffic.com

In 2013 he left his native country Ghana together with his brother after their grandmother passed away and no family was left. They went to Tripoli where their father worked, but after a year and a half their father was shot dead; so they decided to go

to Italy because it was too dangerous for them in Libya. An acquaintance of their father organized the journey for them. He brought them to an apartment where they stayed for two days, and from there they were brought to the boat. He didn't pay anything for his seat on the boat but he is not sure whether, maybe, the acquaintance paid something. They travelled on a small rubber boat with more than 80 people on board, among them five women and one baby. The passengers were from Ghana, Nigeria, Gambia and other countries.

He couldn't give any information of the boat's captain, as the captain was in the back of the boat, and he was in front. They had nothing to drink or eat on board, so he drank water from the sea. After a while the motor of the boat stopped working and water started to come in, so the boat began to sink. A lot of people fell into the water and died but he could save one man pulling him out of the water. Of the five women only two survived, the baby drowned.

After about 24 hours at sea, when their rubber boat was nearly sunk, they saw a big ship that came to rescue them. They climbed onto the ship on a ladder. It was an oil tanker from the Bermudas. The crew talked in English and French and gave them food and water. The 61 people, including him and his brother, stayed on the ship for more than a day before arriving in the harbor of Palermo on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. At the port they got medical treatment and were identified but the police did not take their fingerprints. Afterwards he was brought together with 13 others, including his brother, to a centre attended by the Caritas.

***Case 7 – Palermo, Senegalese, unaccompanied minor (17), rescued by a trawler, no intervention of Mare Nostrum***

This young guy, after a year trip from Senegal to Libya, was forced to leave Libya due to the hostile situation in the country, especially for the Sub-Saharan people from Africa. He met a Senegalese man who helped him with the

money necessary for the boat trip to Europe (1,000 Libyan Dinar/600 €) and he took a little boat with 110 persons, mostly Africans and two Syrians, on board. The guy driving the boat was one of the migrants who was given a satellite phone and a compass. Since the compass seemed not working after a night at sea the migrants called their Libyan contact in order to be addressed towards Italy. The Libyan contact told them in which direction to go and gave them an Italian telephone number; he thinks that it was the number of the Italian Army. They were since five days at sea and had problems with the motor. So they tried to call this number with the satellite phone which had a very low battery. But they got an answer and after a while they saw a helicopter. Afterwards, however, nothing happened so they decided to proceed directly to Italy because of the boat's bad conditions: they were afraid to sink. The boat then first met a trawler which refused to help them. When they met a second trawler (not Italian, unidentified nationality) two Africans and the two Syrians jumped into the water and began to swim to the trawler. The crew decided to rescue them all. They wanted to take them back to Tripoli, but all of them started to cry that they didn't want to go back to Tripoli but to Italy. So the trawler called the Italian Coast Guard. They got the permission to bring the migrants to Pozzallo (Sicily) where they arrived after further four days on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March. They were identified (fingerprints). The guy spent two months and three weeks in the very first reception centre of Pozzallo, where he was tested (wrist X-ray and interviews with doctors) to determine his age. Now he is living in a facility in Palermo since June but is still waiting for a guardian and his documents.

So, with the Mare Nostrum operation there were less boats arriving directly at the Sicilian coasts, but in the last month, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June and 7<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of July, migrants reached the island of Lampedusa without

being noticed, neither by the Italian Navy nor by the coast guards. A total number of 952 people arrived at night on these three dates. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July a boat with about 100 migrants arrived in Ragusa (eastern Sicily) without being noticed. So it is not really clear if Mare Nostrum and the coast guard's ships are simply too few or if there is a policy of pullback in the operation.

### Identification on the Mare Nostrum ships

During the first months of the Mare Nostrum operation the rescued migrants were identified on board: on the ship of command (momentarily the San Giorgio) Italian policemen are on board to immediately identify the migrants. A lot of migrants did not (and still do not) want to give their fingerprints because they don't want to make their asylum request in Italy.



Migrants on a Navy Vessel

In a lot of cases the police used violence or did not provide food for those migrants who resisted. In the last months we did not hear any more about using violence. That might be because the vessels are so overcrowded with hundreds of migrants that the authorities try to do the identification on land.

