



Sea-Watch.org

Airborne

Annual Report

2024



04-05	Glossary
06-07	Sea-Watch's Airborne Department
08-15	Political Analysis 2024: The Systematic Disregard of Human Rights
16-21	Statistics of our Airborne Operations
22-39	Main Findings of our Monitoring Flights
24	Europe's partners of choice: the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and Tunisian National Guard
28	Shipping industry, left alone and complicit of violations of the law
31	They see everything and report nothing: the European Border and Coast Agency Frontex
36	Persons in distress are left to die in the central Mediterranean Sea
40-41	Our Demands

Glossary

AFM = The Armed Forces of Malta are responsible for search and rescue (SAR) activities within the Maltese Search and Rescue zone and are coordinated by the Maltese Rescue Coordination Centre.

INMARSAT = An International Maritime Satellite is a satellite telecommunication system transmitting messages from ship to shore, shore to ship and ship to ship. This system is particularly used by Rescue Coordination Centres in the central Mediterranean to inform all ships about boats in distress and provide instructions to ships.

Mayday relay = A mayday relay is an emergency procedure that provides information about a boat in distress via maritime or aerial radio, requesting any asset in the vicinity to assist.

Interception = An interception describes the practice of intentionally stopping people trying to flee at sea and subsequently returning them to an unsafe country, usually from which they have fled, with the aim of preventing the persons from reaching the EU.

Rescue = According to the 1979 SAR Convention, a rescue is the operation to retrieve persons in distress, provide for their initial medical or other needs and deliver them to a place of safety. In the central Mediterranean Sea and according to the law, Libya and Tunisia disqualify themselves as places of safety. Consequently, only Italy and Malta can be identified as such.

Nm = 1 nautical mile equals 1,852 metres.

Search and Rescue Region (SAR region/zones) = According to the 1979 SAR Convention, a search and rescue region is an area of defined dimensions associated with a rescue coordination centre within which search and rescue services are provided. Libya has a SAR zone since 2018, and Tunisia since 2024 - which partly overlaps with the Libyan and the Maltese SAR zones.

Rescue coordination centre = the (maritime or joint) rescue coordination centre(s) is the authority responsible for coordinating the rescue operation within a search and rescue region, and other SAR

regions in case the RCCs are unable to do so. According to the SAR Convention, RCC staff must ensure that assistance is provided to people in distress, be reachable 24/7 and speak English fluently.

So-called = We use the addition “so-called” to indicate that certain actors and their behaviour or political decisions are questioned in terms of their functionality, legitimacy or legality.

Sea-Watch's Airborne Department

The Airborne Annual Report 2024 provides an overview of the findings of Sea-Watch's airborne monitoring of human rights violations in the central Mediterranean Sea during 2024.¹

Together with the Swiss organization Humanitarian Pilots Initiative (HPI), Sea-Watch operates the two monitoring aircraft *Seabird 1* and *Seabird 2*.² Starting from Lampedusa, the aircraft patrol the central Mediterranean Sea between the coasts of Libya, Tunisia and Italy. In this region alone, 25,060 people drowned over the past 10 years due to non-assistance by European coastal states, backed by the European Union.³ Despite this politically-caused state of emergency, the EU has not established a European search and rescue operation. Instead, the EU relies on surveillance and violent militias to forcibly hinder people fleeing torture and inhumane treatment and stop them from reaching safety.

As a civil eye, Sea-Watch's Airborne department monitors, documents and publishes these daily human rights violations as well as the associated roles of European states, the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency *Frontex*, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and other Libyan militias. If we encounter boats in distress during our flights, we try everything to push for a rescue and subsequent disembarkation in a safe port by the competent authorities and civil vessels in the vicinity.

Besides the two monitoring aircraft, Sea-Watch also operates two rescue vessels, the *Sea-Watch 5* and the *Aurora*. In 2024, these two ships rescued 937 people from boats in distress.

- ¹ Sea-Watch, Airborne Annual Report 2020: sea-watch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Airborne-Annual-Report-2020.pdf ; Sea-Watch, Airborne Annual Report 2021: sea-watch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Airborne-Annual-Report-2021.pdf ; Sea-Watch, Airborne Annual Report 2022: sea-watch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Airborne-Annual-Report-2022.pdf ; Sea-Watch, Airborne Annual Report 2023: sea-watch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Airborne-Annual-Report-2023_Sea-Watch.pdf.
- ² Since March 2025, both organisations also operate the *Seabird 3*: sea-watch.org/en/seabird-3-new-aircraft-old-deadly-migration-policies/.
- ³ IOM, Missing Migrants Project, June 2025: missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean?region_incident=All&route=3861&month=All&incident_date%5Bmin%5D=&incident_date%5Bmax%5D=.

Seabird 1 and Seabird 2 at the airport in Lampedusa.
Photo: Suzanne De Carrasco

Airborne Annual Report 2024



Sea-Watch's Airborne Department

Political Analysis 2024: The Systematic Disregard of Human Rights

The year 2024 was a year in which the open call to disregard human rights by allegedly democratic European actors became systematic. While human rights were under attack since their declaration and have never been actual rights but rather an unredeemed promise, 2024 was the year in which the promise was revoked altogether. While war and genocide raged in Sudan, Gaza and Congo, the European discourse around migration and asylum reached an unprecedented level of open racism.

In this political analysis, we will keep the focus on developments directly related to the situation in the central Mediterranean Sea.

