



Civil MRCC

Coordination and documentation platform for people in distress in the Central Mediterranean

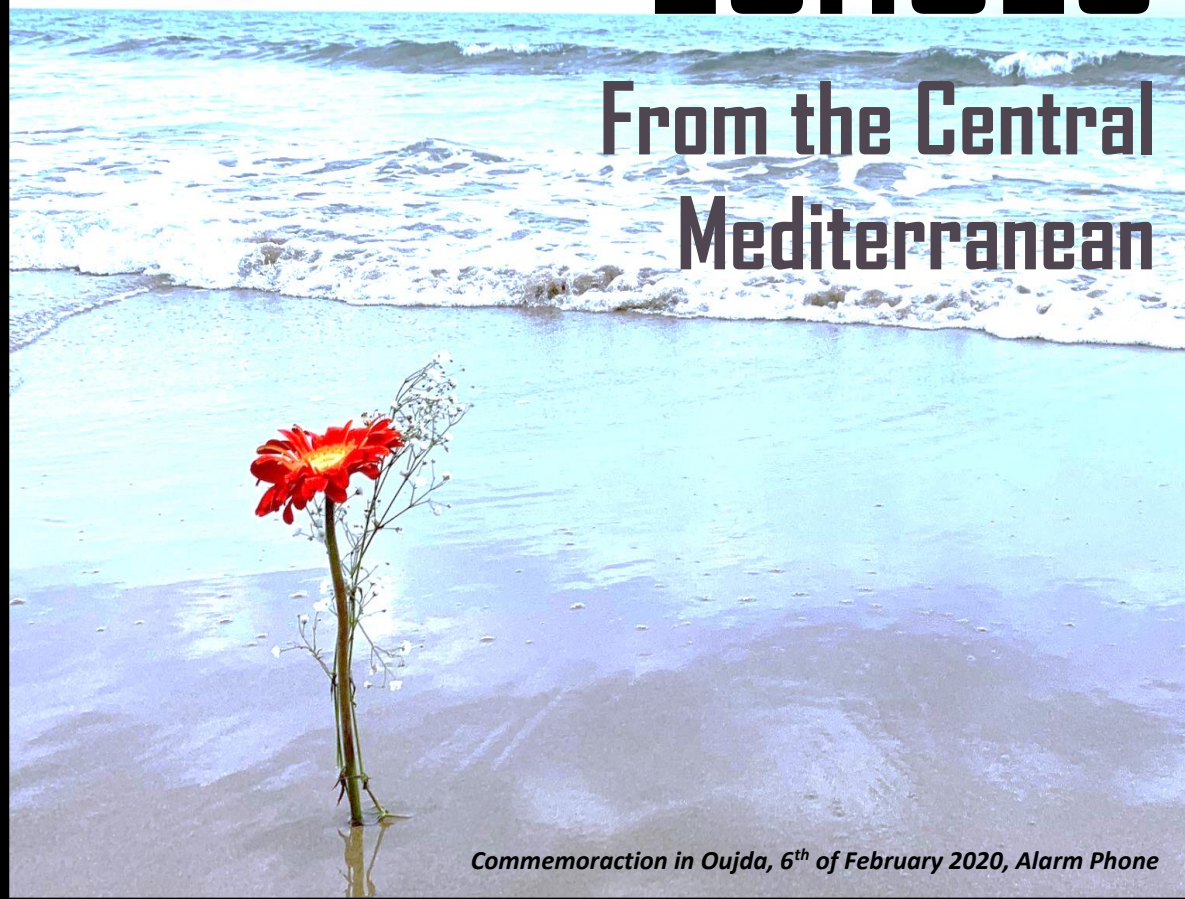
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N°2

September-2022

# ECHOES

## From the Central Mediterranean



Commemoration in Oujda, 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, Alarm Phone

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## MISSING AT THE EU BORDER

CommemorAction - a verbal combination of mourning and anger - developed by relatives, survivors and supporters as an outcry to the ongoing racist murder at the borders. In reference to the transnational days of CommemorAction in the beginning of September in Zarzis/Tunisia, we dedicate this 2nd issue of Echoes to the people missing and drowned at sea.

Not without emphasizing once again, however, at the beginning - that death at sea (as more generally the continuing death and suffering at the borders) is nothing natural and inevitable, but rather takes place as the result of the EU visa and border regime which has been built up over the past decades. This can change! The Ukrainian war shows that when there is a political will to welcome refugees, there is also a way. Open borders and safe passage made possible through trains, ferries and flights - what better way to immediately stop the death at the borders?

We as the Civil MRCC stand for an open Mediterranean region, as a necessary and crucial step towards a fairer world. Again, the last two months show that despite the increasing restrictions imposed upon freedom of movement, people will continue to move autonomously and with the support of civil society actors.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> of January until the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2022:

- Over 40,794 people arrived in Italy, of which a significant number arrived **autonomously**
- 8,435 people were **rescued by the civil fleet** from 137 boats in distress (CMRCC figures)
- 11,612 people were **pushed back** to Libya, and 918 people **died** or are reported **missing** (IOM figures)

# MISSING AT THE EU BORDERS

## COUNTING THE DEAD AND MISSING

In recent years, various initiatives have been launched which attempt to count the numerous dead and missing persons at the borders of the European Union. The organization "United" was among the first to try to count and (where possible) find the names of the deceased or disappeared. Gathering figures in order to measure the extent to which the Mediterranean has become a mass graveyard in recent years. Naming these disappearances so that the accumulation of numbers does not make us forget that, behind each number, there is a human being, an individual story, a broken life and a mourning family.

While for a long time this counting was left to civil society, states being disinterested in revealing the deadly consequences of their policies, in 2014 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) created a specific database called the "Missing Migrants Project", providing figures and information about people who died or went missing in migration journeys around the world. As of August 2022, the IOM has counted more than 24,500 deaths in the Mediterranean since 2014, including nearly 17,000 deaths and disappearances in the central Mediterranean alone. For the IOM, this makes the central Mediterranean at present the deadliest route for people on the move (though it should be noted that recent estimates from civil society organizations regarding crossings to the Canary Islands question this assessment). Even these figures, however, do not do justice to the terrible reality in the region - as they do not for example include shipwrecks which are not accounted for, or those for which the IOM believes that there is insufficient evidence.

## A CYNICAL INSTRUMENTALIZATION

Even if counting the number of dead or missing persons is essential in order to make visible and denounce the disastrous nature of migration policies in the Mediterranean, the intentions behind the production of such figures are not always good. In fact, for several years now counts of the dead and missing have been cynically used towards servicing increased mobility controls, as illustrated by rhetoric used by the European Union. "Migration along the central Mediterranean route. Managing migration flows, saving lives." This is the title of the brief by which the European Commission formalized the outsourcing of migration controls to the so-called Libyan coastguard in January 2017. To respond to the "tragedies" in the Mediterranean, which in 2016 had cost the lives of more than 4,500 people, the Commission proposed the creation of a maritime rescue coordination center in Tripoli.

The rest is well known - a drastic increase in interceptions by Libyan militias, the forced returns of more than 100,000 people to the situation they were desperately trying to escape, and the continuing development of increasingly perilous and deadly routes due to the lack of possibilities for safe passage. How many times has the Alarm Phone hotline heard from people in distress that a return to Libya was worse than death? How many have died because of the bullets fired at them by the so-called Libyan coastguard? How many have disappeared after being locked up in detention centers subsequent to interceptions at sea by the same militias?

## THERE IS NO "TRAGEDY" IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

What is happening in the Mediterranean is not a tragedy. It is time to reverse the naturalizing and depoliticized narratives that make the sea a place where human beings seek to survive the merciless forces of nature. Today, one does not disappear in the Mediterranean as a human being. One disappears as a black person, as a racialized person, as a person constructed as an undesirable other, deprived of their fundamental right to freedom of movement. Much more than a hostile natural border, the Mediterranean is a space that the policies of both northern and southern states have transformed into a place of sorting - where the lives of some count, while the lives of others seem to be worthless when they are not being instrumentalized for cynical purposes.