### ***Case 8 – Palermo, Gambian, unaccompanied minor (16), rescued by Mare Nostrum***

B. took a little wooden boat from Libya in March 2014. He started at night and said that

nobody had seen him, so he could enter the boat without paying, while others had to pay 1,000 Libyan Dinar/ 600 €. There were 96 people of different nationalities on board, and a Ghanaian guy drove the boat. Before they started somebody (the trafficker) asked: “Who can drive a boat?”, so this man did not pay. After two days they had problems with the engine and the food was finished. They had a satellite telephone on board, but it fell into the sea. The driver used a compass to direct the boat towards Italy. A helicopter arrived after two days and thereafter a big Italian Navy ship which rescued them. With a small boat (dinghy) the Navy soldiers brought them in small groups to the big vessel. On board the soldiers were talking in English with them and the Police took their fingerprints (so it must have been the main vessel of the Mare Nostrum operation, the only one with Italian policemen on board). They slept on the floor with paper blankets. They spent another four days on board of the Navy vessel while the Army was rescuing other people at sea. The Navy vessel arrived on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March in the port of Augusta and the migrants were brought to an emergency centre for unaccompanied minors in Porto Palo. The minor was transferred in June to a specific facility for unaccompanied minors but he doesn't have any document yet, since the judge supervising cases concerning guardianship has not yet appointed a guardian for him.

## Identification on land

Arriving in an Italian port, the migrants have to leave the vessels one by one. Normally interpreters are coming on board to explain what will happen. The Red Cross and other organizations are waiting in order to provide first medical help. The police is doing a first identification with photographs, name, country of origin and date of birth. Often the names are written in a wrong way so that it is difficult afterwards to find relatives or friends. Normally there is NO fingerprinting at the arrival! After this first identification the

migrants are brought to different kinds of shelters or by bus or plane to other parts of Italy. The police normally returns after some days or gives an appointment to come to the aliens department to take the fingerprints.



First triage and identification, Trapani

### ***Case 9 - Palermo, Gambian, unaccompanied minor (16), rescued by Mare Nostrum***

A. started in 2014, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, from Tripoli (Libya). 102 persons of different nationalities were on board. They lost their way, and after five days they had no more water. They saw another migrant boat, but they just passed without talking to them. After seven days an Italian Navy ship passed and rescued them. He thinks that they were the second boat rescued by the Navy, and after his boat seven more boats were rescued, so that in the end there were about 1,000 people on the Navy ship. They passed three days on board and slept on a closed deck. The authorities tried to take their fingerprints, but they were too many, so they did not do it. A. reports that the Navy soldiers were very kind and talked in English with them. There were bathrooms on board, but they had to sleep on deck only with paper-blankets. When they arrived in Augusta (Sicily) after three days 25 of the migrants had to be brought to hospital. In Augusta they were identified, but the police only took photos with the badge (name, date of birth, origin). Then the declared unaccompanied minors were brought to Porto Palo, a small city in the south-east of Sicily, to an emergency centre where they



should stay for three days, but in the end they stayed there for a longer time. Nobody took his fingerprints in Porto Palo. They were about 100 minors. A. was transferred to Palermo in July. He is still waiting for the documents, but the guardianship court did not decide yet a guardian, and so he has to carry on waiting. See also case 7

***Case 10 – Siracusa, Eritreans who arrived in Sicily and are about to continue their journey to the north***

A colleague from Borderline Sicilia, when monitoring the conditions in a migration centre in the region of Siracusa, talked to young men from Eritrea. They already had their tickets for the bus to Rome and were about to leave. When they arrived at the port they refused to get their fingerprints taken because they wanted to go to other European countries, where they have friends and family. They were sure that they wanted to leave Italy because of the long waiting time for the documents, but the destination of their journey was still uncertain.

For their journey from Libya to Italy they had paid about 3,400 US Dollar each but the person they gave their money to, the trafficker, didn't get on the boat with them. "In reality the traffickers showed a couple of migrants who already had paid for the journey how to navigate the boat. They gave them a compass and a GPS and that was it!" The Eritreans explained that the journey had been very dangerous because the person who navigated the boat didn't really know what he was doing nor where they were going.

***"Internal push-backs" after been rescued by Mare Nostrum***

"First we were saved, now some of us are in the refugee centre of Mineo, but we are in the middle of the road with the obligation to return to Nigeria within seven days." On Sicily happened some such cases of so called "postponed rejections": migrants, arrived

with Mare Nostrum vessels on the island, put into different centres, and then they were kicked out with the order to leave Italy within seven days.