Meloni government spirals out of control

In Italy, the fascist government of Giorgia Meloni continued its attack on people on the move, human rights and civil search and rescue. The so-called *Piantadosi* decree-law (Law 15/2023) has been in place for over two years now. This law, introduced by the Italian government, puts up requirements for civil search and rescue ships, which are in stark contrast to the rescue obligations under international law. The ships of

the civil search and rescue fleet - like all ships - enjoy the freedom of navigation and act in full compliance with rescue obligations under international maritime law. By introducing the requirements spelled out in the *Piantadosi* decree-law, Italy created opportunities to detain and fine ships and eventually to confiscate them. Ships of the civil fleet have been detained 26 times under this framework, for alleged violations of these requirements. Not only are the obligations set by the Italian state a systematic violation of the interna-

tional maritime law - even if no such violations occurred, Italian authorities arbitrarily detained and fined ships on several occasions. However, the civil fleet fought back and appealed against these detentions. In many cases, courts eventually ruled in favor of the NGO, lifting the detentions. These wins are of great importance, as they show that the Italian government also does not stand above the law. Nevertheless, even if NGOs eventually win in court, the time of the detention is lost as time to be operational and the court cases take a lot of energy and resources.

In autumn 2024, with the *Flussi* decree-law (Law 145/2024), the Italian government tightened the laws once again, thereby increasing the risk of final confiscations of rescue vessels. At the same time, the rules were expanded to NGO airplanes, such as our *Seabird 1* and *Seabird 2*. Already in May 2024, the Italian authorities had published an order restricting the use of NGO aircraft over the Mediterranean.⁴ The aim of the government is clear: They want to obstruct the life-saving activities of civil search and rescue and shut the civil eyes that monitor human rights violations.



4 For more information: sea-watch.org/en/italy-bans-human-rights-monitoring-over-the-mediterranean/.

Germany's shift to the far right and repression of migration

In Germany, the year began with an initiative by the government that carried the euphemistic name “deportations enhancement law”.⁵ As an element of criminalization of facilitation of border crossings, this law included passages that allowed for the criminalization of search and rescue activities. Only thanks to civil society protests, these amendments could be mitigated, however not fully removed from the adopted law. Even under the current version, it is still possible for activists onboard NGO ships to be prosecuted for facilitation of illegal entry into the European Union. People who “facilitate” their own entrance or the once of family members can now be criminalized, even though this contradicts international law such as the Geneva Refugee Convention, that prohibits the criminalization of people for their own illegal entry, and the UN-Smuggling Protocol of 2000, which protects family members, humanitarian support and altruistic conduct.

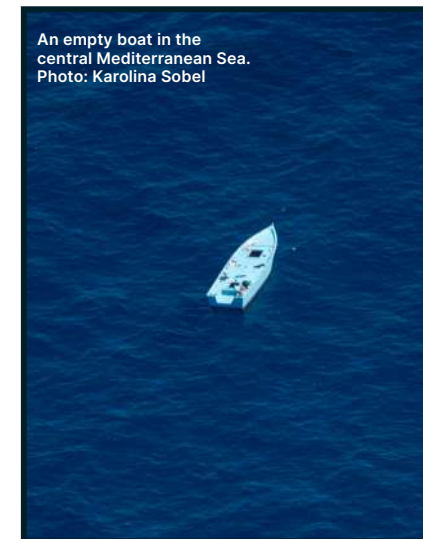
The German election campaign in winter 2024/2025 showed an unprocessed level of open attacks on peo-

ple on the move. Besides right-wing politicians, also several conservative politicians openly attacked the individual right to asylum, which is enshrined in the German constitution. Also the Social Democrats and the Greens joined in a discourse that was formally invented by the right-wing AfD.

The European Union targets people on the move and NGOs

On 10th April 2024, the European Parliament adopted 10 legislative texts, which constitute the Common European Asylum System. This new legislation will be applied EU wide in 2026 and foresees a downgrade of EU standards. It will not improve or end the dying at sea, and increase the disastrous situation along EU borders. Simultaneously, the EU Commission kept pursuing plans to amend its *Facilitators Package*, widening the scope of criminalisation for alleged “facilitation of illegal entry” - including of people on the move and sea rescue organisations. While human rights actors have called for an improvement of the deficient legal framework for years, the proposal by the EU Commission only increases the failings of the old one. In June 2024, a new European Par-

liament was elected, with a strong far-right presence, which is alarming for human rights and people on the move. The new European Commission took office on 1st December 2024, with “a Commissioner for the Mediterranean”, Dubravka Šuica, for the first time, whose agenda and concrete field of actions remain unclear.



An empty boat in the central Mediterranean Sea.
Photo: Karolina Sobel

On the other side of the Mediterranean: continuous externalisation by the European Union and European member states to Libya and Tunisia

By “externalisation” in this context, one understands the various ways EU states or international organisa-

tions use to delegate obligations they have under the law. Focussing on the central Mediterranean Sea, “externalisation” is translated into the financial and material continuous support of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and *Tunisian National Guard* by the European Union and single member states. It is obvious that the aim is ultimately to keep persons in states that are not safe, at all costs. This means exposing people on the move to human rights violations and crimes against humanity. Furthermore, by doing so, the European Union and European member states are actually strengthening autocratic regimes and militias in Tunisia and Libya, without any transparency and accountability.

It is under these circumstances that in 2024, Malta has renewed its Memorandum of Understanding with **Libya**.⁶ Italy kept pushing for more cooperation with North African countries,⁷ the German Secretary of State Kröscher met with the Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs on 19th August to allegedly discuss migration.⁸ In the meantime, people on the move keep being exposed to violence amounting to crimes against humanity in Libya: mid-july, Libya expelled around 400 Nigerien to

⁵ “Rückführungsverbesserungsgesetz”.