If the sea is a political space, it is also because it is where forms of resistance and struggles for freedom of movement are taking place. This is evidenced by the efforts of civilian actors operating in the Mediterranean towards ensuring safe passage, but above all by the relentless continuation of attempts by people on the move to leave the places they are forced to flee or to reach the places they have chosen to live in, despite the risks. The costs here are the thousands of lives that the European Union is willing to sacrifice on the altar of its migration policies.

## THE SILENCE OF THE AUTHORITIES

The silence faced by those who have a loved one go missing at sea adds to the violence of this border regime. On either side of the Mediterranean, the authorities tend to offer no response or support to bereaved families or those searching for missing loved ones. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Restoration of Family Links Service and local Red Cross committee, which are responsible for attending to these requests, remain mostly unresponsive. The procedures

for identifying bodies which are found are very long and often inaccessible. When no body has been found, which is generally the case (around 9 times out of 10), the ICRC is of no help and relatives are left completely alone in their search.

*Porta d'Europa, Lampedusa,  
August 2022*



As a result, many people live for years in uncertainty, without knowing whether their loved one is alive. In addition to the psychological distress that this uncertainty delivers by making mourning impossible, this situation also can have significant economic consequences. While the status of "disappeared" is still little recognized by states (there are no "certificates of disappearance"), some people cannot receive the aid to which they would be entitled if the death of the person was attested, resulting in the inability to remarry, to receive an inheritance, and so on. The disappearance of a loved one at the border is therefore a double punishment for the families.

### **THE MOBILIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Faced with the abandonment of the authorities and large organizations, civil society and activist groups have gradually mobilized to accompany people in search of missing loved ones. With the few means at their disposal, associations help families to find answers, repatriate the bodies of loved ones to their countries, or provide for their needs in the absence of missing persons. In Morocco and Tunisia, families of the missing are self-organizing in order to seek answers together from the authorities and support each other. While fishermen collect the bodies that the authorities do not bother to search for, the local population organizes itself to offer the shipwrecked a more dignified burial than a mass grave.

For their part, NGOs working in sea rescue are increasingly confronted with the issue of deaths and disappearances. During rescue operations, it is not uncommon for them to have to deal with the bodies of those for whom rescue came too late. Faced with continuous requests from families looking for missing relatives, the civil fleet also simply does not have the means to respond adequately due to a lack of time, skills or knowledge.

Actors such as Alarm Phone mobilize resources to accompany the families, cooperating with civil society associations in the countries of departure and destination. But the task remains colossal. As a platform for coordination and documentation, the Civil MRCC aims to strengthen the cooperation of solidarity actors at sea to improve information and support for the relatives of missing persons. In the long term, the aim is to push states and international organizations towards taking their responsibilities, both by stopping the

implementation of deadly border regimes and by providing families with the support they need.

### MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

The work of civil society, in cooperation with the families, oftentimes consists of making the invisible visible - such as shipwrecks which are invisible, unknown or sometimes covered up by the authorities. With the help of information collected from survivors or fishermen, testimonies from people looking for a missing loved one, satellite images, traces of ships and intercepted radio communications, civil society strives to reconstruct these shipwrecks.

Thanks to this work, it is also not only a question of fighting against this regime of invisibilization, but of castigating the authorities responsible for these forced disappearances. To demand - though often in vain - that justice be done. This is apparent, for example, in the case of the "left-to-die boat" - seeking to highlight the responsibility of several European states when a boat carrying 72 people fleeing Libya in March 2011 was found with only 9 survivors after having drifted for 14 days. The investigation carried out by Forensic Oceanography showed that during its drift, the boat had in fact been overflowed by a number of military aircraft and had even crossed paths with NATO ships on several occasions without any rescue being launched.

### COMMEMORATION: BETWEEN GRIEF AND ANGER

For a long time, activists and civil society actors engaging in solidarity with people on the move have been confronted with the deaths and disappearances of human beings at Europe's external borders. Through this, they have developed not only networks of solidarity in trying to counteract the deadly violence, but also ways of commemorating those who have been killed, disappeared or made victims of forced disappearances.

The term CommemorAction has come to be used to characterize gatherings in which mourning is connected with protest. The 2020 call out for a global day of CommemorAction (<https://missingattheborders.org>), stated:

*"With our term "CommemorAction" we offer a promise: We will not forget those who have lost their lives or went missing and we will fight against murderous border regimes. We will provide a space for remembrance and we will collectively build something from our grief. We will not be alone and we will not give up. We will continue to fight for freedom of movement and human dignity for all in our daily lives."*

For several years now, these CommemorActions, both smaller and larger ones, have become regular transborder events and fostered a community of mourners who will not give up in their struggle against

the violence that killed or disappeared people on the move.

The next larger CommemorAction will take place in Zarzis, Tunisia, from 3-6 September 2022, and is organized by the families of the disappeared and supporters.



**Cemetery in Lampedusa**

### RELATIVES AS ANTI-NEOCOLONIAL ACTORS?

Tens of thousands of victims of the border regime means hundreds of thousands or even millions of relatives and friends, parents and children in the global south who still miss or search for their loved ones. Of course though, the handling and forms of this mourning are very different. The majority of the affected likely try to deal within their domestic circles with their respective „tragedies“.

So far, then, the families who are engaged and organized on a transnational level with commemorActions appear as the political peak of a social iceberg. Might this become the embryo of a potentially stronger collective power in the future? Even as a new developing anti-neocolonial actor? Already today, in pointing an accusing finger at the lethal injustices of the borders, the relatives are a remarkable power from the global south. As we understand the fight against borders as a struggle for equal social rights, we should perceive and support the families of the commemorActions as a crucial future actor towards global justice.

# COMMEMORATION

*"We will not forget those who have lost their lives or went missing and we will fight against murderous border regimes.*

*We will provide a space for remembrance and we will collectively build something from our grief.*

*We will not be alone and we will not give up.*

*We will continue to fight for freedom of movement and human dignity for all in our daily lives."*

# IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

## A DIARY OF RESCUE COORDINATION BY CIVIL ACTORS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The following part provides an overview of the level and impact of rescue coordination by civil actors in the Central Mediterranean Sea, using brief reports and Twitter extracts.

### JULY 2022

For July, the CMRCC counted a minimum of 209 boats departing from Libya. 72 of these arrived autonomously or with support through the Alarm Phone hotline, while 32 boats were rescued by the civil fleet. For the route from Tunisia towards Lampedusa, the Alarm Phone counted 223 boats which arrived on the island.

The Alarm Phone learned about 66 people who died on this route, while 86 people went missing. These numbers however we believe to be much higher, as many shipwrecks tend to happen without witnesses.

**1 July** **Seabird 1 (Sea Watch)** locates a wooden boat carrying 14 people in distress, and alerts nearby vessels. The sailing ship **Imara (R42 sailandrescue)** is first on scene and is able to support the people until the vessel **Ocean Viking (SOS Mediteranée)** arrives and takes the people on board (1).

**2 July** 68 people in distress reach out to the **Alarm Phone** and later end up on the structure of the Miskar offshore oil platform. The **Ocean Viking** is willing to assist the group, but the alerted state authorities ignore this offer and instead organize an illegal pushback to Tunisia (*cf. focus*).

**3 July** After an alert from the **Alarm Phone**, the vessel **Ocean Viking** rescues 63 people from a wooden boat.

**4 July** The **Ocean Viking** rescues another 15 people from a rubber boat which had previously reached out to the **Alarm Phone**.

**7 July** After being alerted by the **Alarm Phone**, the vessel **Geo Barents (Médecins Sans Frontières)** rescues 41 people in distress from two fiberglass boats. During the remainder of the day, the crew spots an additional 4 boats and takes a total of 315 guests on board (2).