***Case 11 – "Internal push backs"***

A first group of Gambian migrants arrived in the first days of January 2014, rescued by Mare Nostrum, and identified on board. Some of them were brought to Syracuse, some to Pozzallo (Sicily) where they got a deportation notice. Some of them were put in the detention centre of Trapani. Another group of Gambians and Nigerians, arrived on 24th of January, were set "free" without any help, but with the deportation notice. In February a group of Nigerians got the deportation notice and were put in the detention camp of Rome, another group of Senegalese migrants was set "free" with the same paper. In another case two Nigerian women, one of them pregnant, were just kicked out without any explanation nor assistance. On April 25, 36 Nigerian men arrived in Porto Empedocle (Sicily) on the Navy vessel Cassiopea and were brought to the reception centre Villa Sikanian (Sicily). On May 8, the Prefettura (prefecture) issued deportation notices for these 36 men. The migrants were waiting to be placed in a center to formally request international protection. Instead, the Nigerian citizens were all transferred in detention centres: seven were transferred to the CIE in Caltanissetta, 10 were transferred to the CIE in Torino and 19 were sent to the CIE in Ponte Galeria in Rome.

In all these cases the migrants did not have any chance to ask for asylum.



<http://chouchaprotest.noblogs.org/>

**Choucha-Camp Cases** – In 2011 the UNHCR opened a refugee camp near the Libyan border in Tunisia. The camp was closed in 2013 but until today there are a lot of refugees holding out near the Tunisian-Libyan border. There is no way back to Libya and no way back to their home countries. Refugees from Sudan, Libya, Botswana and Nigeria describe that the situation is getting even more hopeless after their applications for asylum were refused by the UNHCR. In their hopelessness some of the refugees went to Libya, from there by boat to Italy and a few arrived in Germany, where we talked to them:

***Case 12 - Two cases of boatpeople from Choucha, who arrived in Italy at the end of May 2014***

In May/June/July 2014, about 10 families and nine single persons from Choucha arrived in North Germany, mostly Sudanese people, also some Eritreans and Somalians who were distributed to other parts of Germany. E. and M. told about their boat trips, which were horrible for all of them. They started from Libya, which is difficult because of the danger to be arrested, tortured and even deported to their countries of origin.

E. and M. said that all boatpeople who start from Libya have to pay traffickers (700-1,000 US Dollar) and have to give away their mobile phones before entering the boat in order not to be discovered near the coast. Only women

are not searched, so E.'s mother took his smartphone with her (she arrived later). Only the captain has a satellite phone. They said about the Libyan Al madaar SIM card that it works near the Italian coast, but not on the sea.

M.'s boat was a small one with 59 adults and five children (normally more than 100 are put on such boats!). Most of them were from Choucha, among them Sub-Saharan and Palestinians. The captain was from Eritrea and did not know the way. The boat had a problem with the engine near Tunisia, one of the migrants repaired it after two days, but later they run out of fuel and were seen by a helicopter and then rescued by the Italian Navy and brought to Sicily. They were four days on sea without food and water.

E.'s boat was bigger and had 350 people on board. They were Sub-Saharan Africans (47 from Choucha, among them many families) and Arabs. E. and other single men were under the deck, without enough air and possibility to go out, and families were on the deck. E. and some Syrians had life jackets, but only because they bought them before - there was nothing on the boat, no water and food provided by the trafficker, only what migrants had with them. The boat needed only 13 hours with a good Tunisian captain, who applied for asylum in Italy and was not arrested. They were rescued by the Italian coast guard on international waters. Their boat was taken back by some Tunisian fishermen, when the coast guard had left. None of them had to give fingerprints after arrival. They only had to give their names and got cards to take food. Then they were brought to hotels on Sicily. From there, they could run away and travel to other European countries.

Being asked if they had the numbers of the Italian coastguard they said that, at the moment, nobody calls the coastguard, because the Italian Navy (Mare Nostrum) is always coming. E. said he did not see the sea, because he was under the deck all the time.

So in case of distress at sea he could not have done anything.

*Many thanks to Conni Gunsser, Flüchtlingsrat Hamburg/afrique-europe-interact*

***Case 13 – Germany, Somali from Choucha, tried to arrive in Italy twice, first time pushed back to Tunisia***

A. tried to reach Europe from Libya over the Mediterranean Sea in March 2011 for the first time. He paid 700 US Dollar to a trafficker, was picked up in Tripoli and brought to a so called connection-house (where the migrants who want to take a boat are brought) about two hours by car away from Tripoli. Together with the others he waited there for the journey to start. They were given only little food and water and they were told to better get used to it because the conditions on the ship would be the same. They got beaten and all their money, valuables and mobile phones were taken away. After three days in the house they were picked up again and brought to the seashore on the back of a pick-up truck under a canvas cover.