⁶ See: middleeastmonitor.com/20240717-libya-malta-renew-deal-to-combat-irregular-migration/

⁷ See: euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italys-meloni-in-libya-to-further-expand-cooperation-on-migration/

⁸ See: fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/bmi-in-libyen-august-2024/940956/anhang/herausgabeaa346-2024_geschwaerzt.pdf

Niger in the desert. Furthermore, Sea-Watch, witnessed on many occasions the violence by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and other militias at sea.⁹

One year after the Memorandum of Understanding with the EU, Tunisia has registered a search and rescue zone at the UN International Maritime Organisation. As of 19th June 2024, Tunisia is responsible to coordinate rescue operations for a certain area in the central Mediterranean Sea, which partially overlaps with the Maltese and the Libyan SAR zones. This means further outsourcing possibilities for EU member states to an unsafe country, as it will only lead to prevent people from fleeing. The violence against people on the move and civilians and the autocracy of the Tunisian regime has exacerbated. From the sea, with reports of violence by the *Tunisian National Guard*,¹⁰ to reports on expulsions and sales - a proper state supported trafficking - of people on the move to Libya,¹¹ Tunisia is not a place of safety for persons res-

cued at sea, as emphasized by NGOs, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.¹² Despite the escalating situation of human rights abuses, and continuous concerns at the highest rank,¹³ the European Commission commissioned the French organisation Civipol and the German “Cooperation for International Development” (“Deutsche Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit”, GiZ) with a project. Its aim is to strengthen the capacities of *Tunisian Navy’s* maritime fleet and strengthen the Tunisian maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, by providing them with ships for instance.¹⁴ The German police has furthermore provided trainings and equipments to the so-called *Tunisian National Guard*¹⁵ which makes Germany complicit in the violence perpetrated against people on the move at sea in Tunisia.

⁹ See p.38 for more information.

¹⁰ See the Alarm Phone’s report: alarmphone.org/en/2024/06/20/interrupted-sea/.

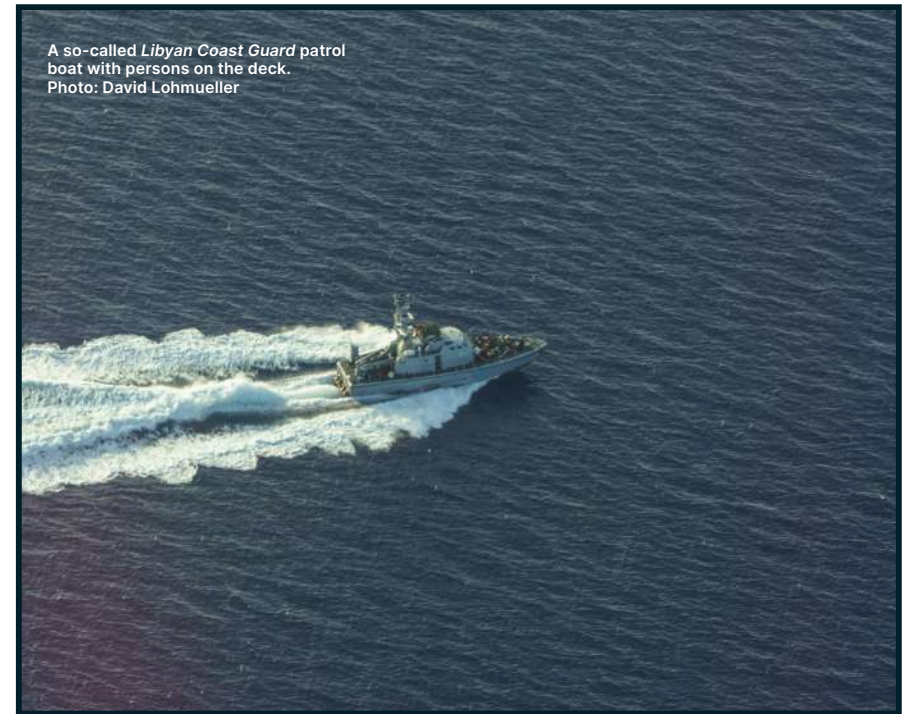
¹¹ See the report “State Trafficking” by the research group Researchers X: statetrafficking.net/StateTrafficking_EN_21012025_light.pdf.

¹² See the joint statement: amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/10/joint-statement-tunisia-is-not-a-place-of-safety-for-people-rescued-at-sea/.

¹³ See for instance: ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/tunisia-un-experts-concerned-over-safety-migrants-refugees-and-victims.

¹⁴ More information available here, under the project “Support to border management institution (MRCC)”: www.giz.de/projektseiten/region/3/countries/TN and see the documents released via information request: fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/die-beteiligung-der-deutschen-giz-in-tunesien-projekt-support-search-and-rescue-operations-at-sea-in-tunisia/, for instance: fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/die-beteiligung-der-deutschen-giz-in-tunesien-projekt-support-search-and-rescue-operations-at-sea-in-tunisia/891775/anhang/dokument20.pdf.

¹⁵ See: digit.site36.net/2023/09/27/human-rights-violations-german-federal-police-equips-coast-guard-in-tunisia/.



Further alarming projects by the European Union and European member states against people on the move

As witnessed in the past years, severe concerns on human rights and crimes against humanity do not prevent the European Union and single member states from considering projects which severely affect the lives of people on the move. In 2024, Italy implemented its protocol with Albania and disembarked persons rescued at sea in closed centres outside of the European Union, dis-

regarding concerns on the compliance with human rights and EU law. Instead of fulfilling their mandates to support people on the move and hence, refusing to promote externalisation policies, the UNHCR and IOM were involved in the Italy-Albania protocol. Despite facing immense political pressure, Italian judges did not confirm the detentions of the people deported and detained in Albania and ordered their transfer to Italy. This illegal flop endangers the lives and the mental health of people on the move further, and costs multiple millions euros to Italian tax payers.

Similarly to the EU Commission with the concept of “return hubs”, the German government started reflections around possible ways to expel people on the move to non EU-states, alleged “safe third countries”, with deals, like the United Kingdom attempted to do in Rwanda. Furthermore, alleging a situation of emergency, Germany re-established controls at all its borders since September 2024, which contravenes EU law, as per Schengen Border Code.

Overall, the situation has deteriorated in the European Union, in Tunisia and Libya for people on the move, where the rule of law is systematically and continuously disregarded.