**19 July** The vessel **Rise Above (Mission Lifeline)** rescues 63 people from a wooden boat.

**23 July** The **Sea-Watch 3 (Sea-Watch)** locates and rescues 101 people from a wooden boat. On the same day, the **Alarm Phone** is alerted by the people on board three rubber boats, carrying more than 300 people. All three boats are rescued by the **Sea-Watch 3** (3).

**24 July** Off the coast of Libya, the **Ocean Viking** rescues three rubber boats carrying a total of 258 people. Two of the boats had previously reached out to **Alarm Phone**.

**24 July** After the **Alarm Phone** forwards a distress call from 16 people, the sailing vessel **Imara (r42 sailandrescue)** is able to locate and assist the boat for some hours until the better equipped **Sea-Watch 3** arrives and takes the people on board (4).

**25 July** The vessel **Geo Barents** rescues 52 people from a wooden boat and 13 people from a smaller fiberglass boat. Both groups had previously reached out to the **Alarm Phone**. The **Ocean Viking** locates and rescues 39 people in distress and afterwards changes course towards another 80 people on board a rubber boat who had previously alerted the **Alarm Phone**.

**26 July** The **Geo Barents** rescues a total of 158 people from 4 different boats in distress. One of these boats was spotted from the bridge, while the other three had first reached out to the **Alarm Phone**, which forwarded the alerts.


**27 July** The **Geo Barents** continues with the rescues of a further three boats, of which one carries 232 people. One of the boats had previously called the **Alarm Phone** for help.

**28 July** The **Alarm Phone** receives two distress calls from people at sea. With assistance from the aircraft **Seabird 1**, which helps to locate it, one of the fiberglass boats carrying 40 people is rescued by the **Geo Barents**. Afterwards, the **Geo Barents** locates another 23 people who had called the **Alarm Phone** for help.

**31 July** The sailing vessel **Nadir (RESQSHIP)** overhears a fishing vessel via radio asking for help for 88 people on a drifting wooden boat near Lampedusa. Once on scene, **Nadir** supports the people throughout the day until the larger vessel the **Sea-Eye 4 (Sea-Eye)** arrives and takes the people on board (5) (*cf. focus*).



1

 r42\_sailandrescue  
@r42sailrescue

In collaboration with [#seabird](#) and [#OceanViking](#) this night our crew could rescue 14 people from a small wooden boat in distress!

2

 MSF Sea  
@MSF\_Sea

All these rescues took place in the Maltese SAR zone. We are appalled by the fact that [@Armed\\_Forces\\_MT](#), the primary responsible for rescues in this zone, were informed but remained silent and inactive, neglecting their legal obligation to provide or coordinate assistance.

3

 Sea-Watch International  
@seawatch\_intl

UPDATE: Over 100 people taken on board [#SeaWatch3](#) in 4. rescue. [@alarm\\_phone](#) informed us about the people in distress. Among them a heavily pregnant woman & a patient with severe burns. Our medics are doing their best, but further treatment on land might be needed soon.

10:26 PM · Jul 23, 2022 · TweetDeck

4

 Alarm Phone  
@alarm\_phone

This is what solidarity at sea looks like!

16 people alerted Alarm Phone when in distress at sea. [#IMARA](#) of [@r42sailrescue](#) found and stabilised the boat. [#SeaWatch3](#) arrived and carried out a successful rescue operation. [❤️ #civilfleet](#)

5

 sea-eye  
@seaeyeorg

In Dunkelheit evakuierte die Einsatzcrew die 88 Menschen und brachte sie an Bord der SEA-EYE 4 in Sicherheit. Dort kümmert sich seitdem die Crew um die Menschen und Einsatzarzt Alexander Lupke von [@germandoctors](#) leistet mit seinem Team die notwendige medizinische Versorgung.

## AUGUST 2022

For August, the CMRCC counted a minimum of 93 boats departing from Libya. 55 of these arrived autonomously or with support through the Alarm Phone hotline. 20 boats have been rescued by the civil fleet.

The Alarm Phone learned about 14 people who died on this route, while 60 people went missing. These numbers however we believe to be much higher, as many shipwrecks tend to happen without witnesses.

**6 August**

The vessel **Astral (Proactiva Open Arms)** assists 2 boats on the way to Lampedusa. One of these boats is found with the air support of **Seabird 1**.

**8 August**

After an alert from the **Alarm Phone**, **Seabird 1** is able to find a boat carrying 7 people. The **Astral** is then able to meet and support the group of people in distress until the Italian coast guard finally arrives and rescues them.

**11 August**

After 47 people in distress reach out to the **Alarm Phone**, the aircraft **Colibri 2 (Pilotes Volontaires)** is able to find the boat in distress on the way to Lampedusa. Upon the arrival of the **Astral**, the wooden boat capsizes and everybody except a child is rescued. The Italian coast guard later takes the survivors (6) (*cf. focus*).

**17 August**

After the **Alarm Phone** stayed in contact with 101 people in distress throughout the night, the new ship **Open Arms Uno (Proactiva Open Arms)** is able to perform her first rescue in the morning near Lampedusa.

**21 August**

The **Geo Barents** receives a very rare alert from the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Center about a boat in distress approximately 70 to 80 nautical miles southwest of Sicily. The **Geo Barents** rescues the 90 people within the shared Search and Rescue Region of Malta and Italy (7).

**25 August**

The **Ocean Viking**, while patrolling off the Libyan coast finds and rescues 41 people in distress traveling on a wooden boat (8).

**26 August**

The sailing ship **Nadir** is the only boat which responds to an **Alarm Phone** alert about a rubber boat carrying 57 people. The **Ocean Viking** rescues 56 people in distress which have been located by **Seabird 1** before. In the meanwhile, 20 hours after an alert of **Alarm Phone**, **Geo Barents** rescues 11 people who were drifting for more than a day off Libya

**27 August**

**Ocean Viking** rescues 204 people from 5 different boats and assists another one just south of Lampedusa. 3 of these have been located by **Seabird 2** before, after one of the boats reached out to **Alarm Phone**. At the same time, **Geo Barents** rescues 25 people who reached out to **Alarm Phone** before. The sailing vessel **Astral** finds another group of 13 people fleeing Libya and provides them with life vests and water, shortly before they arrived autonomously at Lampedusa as one of 48 boats which reach the island that day (9).

**28 August**

**Geo Barents** rescues 61 people from a wooden boat, then heads towards 79 people on a rubber boat which called the **Alarm Phone** for help from a rubber boat.

**29 August**

**Geo Barents** continues to rescue people which have called the **Alarm Phone** before. She rescues another group of 18 people who have already spent 4 days at sea and another 41 people who could be found 2 days after the first alert. Both boats reached out to the **Alarm Phone** before and **Seabird 2** supported in locating them (10).

**30 August**

Following another **Alarm Phone** alert, **Geo Barents** rescues 32 people fleeing Libya and has now a total of 297 guests on board.





MSF Sea  
@MSF\_Sea

**BREAKING**

While wrapping up training exercises and before heading south to the search and rescue zone, the **#GeoBarents** team received by the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre **#MRCC** an alert of a boat in distress in the Italian **#SAR** zone.

7



Oscar Camps  
@campsoскар

6

Otro naufragio en el **#Mediterraneo**, unas 40 personas de Sudán y Eritrea. Todo ocurre en pocos minutos, pero la inmediata actuación del equipo de **#Astral** las puede recuperar del mar y ya están todas salvo incluido un niño. ¿Cuántos naufragios ocurren sin que sepamos **#CadaVidaCuenta**



SOS MEDITERRANEE  
@SOSMedIntl

8

Shortly after this operation, **@SOSMedIntl** team evacuated 119 people from an unstable overcrowded wooden boat first assisted by **#Astral**. The survivors spent 24 hours at sea and show signs of seasickness & exhaustion.