The rubber boat was low, narrow and about 11 meters long. With him there were other 75 people from Somalia on the boat, among them about 14 women, one of them pregnant. Before they started the traffickers explained to one person on the boat how to use the satellite phone and how to read the GPS-coordinates. A. did not see the captain before the departure. They started their journey at three in the morning with the destination Lampedusa. After several hours water started to get inside the boat and they tried to scoop the water out of the boat but it didn't work – the water rose higher and higher. The satellite-phone was switched off in fear of being spotted, but finally they turned the phone on again in order to call the Italian coast guard. Nobody on the boat knew where they were but the coast guard promised to come. Shortly after the call they saw a big fishing boat and they paddled to

the boat. Some of the passengers jumped into the water and tried to enter the fishing boat. The crew of the boat threw a rope into the water so that everybody could get on deck of the fishing boat. The person who had the satellite-phone threw it into the water in fear of being accused to be the trafficker of the boat. On the fishing boat they saw a helicopter circling over their abandoned rubber boat, but the helicopter flew away quickly after that. The people on board were all Tunisians who spoke with them in French. They told them that they were in international waters. A. and the other migrants tried to sleep on deck when the Tunisians promised to inform the Italian coast guard. The next morning the crew told them that the Italian coast guard would come and rescue them, but in the afternoon a Tunisian military vessel arrived. Soldiers came on deck armed, issuing commands and shouting that they should not move. The soldiers said that they would bring them to Italy, and the boat started to move again. It was already dark, so they couldn't see in which direction they were moving. The fishing boat stopped only the next morning and they were handed over life jackets and brought to another ship – a military vessel. When they realized that they were being brought back to Tunisia they started screaming and shouting but it didn't help. „We talked to the Italians“, the Tunisians said, „you were in international waters and since we reached you first, we had to bring you back to Tunisia.“ After they had arrived in Sfax they were brought to Choucha, a Tunisian refugee camp.

In April 2014 A. tried once again to cross the Mediterranean Sea after he had found a trafficker, willing to organize the whole route from Tunisia to Italy and beyond. A. wanted to go to Britain because he understands and speaks English. After he paid 5,000 US Dollar to the trafficker, he was picked up by car on the same day after sunrise and brought to the Libyan coast. With a small rubber boat, which was about four metres long, he was



brought to a bigger, more stable wooden fishing boat. There were about 50 other people on board, except him they were all "Arabs", most of them from Tunisia, but no women and kids. The boat had two decks. He was brought under deck immediately, that's why he couldn't see the captain of the ship. He had left his phone in Tunisia because last time, when he tried to cross the Mediterranean, the Tunisian soldiers took away his phone. He didn't see anyone else with a phone. The destination was Sicily because the risk of being brought back to Tunisia was higher in Lampedusa, according to the traffickers. It was dark under deck, he couldn't see anything and he didn't know whether it was day or night. They only had little water and food supplies with them. And so they have been on the ship for two days and two nights before they arrived in Sicily at three in the morning. They jumped out of the boat and started walking on a country road for seven hours before they arrived in a small city where they took a bus that brought them to a big city. When they arrived there, a man waited for him. He was reserved and didn't speak much. He told him that he was not allowed to walk outside and that he shouldn't ask too many questions. He was brought to a house, hiding there for four weeks. One day

that man told him „We are going to Britain tomorrow,“ and the next day they went to the bus terminal together. The man gave him an envelope and told him to get on the bus and wait for him there. But after five minutes the bus started without the man. When A. realized that he had to continue his journey all alone, he opened the envelope. He found a ticket to a German city and a fake passport. In the first city after he crossed the German border German policemen entered the bus to control everybody's documents. A. showed his passport and told them that this wasn't his and that he wanted to go to Britain. The policemen took him to the police station and asked him if he still wanted to go to Britain. He said no and applied for asylum in Germany.

He is in Germany since a few months now. He already moved from the centre of first accommodation to a small apartment where he lives together with three other Somalis. He is waiting now for his hearing in front of the German Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Authority for Migration and Refugees) in order to justify his claim for asylum.



*borderline-europe - Sicily - , August 2014*

*Photo:*

*Photos by, unless noted otherwise, borderline-europe  
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