Legal accountability

Accountability for human rights violations occurring in the central Mediterranean Sea is still missing. The Office of the International Criminal Court remains to this day silent on potential accountability of EU officials and responsible of EU member states for crimes against humanity linked to interceptions conducted at sea by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*.¹⁶

Civil society fills this gap and forces the judicial framework to challenge current illegal policies, and even prosecute criminals. In 2024, following a proceeding initiated by Sea-Watch, the General Court of the European Union revealed that *Frontex* unlawfully kept hundreds of footage secret, which is illegal under the EU law related to transparency.¹⁷ On 19th April, after 7 years of politically motivated criminal proceedings, the crew of the NGO ship *Iuventa* was released from any criminal prosecution.¹⁸ Furthermore, on 12th November, one relative, three survivors, and Sea-Watch filed a criminal complaint in front of the Prosecutor of Agrigento in Italy regarding a shipwreck in Italian territorial waters. The complaint requests the prosecutor to investigate if crimes, such as shipwreck and multiple manslaughter due to negligence, failure to provide assistance, or refusal to perform official duties, were committed by the Italian authorities and other actors potentially involved.¹⁹ Similarly, on 1st February, the Italian Supreme Court confirmed the conviction of a shipmaster of the merchant vessel *Asso Ventotto* for bringing 101 persons to Libya in 2018²⁰ - because Libya was and is still not a safe place.

Finally, Italian courts were called upon to rule on politically motivated attempts to hinder NGOs’ operations, such as the detentions of NGO ships under the Italian *Piantadosi* decree-law framework. In 2024, civil courts recognized in 8 decisions the illegality of detentions, and even recognized the life-saving role of NGOs.²¹ While deciding on a different matter, Italian judges questioned the legitimacy of the Libyan authorities, ruling that following instructions by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* would be against international law²² and that they and the Libyan Coordination Centre cannot be considered legitimate rescue actors in the central Mediterranean Sea.²³

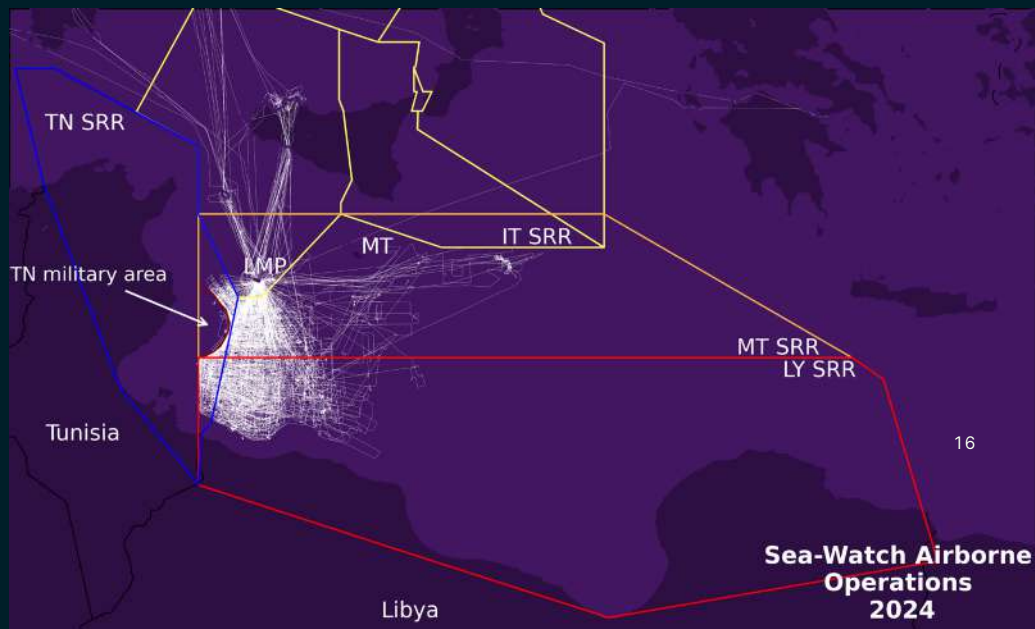
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¹⁶ See the submission by the ECCHR in November 2022: ecchr.eu/fileadmin/Redacted_Article_15_Communication_to_the_ICC_Situation_in_Libya_Interceptions_of_Migrants_and_Refugees_at_Sea_as_Crimes_Against_Humanity.pdf.
¹⁷ See: sea-watch.org/en/eu-court-frontex-wrongfully-withholds-evidence/.
¹⁸ See Iuventa's press release: iuventa-crew.org/de/2024/10/03/iuventa-crew-free-of-all-charges/.
¹⁹ See the press release: sea-watch.org/en/sea-watch-files-charges-against-italian-authorities/ and p.38.
²⁰ See: infomigrants.net/en/post/55310/italys-top-court-handing-over-migrants-to-libyan-coast-guards-is-illegal.

²¹ Civil Court of Brindisi on 22th February 2024 regarding the detention of the *Ocean Viking*; Civil Court of Salerno on 11th September 2024 regarding the detention of the *Geo Barents*; Civil Court of Genova on 12th October 2024 regarding the detention of the *Geo Barents*.
²² Civil Court of Vibo Valentia on 6th December 2024 regarding the detention on 30th October 2023 *sea-eye*. sea-eye.org/en/sea-eye-wins-third-case-against-italy-this-year/.
²³ Civil Court of Crotone on 26th July 2024, ruling on the merits of the detention on 04th March 2024. More information available at: sos-humanity.org/en/press/final-court-decision/.

Statistics of our Airborne Operations



Seabird flight tracks 2024
Credits: Own data visualization

Total number of monitoring flights: 151

Seabird 1: 45

Seabird 2: 106

A total flight time of 845 hours and 14 minutes, which is equivalent to **35 days, 5 hours and 14 minutes** in the air.