**@SOSMedIntl** & **@IFRC** teams are now caring for 212 survivors.



Sea-Watch International  
@seawatch\_intl

9

Yesterday, once again one of the boats spotted by **#Seabird** was rescued by **#OceanViking**. Life-threatening scenes happen daily on the **#Mediterranean**. The civil fleet rescues while the **#EU** looks the other way and willfully puts human lives at risk.



Alarm Phone  
@alarm\_phone

10

**SOS** ~17 people in distress in **#Malta SAR**  
Yesterday evening we were alerted to a boat with ~17 people on board, incl. women and children, fleeing from **#Libya**. Authorities are informed, but don't share any info. The contact with the boat was lost last night - we hope they are alive.

## FOCUS

### 02.07.2022 – Attempt by the civil fleet to rescue people in distress stranded on an oil platform, resulting in an interception to Tunisia

**Alarm Phone** was alerted by 68 people (including 2 children) on board an overcrowded wooden boat in distress within the Maltese Search and Rescue Region (SRR), who were at sea after having departed from the Libyan coast. The people on board the boat in distress reported that one woman was sick and that one man on board had already died during the ordeal. The vessel **Ocean Viking (SOS Méditerranée)**, having received the alert, then changed course in order to meet with the people in distress. The Frontex aircraft Osprey 2 was also observed operating in the area and was likely on scene with the people in distress during the day, witnessing events but not alerting members of the civil fleet about the presence of the people or developments in their condition.

The people in distress ended up climbing onto the infrastructure of the Miskar offshore oil platform, where they continued to call the Alarm Phone for help - the personnel on the oil platform also requesting that the crew of the Ocean Viking should intervene. The people however were ultimately intercepted and pushed back to Tunisia by the Tunisian coastguard, after the Maltese rescue coordination center had told the crew of the approaching Ocean Viking that their assistance was not necessary. For ten hours the Ocean Viking had made the offer to authorities to assist the situation.

The presence and cooperation of the civil fleet in this instance, even though it held the capacity to deliver a safe and legal outcome for the people in distress, was ultimately hindered by authorities which hold the primary objective of pushing people back to countries from which they are attempting to escape, in violation of their fundamental rights.

### 31.07.2022 – Alert by a fishing vessel overheard by Seabird 1 and the Nadir, distress case assisted by the Nadir and then rescued by the Sea-Eye 4

While flying over the Maltese Search and Rescue Region at just before 1500 UTC, the air crew of the aircraft **Seabird 1 (Sea-Watch)** overheard an unknown fishing vessel communicating a position over the radio. The crew of the sailing vessel **Nadir** also overheard this same broadcast, whereupon they changed their course in order to investigate the position as their vessel was in the vicinity. At just before 1700 UTC, the Nadir had located a boat in distress at the reported position. This was an overcrowded gray wooden boat which was carrying 88 people without any navigational or lifesaving equipment.

The Nadir was firstly able to assist the people in distress by distributing life jackets and water to them, before remaining alongside their boat in order to monitor the

safety of the situation. In the meantime, the larger and better equipped **Sea-Eye 4** was able to approach the scene, eventually arriving to meet the Nadir and the people in distress during the night. All 88 survivors could then finally be brought on board the Sea-Eye 4 without harm and given medical attention.

Malta once again knowingly decided not to fulfill its responsibility during this incident of an overcrowded vessel in distress within its SRR, where the people involved could fortunately be assisted, rescued and then disembarked in a safe place, though thanks only to the efforts of members of the civil fleet. It can be further noted that the Sea-Eye 4 was subsequently forced by authorities to wait an inordinate period of twelve days at sea until the disembarkation of these persons was at last permitted.

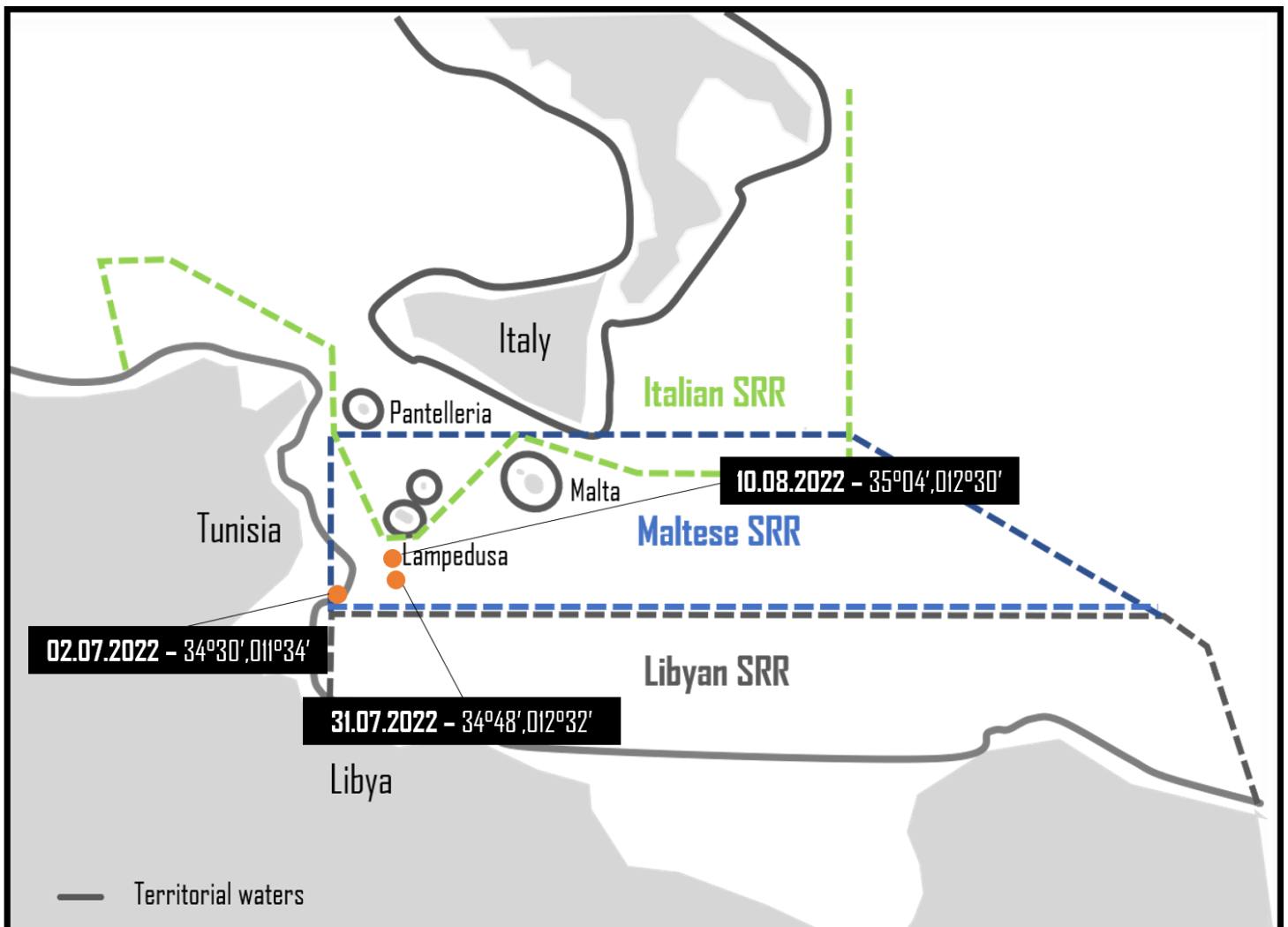
**10.08.2022 - 40 people calling Alarm Phone and spotted by aircraft Seabird 1 and Colibri 2, rescued in critical conditions by the Astral, one child missing**

At just before 1100 UTC, **Seabird 1** spotted an overloaded wooden boat at sea, five nautical miles north of the boundary to the Maltese SRR. There were 40 people on board the unseaworthy vessel without lifejackets. The crew of Seabird 1 informed the relevant authorities in Malta, an alert which heeded no action from the Maltese RCC. Later in the day, the people in distress also reached out the **Alarm Phone** for help, which also urged the responsible authorities in Malta to act. The people on board subsequently reported to the Alarm Phone at around 1800 UTC that their vessel was no longer underway and that they were drifting. Malta still did not take any steps regarding the situation.

The following day, with conditions at sea worsening, the aircraft **Colibri 2 (Pilotes Volontaires)** spotted the vessel in distress early in the morning, also informing authorities and demanding that the situation be addressed. Thanks to these combined alerts by the

Alarm Phone and the two NGO aircraft, the vessel **Astral** (Proactiva Open Arms) was later able to arrive at the scene, locating the boat amid strong winds and waves. After several attempts to secure and stabilize the vessel in distress however, the poor sea conditions and the overloading of the vessel led to it capsizing, whereupon the crew of the Astral had to rescue and embark the people. An Italian coastguard asset then finally took the people from the Astral, disembarking them in Lampedusa. One child, though, was ultimately reported missing out of the ordeal.

Without the coordination of civil fleet reconnaissance assets, the Alarm Phone distress hotline and the presence of a properly equipped NGO rescue vessel, the outcome for these people could have been far graver. The Maltese RCC once again showed no willingness to uphold its legal obligations during the event, having time to act and refusing to do so, where the community of international NGOs was fortunately able to step in, keep track of and ultimately provide critical lifesaving assistance to the people. Our thoughts are with the child and their family.



# COMMENTARY

## TRANSSHIPMENT: WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BOOGYMAN?

By Alina Krobok from Sea-Watch

Last June, the Sea-Watch 4 did its very last mission as Sea-Watch 4 - from now on she will continue to operate in the Central Mediterranean with SOS Humanity as "Humanity 1". This last mission was quite extraordinary in the sense that the ship broke the record of transshipments in one rotation among the civil fleet, by assisting three other assets and taking over their rescued guests.

Transshipments have a long history in civil sea rescue. In early 2015, we handed over our guests to navy and coast guard assets whose rescue efforts we supported. When those stopped showing up, we bought bigger ships and had to start bringing the people to land ourselves. During this whole period, there were, regularly, merchant ships which came across people in distress and assisted them.

Then, during the dark Salvini period, no ship was allowed to enter ports when there were people in need on board. The message to the merchant industry was easy: If you help people in distress, you will run into trouble and make huge losses by having endless standoffs in front of European ports without being allowed in. So, better ignore them or participate in illegal pushbacks and hand them over to some Libyan military unit.

While the civil fleet was outraged about this development, the strategy of helping merchant vessels and preventing pushbacks by taking over the people only changed slowly. Rescue ships are ultimately better-trained and equipped to care for people rescued from distress at sea. The fear of doing something wrong, of being stuck in front of or in a port again, and of being criminalized for supporting each other and people on the move runs deep by now.

Of course, you could argue that we, again, take over a task that states deliberately have given up and therefore, we provide a solution and relief for what can only be described as state failure. But that's the issue with civil sea rescue: While we want states to do their job, we know they won't. So, if we are not doing it, this is on the backs of the people on the move. And that's not an option.

So, if there were no fear of repression, what could be wrong with transshipments? What could be wrong with assuring the merchant industry that they won't be left alone if they actually decide to help? What could be wrong with supporting other NGO ships who reached their limits of space and supplies in providing the best possible care for people on the move by taking them over? What's wrong with looking at the Central Mediterranean as a whole and looking how we can maximize the available rescue capacities because we never have enough? Right, nothing.

So here is my plea and a reminder also for us: Let's not have our decisions led by fear of something that should be a matter of course.

*Picture taken from Nadir (ResQship), before a transshipment of the guests to the Sea Watch 4*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENT



## AUTONOMOUS ARRIVALS: THE VAST MAJORITY OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS OF SEA-CROSSING ON THEIR OWN STRENGTH

What happened in the early morning of 26.07.2022 was far from new - in another call to Alarm Phone, the same people who provided their GPS position from their boat at sea during the night a few hours earlier, stated that they were now at Lampedusa. The people landed at the shore themselves without any support from the Italian Coast Guard or any civil rescue ship.

Aside from such a clear type of autonomous landing, much more often the Coast Guard or Guardia di Finanza intercept or accompany boats only a few nautical miles before the people reach the coast by themselves. According to official statistics, these interceptions or escorts might be counted as rescues by coast guards, but in fact, the practice appears more to represent final controls upon arrival. The perception of autonomous arrivals should then definitely include at least all boats which make it near to or into the territorial waters of Italy or Malta. Thus, about 12 to 15 nautical miles from

In any case, the people on such boats often cross the sea for around 20 hours when departing from Tunisia, or 30

landings and with the brunt of the arduous journey already behind them.

To expand on this, around the time of Salvini's government, the Italian state seemed to have reframed its duty to assist distress cases by treating boats making the crossing not as SAR events, but as domestic 'illegal immigration events', and thus, responding only once the boats approached Italian territorial waters. This can in part be seen as a mechanism which Italy uses to shun its responsibility for going through the normal (and more long-winded) SAR event procedures such as providing an official place of safety. Moreover, this reframing of SAR events as 'illegal immigration events' has also been done for NGO rescues. A port of destination has more recently been provided for disembarkation rather than the conventional place of safety, and can be seen to represent a wider effort by Italy to change the normal discourse and rules of engagement when it comes to SAR in the context of migration.

to even 40 hours when departing from Libya. Often, they desperately call for rescue for a long time directly to the

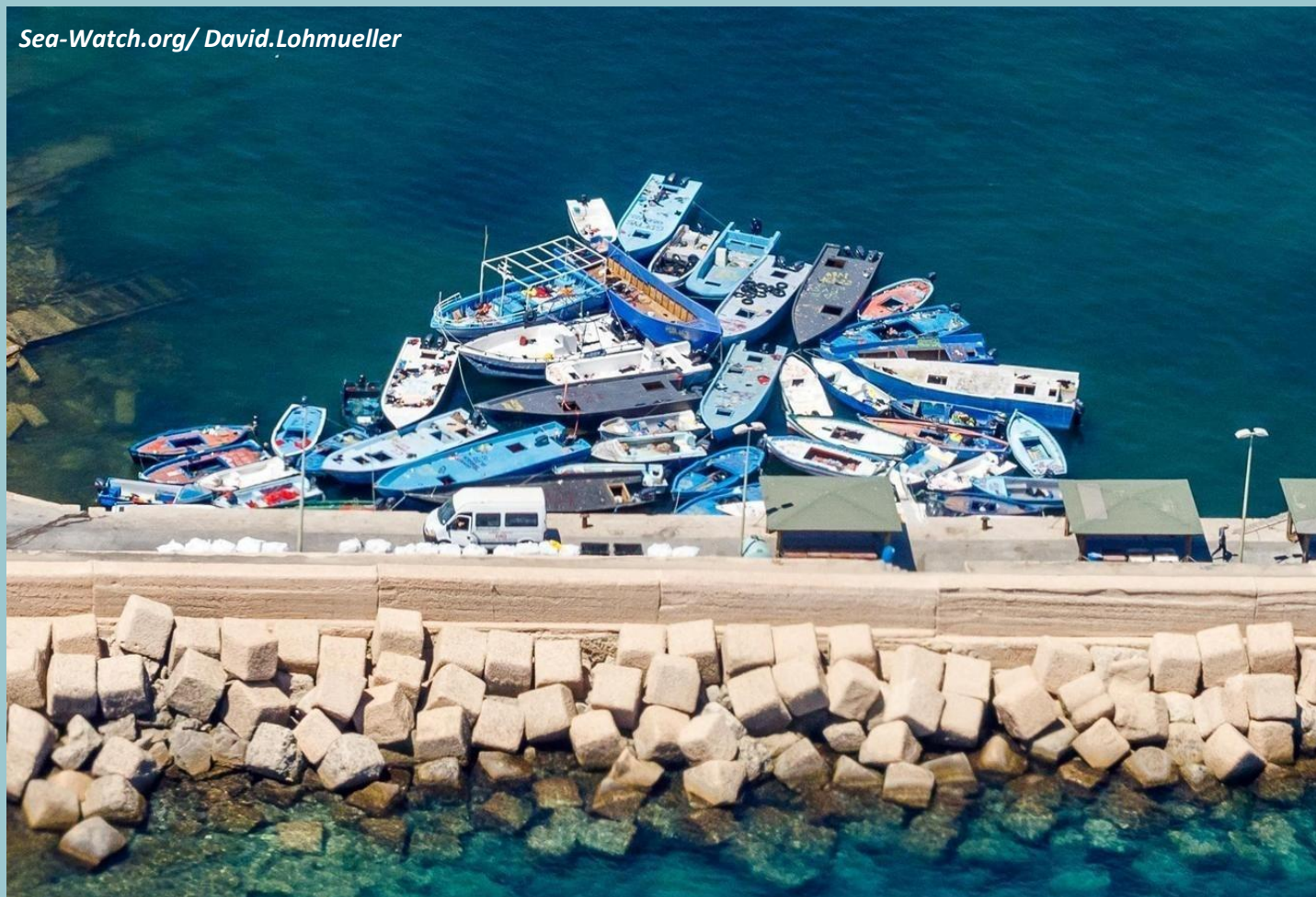
coast guards and/or indirectly through Alarm Phone. But these SOS calls are ignored regularly. Non-assistance has long been the norm in the central Mediterranean sea.