Statistics

Airborne Annual Report 2024

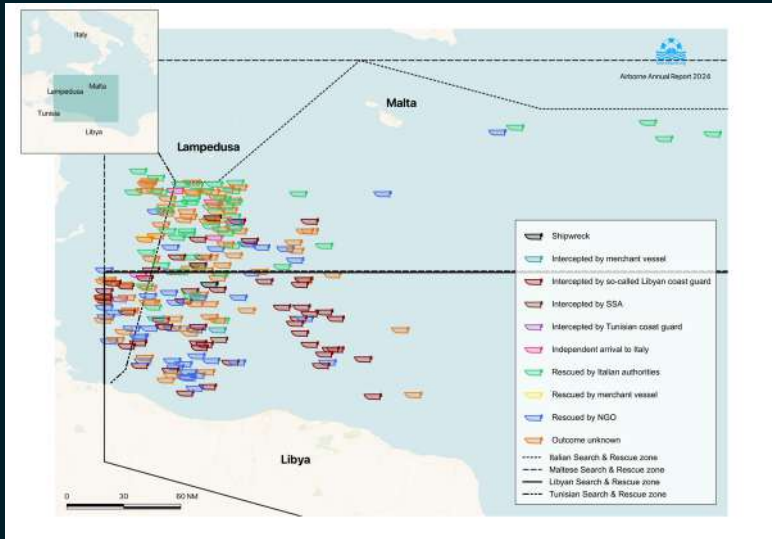
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The map on the left indicates all flight tracks of Sea-Watch's Airborne operations in 2024. One can clearly see the starting point Lampedusa (LMP), in the Italian search and rescue zone (IT SRR on the map), where our aircraft *Seabird 1* and *Seabird 2* are stationed and where all flights start and end. Our main area of operation is over international waters between western Libya, Tunisia and Lampedusa. This strait is where Libya, Tunisia and Europe are closest to one another and therefore it is the most frequented migration route from the North African coast towards Europe.

Furthermore, the flight pattern shows that in comparison to the Libyan coast, we keep a much greater distance from the Tunisian coast. This is due to a military flight zone off the coast of Tunisia, which prohibits us from flying closer. As a consequence, we are usually not able to spot interceptions and other human rights violations committed by the so-called *Tunisian National Guard*, as they generally take place within the Tunisian territorial waters or closer to the coast (Tunisian search and rescue zone, TN SRR).

The distress cases we spot and the outcomes we monitor appear in international waters, mainly in the Libyan search and rescue zone (LY SRR) off the coast of Libya or in international waters in the Maltese search and rescue zone (MT SRR), located between the Libyan SAR zone and Lampedusa.

All Boats Spotted

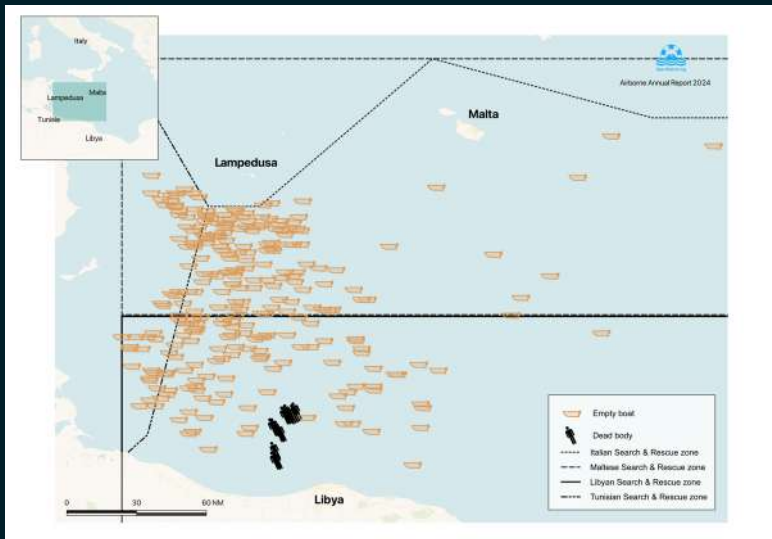


The numbers of boats and persons in distress are based on Airborne's own sightings only - they do not represent the total number of boats and persons that were in distress in the central Mediterranean Sea in 2024.

Airborne sighted 221 boats, carrying approximately 10,929 persons in distress

- in the Libyan SAR zone: 104 boats with approximately 5,404 persons
- in the Maltese SAR zone: 88 boats with approximately 4,000 persons
- in the (newly established) Tunisian SAR zone (partially overlapping the Maltese and Libyan SAR zones): 29 boats with approximately 1,525 persons

Empty Boats and Dead Bodies Spotted



Outcome of Spotted Boats in Distress

54 boats with around 2,852 persons were illegally intercepted and returned to unsafe places:



49 boats with around 2,663 persons were intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, **at least 7 interceptions of around 406 persons took place in the Maltese SAR zone**



1 boat with around 20 persons was intercepted by the Libyan militia called *Stability Support Apparatus* (SSA)



1 boats with around 15 persons was intercepted by the so-called *Tunisian National Guard*



2 boats with around 110 persons were rescued by the merchant vessels *Maridive Zhor 1* and *Bos Triton* and illegally handed over to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*



1 boat with 44 persons was rescued by the merchant vessel *Hermes* and illegally disembarked in Tunisia



LAMPEDUSA,
ITALY

MALTA

20

21

Statistics

Official Numbers according to the UNHCR and IOM:

Total number of persons arrived to **Italy: 61,739**

Total number of persons arrived to **Malta: 238**

Total number of persons intercepted and pulled back to **Libya: 21,762**

An overview with the number of persons intercepted and pulled or pushed back to Tunisia was not possible

Total number of persons drowned in the central **Mediterranean: 1,810**

92 boats with around 5,018 persons arrived in Europe



43 boats with around 2,578 persons were rescued by NGO ships

0 boat were rescued by the Maltese authorities even though at least 88 boats were in distress in the Maltese SAR zone

At least 2 boats shipwrecked, with at least 61 persons missing. Only 7 persons could be rescued.

The outcomes for 73 boats, with around 2991 persons onboard, remains unknown. Depending on the (in)completeness of information, it is not always possible to reconstruct an outcome for the boats spotted. This can mean that the people arrived to the EU independently, were intercepted, were rescued by European state actors or were shipwrecked invisibly. This is what we must assume for 1 boat, with approximately 40 persons that completely disappeared without a trace, despite search and rescue operations by NGOs and the authorities in January 2024.