We should pay appropriate attention to the fact that in the majority of sea crossing cases, people make it by themselves. On the 30th of July, 31 boats arrived in Lampedusa, on the 6th of August, there were 18. The majority of these boats departed from Tunisia, but several also from Libya.

During the last weeks, several larger boats with 300 to 500 people on board also made it to the coasts of Sicily or Calabria. Of course such big landings receive public attention. But nobody knows how often smaller boats, so-called “ghost boats”, arrive during the night without any attention.

All in all, it should never be forgotten that only a small part of sea arrivals from Tunisia and Libya are rescued by the civil fleet. We should acknowledge that a vast majority of refugees and migrants overcome the challenges and risks on their own strength.

*Sea-Watch.org/ David.Lohmueller*



# ANALYSIS

## FROM PLACE OF SAFETY TO PORT OF DESTINATION

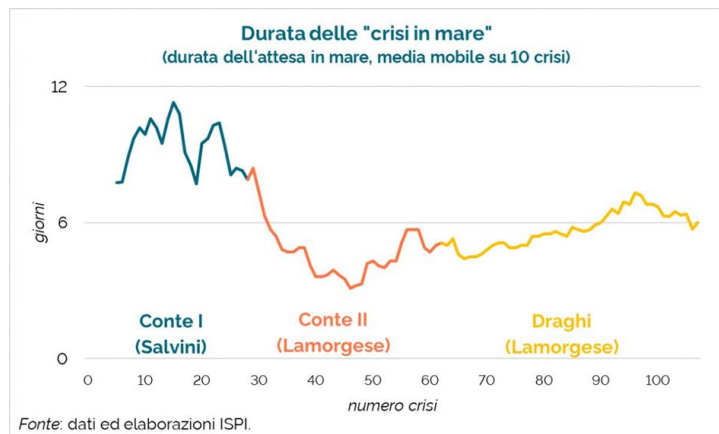
On the 25th of September, there will be an early general election in Italy. Once again, a part of the election campaign is being played out on the backs of people on the move. According to the polls, Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the post-fascist party Fratelli d'Italia ('Brothers of Italy'), could win the elections and become Prime Minister. For her, the solution is a military “naval blockade” to repel migrant boats off the coast of Libya.

Matteo Salvini, the League leader is her junior ally and is preparing to return as Minister of the Interior, a position he had already occupied from May 2018 to September 2019. He wants to reinstate the “security decrees” and try again to “close the ports” of Italy to landings.

But, beyond the propaganda, what has really happened in these four years?

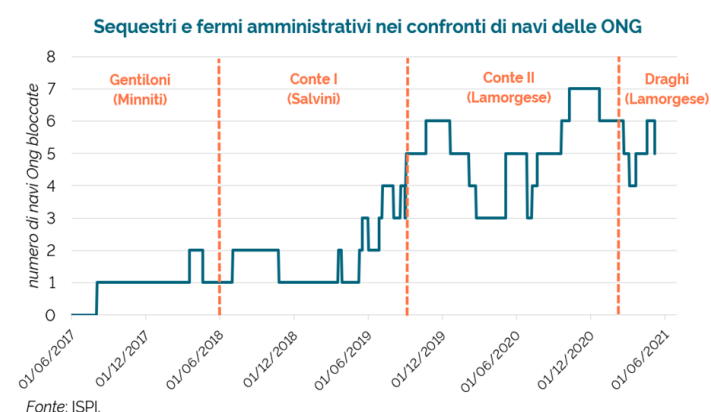
According to data collected by the reliable ISPI researcher Matteo Villa, during the Salvini period, 28 crises occurred: 12 times when rescue ships were forced

to disembark in non-Italian ports, and in the rest of the cases, they were forced to wait up to 20 days before landing.



**Fig. 1 CRISIS AT SEA DURATION** - Moving average of stand-off length over ten cases

With the following two governments (Conte 2 with Mario Draghi as Prime Minister and Luciana Lamorgese as Minister of the Interior), the authorities' attitude changed but obstacles continued to be created to civil rescue activities at sea. Since May 2020, following Port State Controls, 15 systematic administrative detentions of non-governmental ships occurred.



**Fig. 2 SEIZURES AND DETENTION OF NGOs SHIPS**

This practice only stopped in August 2021. In official communications with foreign authorities, new terminology has been introduced - the Italian authorities write that the ships are engaged in “systematic assistance to migrants in transit”.

But let’s now look at another specific point: in March 2020, the Covid 19 pandemic was rampant in Italy and a state of health emergency was declared. On the 7th of April, a decree by the Ministry of Transport (MIT) stated

that Italian ports can no longer be considered as a “Place of Safety” for health reasons.

Quarantine ships for survivors and imposed quarantine periods for civil fleet ships themselves were established. And here too, there were significant changes in official terminology - increasingly, even rescue operations carried out by patrol boats of the Italian Coast Guard and Guardia di Finanza are not defined as “SAR events” but as “illegal immigration law enforcement operations”.

For civil rescue vessels it is always possible to disembark, often though after several days of waiting, unofficially justified by the lack of adequate reception facilities ashore. But in the official communications addressed to ships it is almost never a question of assigning a “Place of Safety”, but rather a “port of destination”, as it would be for the cargo of a merchant vessel. The state of health emergency ended on 31st March 2022, but ever since, this language continues to be used.

These are not innocent changes. On the contrary, it seems clear that the medium to long term attempt is to first of all get out of the legal framework defined by the International maritime law on SAR as defined by the Hamburg Convention of 1979, relieving European states (Italy and Malta first) of the duties and obligations that these entail.

Secondly, the aim seems to be to treat the landed persons differently - not as survivors of a SAR event seeking asylum, but rather as “illegal migrants intercepted in an irregular attempt to cross the border by sea”, resulting in more accelerated discriminatory removal procedures.

Finally, the objective is to prepare the ground for further criminalization against people on the move and against solidarity with them.

Undoubtedly, the elections in Italy on 25th September will open up new political scenarios, with impactful consequences upon the management of maritime borders in the Mediterranean.

These consequences are certainly part of a long-term strategy in border externalization, but they could also take more direct, harsh and brutal shapes. Both can and must be effectively countered through a broadening of social and political alliances and a strengthening of the common infrastructures of solidarity, at sea as well as on land.

# INTERVIEWS

## VOICES FROM TUNISIA

*Latifa, Chamseddine and Slah are three Tunisians affected differently by the EU border regime. Each of them has particular ways of struggling against borders through their work and their daily lives. These interviews were collected in Zarzis by the CMRCC research and follow-up team.*

**LATIFA**, sister of Ramzi (missing since 2011) and member of the Tunisian association "Mothers of The Missing", sheds light on how the association decided to self-organize as mothers and sisters of their loved ones back in 2016, and the work that they have been engaged in since then.

**How was your association created? With what purpose? With what demands?**

My mom Fatma was part of another association that never supported us in anything, so she decided in 2016 to create her own association and support the mothers who are looking for their children. The goal of our organization is to search for our siblings and children that went missing at sea. We also try to support families with lawyers or try to find solutions for the families to access free health care, because many families do not have any income after their sons or their husbands disappeared and are totally left alone in a very difficult social and economic situation.

**Why did you name the organization "Mothers of the Missing?" Why did you choose to get visibilized as women?**

From my experience, it is in general the mothers and sisters who are mostly affected and who never give up

from searching. It doesn't matter whether in Tunisia or other countries, it has always been the women who are on the front-line, always present in the protests, always ready to move around the world to find any trace of their loved ones and having the courage and the strength to continue the struggle.

At the beginning we wanted to name our association "The Cry of Mothers" because no one could ever feel the pain of the mothers who have suddenly lost their sons.

**What has been the support of the authorities in your search and reparation procedures?**

The authorities have never helped with anything, they keep on making fake promises since 2011, they do not even support us with visas for Italy, DNA tests or lawyers, we have to count on ourselves and work together and be united, be supportive to each other.



**Latifa, CommemorAction wall in the Transborder summer camp II, July 2022**



**SLAH, a fisherman from the city of Zarzis in Tunisia, opens up about the impact of the EU militarization of the Central Mediterranean on his work as a fisherman, also speaking about his daily engagement in rescuing people since the 90s.**

**To what extent are you, as a fisherman in Zarzis, affected by migration and the border regime?**

The agreements between Libya, Italy and Malta to increase border control are on the shoulders of the fishermen. Our fishing zone has been reduced and Libyan militias have controlled it more and more. The biggest mistake that was ever made was to have the Libyan militias as the traffic police in the Central Med.

Since 2016, we as fishermen are witnessing the deaths and atrocities they inflict on the migrants at sea, and we ourselves are also having our boats and goods stolen, being kidnapped and imprisoned and only being freed when we pay them.

**How do you deal with bodies found at sea? With people in distress? Do you have the support of the authorities?**

We are very often left alone in rescuing people, sometimes without any support from authorities for 20

hours or even more. We are obliged to conduct the rescues ourselves - it's a humanitarian obligation and we have been doing this since the 90s. The first thing we do is to get the people on board. We give them food and water and we call the rescue centers.

This is our culture and our duty: as fishermen we cannot let people drown! Even with the few capacities we have and even if we often have to throw away all the fish we have after a rescue, human life is more important than any money, it is irreplaceable!

**How do you think we can ensure that the sea is no longer transformed into a graveyard?**

The situation cannot stay this way. The more years pass by, the more people are dying and the more people go missing. The EU has to take responsibility and evacuate the people little by little as a first step. But at one point, we should reach a world without visas. It is possible but there's no will from the governments!



**Rescue of a boat of people in distress by the fishermen of Zarzis, Association "the Fisherman" for development and environment**

**CHAMSEDDINE MARZOUQ, a former Tunisian fisherman shares his own experience, since 2011, in burying "with dignity" people on the move that have lost their lives along Zarzis coasts.**



**Chamseddine in the "Cemetery of the unknowns", Mohsen Lihidhed**

***How did the idea of opening cemeteries for the bodies of migrants found off the coast of Zarzis come from?***

In Zarzis, we have been dealing with deaths since the border regime of the EU has been implemented. In 2002 it was amplified but during a dictatorship we were unable to speak-up against these deaths and we were unable to do anything.

In 2011, with the revolution and the establishment of the Choucha refugee camp, we asked authorities to give us a piece of land to bury the people that were found on the coasts of Zarzis. They only gave us a space where they were discharging garbage... I have cleaned it up, prepared the sand and have started burying corpses that are found on our coasts.

***What is the impact of all these bodies found in Zarzis on the inhabitants of the city?***

The people in Zarzis are accepting and are open to have cemeteries for people who lost their lives because of the deadly border regime. They are also supportive and never had problems with it. As for me, it is hard work: you cannot recognize the people, the corpses are decomposed... You have to bury them with respect to their bodies, their lives and their loved ones.

***Do you receive support from local authorities?***

There was no support from authorities, they never gave me a proper piece of land or any financial support. There were normal administrative procedures such as giving the authorization to bury the people but other than that, we do this work alone and with our own capacities and donations.

***Who visits these places and for what purpose? Have you ever received visits from families?***

I remember 2014 when B., a Syrian producer living in the Netherlands, came to the cemetery looking for her sister Maysoon. Maysoon was on a boat carrying 480 people that was shipwrecked near Ben Guerden and only 120 persons survived. I informed her that the people that have been identified or found on the coasts of Tunisia were all buried near the Ben Guerden port. The mothers and sisters from the "Association of the Mothers of Missing" in Tunisia have visited the cemetery in Zarzis in 2022. They were also asking if there was a chance that one of their sons was there.

This to mention a few of the experiences I had with families of missing people. Each time, it is very emotional and touching to have them present, asking many questions for which unfortunately, there is no answer.

# AMPLIFYING VOICES

## SEARCHING FOR THE MISSING, CARING FOR THE DEAD

### "WE, FAMILIES OF THE MISSING"

*Letter written by Laila Waleed Hasan, a young woman from Syria. Her brother, Jihad Walid Hassan, is missing since he left Tunisia by boat on the 4th of March 2022. Laila writes about the long journey that the families had to go through in their search for their loved ones.*

The boat in which my brother traveled departed on the 4th of March at 8pm. In this boat were Syrian, Palestinian and Tunisian people. The boat was carrying a number ranging between 57 and 68 people and was heading towards the island of Lampedusa in Italy, which usually takes around 18 hours to reach by sea. The day after, the news spread that the boat had arrived on the island of Pantelleria (in Italy), and that travelers were now in quarantine for 14 days.

14 days later, some bodies of the people who were on board began to appear on scattered beaches in Tunisia, in the areas of El Haouaria, Kelibia and Nabeul (coastal cities in the North-East of Tunisia). Most of the bodies found, between 30-35 people (mainly women, children and elderly people), were taken to Taher Maamourri Hospital in Nabeul. Apart from these bodies found, a large number of people remain missing until now.

Consequently, we started to search in Italy through the Italian Red Cross. They refused to help except with an official letter directed by the Syrian Red Cross, which in turn, was unable to provide a helping hand under the pretext of imposed sanctions on Syria. Afterwards, we contacted the Italian Coast Guard that offered no help at all, and even tried to extract and elicit information from us. Then, one of the families of the missing traveled to Italy and tried to search there: in vain.

Then we tried to search in Malta through the Maltese Coast Guard, which confirmed that there none of the missing persons were registered in their records. Later on, some news spread that 6 Tunisians from the same boat communicated with their families and told them that they were in a Maltese prison. We verified this information and found out that until mid-March, the last entry of refugees into Malta was at the end of 2021.

***This section contains the words of those affected by the murderous border regime who struggle so the dead and the missing are not silenced and forgotten.***

We also contacted several ships that carried out rescue operations during that period. We came back full of disappointment after the ships' unclear responses, such as not giving the names of those who were with them for security reasons and then denying the presence of any Palestinian, Syrian or Tunisian with them.