48 boats with around 2,298 persons were rescued by the Italian authorities or arrived independently in Italy



1 boat with around 142 persons was rescued by the merchant vessel *Vault* and disembarked in Italy

Main Findings of our Monitoring Flights

In 2024, we identified 5 key findings that we want to exemplify with the help of concrete cases documented by our monitoring aircraft. If you need further information or data on specific cases for possible follow-up, please contact advocacy@sea-watch.org.

- **Italy and Malta**, supported by the **European Union**, disregard persons in emergency situations in the central Mediterranean Sea - violating obligations related to the duty to render assistance and the human rights of the people at sea. Through various programmes initiated by the European Union and other European member states such as Germany, coastal states outsource their duty to render assistance to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and *Tunisian National Guard* - even if it means to expose persons to crimes against humanity.
- Those acting in solidarity with people on the move - be it other persons on the move, activists and NGOs at sea or in the air - **are continuously repressed and defamed**. SAR NGOs are hindered for being the one complying with the law and documenting the violence enabled by the EU at sea.

- **Frontex**, the European Coast Guard Agency, is the right hand of externalisation policies of the EU.
- **Merchant vessels** remain important actors in the central Mediterranean Sea. Left alone or encouraged by European member states, they do not render assistance to persons in distress or even rescue but transship or bring them to unsafe places such as Libya and Tunisia and therefore contravene their obligations under maritime law. They become therefore complicit in violations of the law committed by European member states.
- **The death at sea has not ceased in the central Mediterranean Sea**, due to the lack of actual rescue capacities and willingness to engage in rescue operations.

Europe's partners of choice: the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and *Tunisian National Guard*

Since 2017, the European Union has been financially supporting and training the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, to ensure people don't manage to leave Libya via the Mediterranean. Libya has declared a search and rescue (SAR) zone in 2018, followed by Tunisia in 2024. This gives more legitimacy to European coastal States to remove their assets at sea and systematically delegate their duty to render assistance by referring to the mere existence of such areas. In practice, both the Libyan and the Tunisian maritime rescue coordination centers do not meet the relevant criteria and can not provide places of safety to disembark people. Still, European member states, Italy, Malta but not only, and the European Union, have been financially and materially supporting, strengthening the so-called *Libyan*

Coast Guard and *Tunisian National Guard* relentlessly. Such support occurs via various programs - EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM), the European military operation EUNAVFOR MED Irini, or various Memorandum of understanding.²⁴ Even Germany trains and equips the so-called *Tunisian National Guard*.²⁵

At sea, such deals are translated into: an active presence of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and *Tunisian National Guard*, and the relentless cooperation by European member states with one aim: to ensure that no one crosses the Mediterranean Sea.

Both the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and *Tunisian National Guard* do not fulfill requirements under, and do not comply with, the

search and rescue framework. Even worse, they are linked to violations of the law and potential crimes against humanity. In 2024, Sea-Watch's aircraft witnessed the escalating violence at sea, per-

petuated by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and other Libyan militias towards people on the move and NGOs.²⁶ There are furthermore reports on the violence used by the *Tunisian National Guard*.²⁷

As an example, on 21st September 2024, **the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* fired upon people in distress**.

Seabird 2's crew sighted an interception in the Maltese SAR zone by the so-called Libyan patrol boats "*Murzuq*" and "*Gharyan*". Both were later sighted pursuing a boat in distress within the Libyan SAR zone, at the boundary with the Maltese

SAR zone. While *Seabird 2* was on scene, the crew of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat *Murzuq* fired shots at the boat in distress – before intercepting the people.²⁸ *Frontex* was also on-scene with an aircraft.

In 2024, out of the 49 interceptions sighted, **at least 7 interceptions of around 406 persons took place in the Maltese SAR zone**, under Maltese responsibility. The cooperation can take various forms, as observed or inferred from Sea-Watch's aircraft operations. The Italian and Maltese authorities, or *Frontex*, may coordinate directly with assets on-site, share coordinates over the radio. They likely communicate via emails or phone calls with the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*. They may also send maritime messages to ships "on behalf of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*," or instruct merchant vessels not to assist people in distress, ultimately leading to interceptions—even within the Maltese SAR zone.²⁹

²⁶ See some examples of violence by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and the *Libyan Stability Support Apparatus* against the *Geo Barents* and the *Humanity 1* in March 2024: sea-watch.org/airborne-quarterly-factsheet-january-to-march-2024/; and in July and September 2024: sea-watch.org/en/airborne-quarterly-factsheet-april-june-2024/.

²⁷ See *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone's report*: alarmphone.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Interrupted-sea-EN.pdf.

²⁸ A thorough reconstruction of the case is available here: www.publico.es/sociedad/milicias-disparando-migrantes-nueva-rutina-fronteras-europa.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=web. See the footage: x.com/seawatch_intl/status/1838267250861563998.

²⁹ More information available in our factsheet: sea-watch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Sea-Watch-Quarterly-Factsheet-October-December-2024-1.pdf.

²⁴ A deal has been in place between Italy and Libya since 2017, in which for instance Italy provides the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* with patrol boats. Malta has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) since 2020 with Libya as well, which was renewed in July 2024 and foresees the establishment of a joint "coordination centre", fully financed by Malta. In 2023, the EU signed a MoU with Tunisia.

²⁵ See: digit.site36.net/2023/09/27/human-rights-violations-german-federal-police-equips-coast-guard-in-tunisia/.

On 7th April, Sea-Watch's aircraft sighted an interception by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* after overhearing a position potentially communicated by the *Armed Forces Malta*.