We contacted Tunisian authorities again but they have not yet announced clear news regarding the passengers of the mentioned boat. An official of the Syrian community in Tunisia did not make any statement and when we contacted him personally, his response was that all the passengers of the trip drowned. The Tunisian Ministry of Interior reported on its website that 205 illegal immigration operations had been thwarted from January 1 to April 20, 2022 and that 3.160 people were arrested, including 2.249 foreigners and 911 Tunisians. However, we couldn't get any information about the missing people. According to our follow-up of the news, most of the people departing from Tunisia by boat are rescued, a few remain counted as missing and sometimes, the bodies appear on the beach.

We later contacted the hospitals in Nabeul, which requested us to provide them with DNA samples to match them with the DNA samples collected from the bodies found. Again, we faced countless financial, legal and procedural difficulties, whether in Syria or in Lebanon. After a long effort, we, the families, managed to collect our DNA. However, the hospital did not give us a way to send the samples, but rather we were treated with infinite disdain and were asked to travel To Tunisia! Also, when the family of a missing person called Cosette contacted the hospital to photograph her closely in order to identify her, the hospital never answered.

And for the record, we tried calling my brother's number (Jihad Waleed Hasan) on March 13 at 6pm

repeatedly for 5 times. The phone was ringing but there was no answer. Here, the following questions came to our mind: was the phone confiscated by smugglers? Were the missing persons alive to that date and not rescued? Was there a forced disappearance of some of the travelers in Tunisia? We also tried to contact the numbers of all the missing people in the month of May, and there were many phones ringing, with the line being on for seconds and then off again.

We also searched in Libya in separate areas, whether inside or outside the government-

controlled areas through our acquaintances, and several news spread about their presence in a Libyan prison, but there is no news confirming or denying their presence there.

We, the families of the missing, have moved spontaneously to search for our simple capabilities and have been subjected to exploitation and fraud attempts, but we still have a glimmer of hope in finding news that heals our wounded and stagnant hearts. We demand and appeal to everyone who can help us or at least contribute to delivering our voice to parties that can help us reach our children.



Lihidheb Mohsen, Beach in Zarzis

### REST IN PEACE, ABDEL

*Abdel Wahab Yousif is a young Sudanese poet who drowned in the Mediterranean in August 2020.*

You'll die at sea.  
Your head rocked by the roaring waves,  
your body swaying in the water,  
like a perforated boat.  
In the prime of youth you'll go,  
shy of your 30th birthday.  
Departing early is not a bad idea;  
but it surely is if you die alone,  
with no woman calling you to her embrace:  
"Let me hold you to my breast,  
I have plenty of room.  
Let me wash the dirt of misery off your soul".

**Abdel Wahab Yousif**  
Translation from Arabic by Adil Babikir

أن تموت في عرض البحر  
حيث الموج يصطفق بصخب في رأسك  
والماء يأرجح جسديك  
كقارب مثقوب.

....

في مقتبل العمر  
دون أن تبلغ الثلاثين بعد.  
ليس سيئاً أن تغادر باكراً أبداً،  
إلى سيء، أن تموت وحيداً  
دون امرأة،  
تقول لك: تعال إليّ، حضني يتسع لك،  
دعني اغسل روحك من درن البؤس.

# ENTRE ZARZIS ET LAMPEDUSA

De l'autre côté de la mer,  
Tu enterres les corps de mes frères,  
Je sais, je sais ce que tu ressens,  
A force de l'avoir fait souvent.  
C'est dur, très dur, mon ami,  
D'être témoin de cette infamie,  
Avec un sentiment d'impuissance,  
Devant cette cynique violence.

Moi aussi sur le littoral sud,  
Ce sont Mamadou, Ali et Oualid,  
Que j'ai humblement accompagné,  
Avec des prières au ciel criées,  
Pour faire parvenir leur calvaire,  
A Dieu l'immense de l'univers.

Tu n'as pas seulement enterré les corps,  
Mais l'âme de toute l'humanité.  
Tu étais seul devant chaque naufragé.  
Il était seul quand tu l'as enterré.  
Chacun était seul sur les vagues de la mer.  
Chacun a quelque part un père et une mère.  
J'étais seul à les mettre sous terre,  
Ils étaient seuls arrosés par mes sueurs.  
Un oiseau seul survolait la scène,  
De deux hommes qui s'enterrent sans haine.

Oui, mon ami Vincenzo Lombardo de Lampedusa,  
Moi, de Zarzis, Mohsen surnommé Boughmiga,  
Nous sommes certainement les seuls amis des Harraga,  
Que nous avons bien traités vivants, bien traités morts,  
Que nous avons respecté, comme des frères,  
Dans ton cimetière de Lampedusa,  
Et sur mon monticule de Ras Lemsa.

On the other side of the sea,  
You bury the bodies of my brothers,  
I know, I know how you feel,  
Having done it so many times.  
It is hard, very hard, my friend,  
To witness this infamy,  
With a feeling of helplessness,  
In front of this cynical violence.

I, also on the southern coast,  
They are Mamadou, Ali and Oualid,  
That I humbly accompanied,  
With prayers to the sky shouted,  
To send their ordeal,  
To God the immense of the universe.

You did not only bury the bodies,  
But the soul of all mankind.  
You were alone in front of each castaway.  
He was alone when you buried him.  
Each one was alone on the waves of the sea.  
Everyone has somewhere a father and a mother.  
I was alone to put them in the ground,  
They were alone watered by my sweat.  
A single bird flew over the scene,  
Of two men who bury themselves without hatred.

Yes, my friend Vincenzo Lombardo of Lampedusa,  
I, from Zarzis, Mohsen nicknamed Boughmiga,  
We are certainly the only friends of the Harragas,  
That we have treated well alive, well treated dead,  
That we respected, like brothers,  
In your cemetery of Lampedusa,  
And on my mound of Ras Lemsa.

*Lihidheb Mohsen, Eco artist and poet living in Zarzis*

# CRIMINALIZATION OF MIGRATION

## CAPTAIN SUPPORT NETWORK

People on the move are often arrested and imprisoned for driving boats bringing people to Europe. They are accused of human smuggling, often without access to adequate legal assistance or information about their basic rights.

The 'Captain Support' Network is a platform founded by activists in solidarity with those accused of driving boats to Europe and strives to connect them with local support networks and lawyers.

On our channels, you can find useful information about criminalization. You can reach out for alternative legal support by sending us a private message.

Activists and volunteers will reply by providing helpful information and working to connect people to lawyers and social support if needed.

**FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR ALL!**

**E-MAIL:** [captain.support@proton.me](mailto:captain.support@proton.me)

**FACEBOOK PAGE:** <https://www.facebook.com/CaptainSupportLegalAid/>

**INSTAGRAM PAGE:** <https://www.instagram.com/captain.support/>

**YOUTUBE:** [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCES\\_TV6dvT1U77mphyHcDhg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCES_TV6dvT1U77mphyHcDhg)



# MOBILIZATIONS

## TRANSBORDER SUMMER CAMP II



*Drawing from George.tte.s*

### EXTEND INFRASTRUCTURES FOR FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT!

More than 700 activists from North and West Africa and from all over Europe participated in the second Transborder summer camp near Nantes in France, which again, followed its motto „to build and to extend infrastructures for freedom of movement and equal rights“. It started with a vivid „no border fair" and during the next four days in the middle of July, more than 40 workshops and plenaries took place about several topics and questions on flight and migration.

The four days were characterized by a very productive and respectful atmosphere. The participants exchanged their manifold forms of solidarity on the routes as well as their daily struggles and campaigns against deportations and camps, against externalization and criminalization.

An impressive workshop was dedicated to CommemorAction, in which several relatives, who lost family members because of the EU border regime,

presented their struggles for clarification, recognition and justice.

They also decided to put many portraits and pictures of their disappeared, drowned and killed loved ones not somewhere at the fringe, but right into the center of the camp's space.

WEBSITE: <https://trans-border.net>





Coordination and documentation platform for  
people in distress in the Central  
Mediterranean

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