During the morning of 7th April, the people in distress called the initiative *Watch the Med – Alarm Phone*, which immediately alerted the authorities and NGOs with the position provided by the people in distress, in the Libyan SAR zone, along with the information that water had started entering the boat. *Seabird 2* was already airborne and overheard radio communications suspected by the crew to be between the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and an aircraft belonging to the *Armed Forces Malta*, although the authority did not identify itself on the radio. The position communicated appeared to match the location of the *Alarm Phone*'s boat in distress. About an hour later, *Seabird 2* sighted the people in distress as they were being intercepted by a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat. While the crew was on scene, the boat capsized and around 20 people fell into the water next to the patrol boat. Several people were on top of the capsized

boat, while others swam underneath and around the boat. At the end of the interception, there were no people in the water, although *Seabird 2*'s crew could not confirm that everyone had been retrieved from the water, as the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat was unresponsive via radio. Based on the accent heard on the radio and on open source information, we strongly suspect that the *Armed Forces Malta* provided a position to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, facilitating this interception and pull-back to Libya, in violation of human rights and maritime law.



The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* intercepting persons in distress.
Photo: Manuel Lossau

Civil society remains the only reliable actor to ensure that the international framework is respected. However, the Italian authorities use situations of violence by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, witnessed by NGOs, to obstruct their operations and sanction them.³⁰

³⁰ Since January 2023, ships and aircraft have to abide by a set of rules, arbitrarily used or the asset is detained and ultimately confiscated, and the shipmaster and the NGO have to pay a fine. In reality, the Italian authorities use this framework to detain NGO assets and withdraw them from the central Mediterranean. In 2024, 13 NGO ships were ordered to be detained for 380 days. See political analysis p.8.

In one situation documented by Sea-Watch's aircraft, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* threatened an NGO rescue operation, and ultimately the NGO vessel was unlawfully detained by Italian authorities.

On the morning of 19th September, *Seabird 2* spotted a boat in distress in the Libyan SAR zone. In response to *Seabird 2*'s alert and with the go-ahead from the Italian MRCC, the NGO vessel *Geo Barents* headed towards the people in distress and upon assessment, the crew proceeded with the rescue of the people. At the end of the rescue, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat *Gharyan* arrived on-scene, threatened to use firearms and performed dangerous maneuvers around the people in distress in an attempt to intimidate the people

as well as the crew of the NGO ship. Upon the disembarkation of the survivors in Genoa, the *Geo Barents* was detained - in particular for having "failed to comply with instructions of the *Libyan Coast Guard*" based on the *Piantadosi Decree-Law*.³¹ **In the end, the Court of Genoa suspended the illegitimate detention.**³²

As Sea-Watch, we call upon:

- The end of any programmes, agreements by the European Union and single member states leading to a support of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and *Tunisian National Guard* and ultimately, to the commission of violations of human rights and maritime law
- The end of any systematic delegation of the duty to render assistance by the Italian and Maltese authorities to the so-called *Libyan* and *Tunisian National Guard* and other Libyan militias, who facilitate interceptions and pullbacks to Libya and Tunisia
- The mere compliance with international maritime law by European coastal states and the European Union: everyone must be promptly rescued and disembarked in a place of safety

³¹ For more information: www.msf.org/italian-authorities-punish-geo-barents-rescue-ship-two-detention-orders.

³² See the press release: x.com/MSF_Sea/status/1845121662586380358.

Shipping industry, left alone and complicit of violations of the law

With states having deserted the Mediterranean Sea and NGO ships detained at ports, merchant vessels remain an important actor for people in distress in the central Mediterranean Sea. These face challenges from various sides: it may be the pressure of not being supported by the shipping company, or European states, or the economical pressure - as rescuing means delays and potential cancellations in delivery. Potentially, rescuing may challenge shipmasters and crews because they are not sufficiently equipped or trained to engage in a rescue operation, or upon rescue, to take care of persons who need medical or psychological assistance.

Such challenges mean that certain merchant vessels do not necessarily respond to alerts regarding boats in distress, do not conduct rescue operations and thus, become complicit in pullbacks to Libya.

In 2024, in 2 cases documented by Sea-Watch's aerial operations, around 110 persons were returned to Libya with the concrete engagement of the merchant vessels *Bos Triton* and *Maridive Zhor*. Furthermore, 44 persons were disembarked in Tunisia by the merchant vessel *Hermes*. It has to be expected that more pullbacks took place than what Sea-Watch was able to monitor.



Persons in distress next to the merchant vessel *Maridive Zhor 1* and the platform *Sabratha*.
Photo: Martina Morini

28

Main Findings

Airborne Annual Report 2024

29

In June 2024, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* used violence during such an illegal transshipment:

At midday on 18th June, *Seabird 2* spotted an empty rubber boat next to merchant vessel *Maridive Zhor 1*, flying the flag of Panama, and a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat. Nearby was a black RHIB³³ that had been spotted by *Seabird 2* earlier, thought to be a Libyan asset. Approximately 60 people were aboard *Maridive Zhor 1* and were in the process of being transferred to a Libyan patrol boat. *Seabird 2*'s crew communicated with the captain of the merchant vessel and informed them of their duty to ensure disembarkation of any rescued persons to a place of safety. The captain instead expressed his fear of being arrested if he did not comply with the order to transship the people. ***Seabird 2*'s crew witnessed an officer of the so-called *Libyan Coast***

Guard beating rescued persons with a stick once the transshipment to the patrol boat was complete.³⁴ On that day, the NGO vessels *Geo Barents* and *Mare*Go* were also operational and were not reached out by the authorities for support.

In 2024, the highest Italian Court, the Court of Cassation, confirmed the conviction of a shipmaster of a merchant vessel for disembarking persons in Libya in 2018.³⁵ However, accountability for merchant vessels not complying with their duty to render assistance, and even contributing to serious violations of international criminal law, is still missing in most cases.

European coastal states or companies even instruct merchant vessels not to rescue, or to only provide food, water, or fuel, until the people are eventually intercepted and pulled back to Libya. In 2024, Sea-Watch witnessed multiple situations of this kind, making shipmasters accomplices of illegal pullbacks and violations of the law.³⁶

³³ A rigid inflatable boat is a fast, lightweight, and stable boat usually used by the military for operations at sea.

³⁴ Footage is available at: x.com/seawatchcrew/status/1803482811485024713.

³⁵ See the case of the *Asso Ventotto*: www.reuters.com/world/africa/returning-sea-migrants-libya-is-illegal-italys-top-court-says-2024-02-18/.

³⁶ For instance, on 8th August, the merchant vessel *Janekin* supported an interception of around 65 persons, and handed over 2 persons to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*.

In December 2024, the merchant vessel *MSC Lena* was “not permitted” to rescue by its company. Italy denied coordinating a case and issued an inmarsat³⁷ on behalf of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*.

Indeed, on the morning of 13th December, *Seabird 1*'s crew spotted a stationary fiberglass boat with approximately 28 people on board in the Libyan SAR. *Seabird 1* informed the merchant vessel *MSC Lena F*, flying the Portuguese flag, which was in the area and claimed that it would proceed to the boat in distress and would follow instructions by its shipping company and the Italian MRCC. Shortly afterward, **the merchant vessel informed that their company would not allow the rescue of the people in distress** - which is contrary to its duty to render assistance - but instead that the vessel would only provide food and water. On the phone with *Seabird 1*'s ground crew,

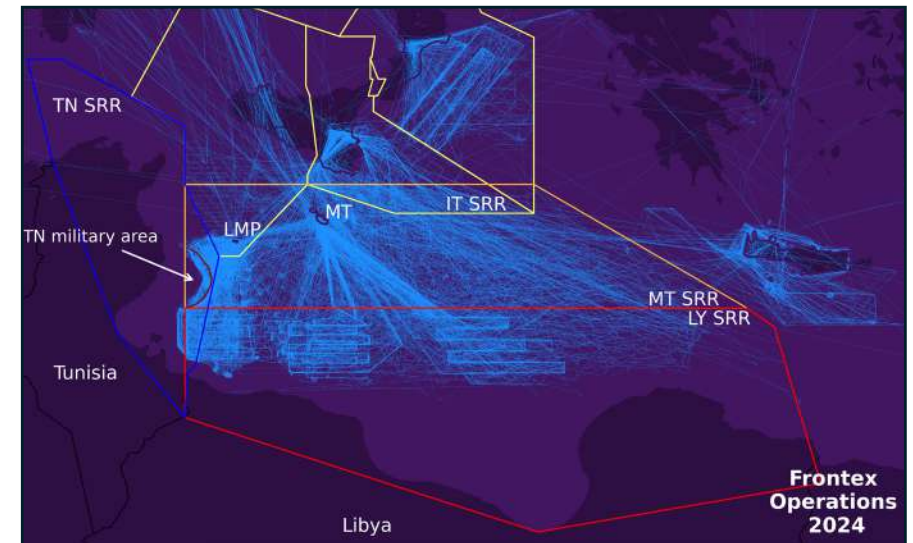
the Italian MRCC denied coordinating the merchant vessel *MSC Lena F*, arguing that the boat in distress was in the Libyan SAR and referring to the Libyan authorities. Instead, the Italian authorities sent an inmarsat message requesting all ships to head to the persons in distress, on behalf of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and referring only to them for further coordination. Eventually, the merchant vessel *MSC Lena F* continued its journey. It is unclear what happened to the people in distress. Once again, the Italian authorities outsourced their duties to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, instead of coordinating the rescue of persons in distress to a safe place.

As Sea-Watch, we demand:

- Merchant vessels must comply with their duty to render assistance, which includes to disembark persons in distress in a place of safety
- RCCs of European member states, Flagstates and private companies must stop spreading illegal instructions to merchant vessels, ultimately forcing them to contravene their duties
- RCCs of European member states, Flagstates and private companies must support rescues of persons in distress by merchant vessels, instead of abandoning captains and crew

³⁷ An International Maritime Satellite (“Inmarsat”) is a satellite telecommunication system transmitting messages from ship-to-shore, shore-to-ship, and ship-to-ship. This system is particularly used by Rescue Coordination Centres and vessels in distress.

They see everything and report nothing: the European Border and Coast Agency *Frontex*



This map is based on tracks retrieved on the open source adsb.exchange and presents all tracks of Frontex' assets in 2024, as available. Frontex operates mainly in the Italian, Maltese, Libyan SAR zones (on the map: IT, MT and LY SRR) and only rarely in the Tunisian one (TN SRR). The flight tracks clearly show how encompassing the situational awareness of Frontex is, **highlighting once again the question of why so many shipwrecks and interceptions happen under their watch, instead of rescue operations to places of safety.**

For 10 years, the European Union has been tasking the European Agency *Frontex*, in cooperation with EU member states, to “monitor” borders at its external borders. Applied to the central Mediterranean Sea, it means that in 2024, *Frontex* operates in agreement with Italy

and Malta on high seas with aircraft, a drone, and within the Italian territorial waters with 4 small ships. Yet, *Frontex* does not have the mandate to rescue persons at sea, on the contrary: to ensure that “borders” are monitored. Upon sighting of persons in distress - with the use of

high technologies and not only binoculars like our Sea-Watch aircraft crew the authorities are informed about the presence of persons in distress, while NGOs or other vessels in the vicinity are regularly deprived of this information.

Over the years, many scandals emerged from *Frontex*' operations, questioning its use in the Mediterranean and revealing their true aims. This is demonstrated through their use of Whatsapp messages³⁸ and their 2200 emails sent to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*.³⁹ In 2022, *Human Rights Watch* and *Border Forensics* demonstrated how *Frontex*' operations contribute to so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* interceptions.⁴⁰ *Frontex*'s presence did not contribute in any circumstances to avoid shipwrecks, as with the Crotone and Pylos shipwrecks, both in 2023.⁴¹

Up to now, transparency is lacking and accountability is missing. In April 2024, the General Court of

the European Union revealed that *Frontex* had withheld hundreds of hours of footage while examining an information request on a specific interception at sea.⁴² "Shared responsibility" with European member states or providing them a service means in the end that no one is responsible for human rights violations and crimes against humanity. In February 2024, the EU Ombudsman's office concluded "if the (Fundamental Rights Office) identifies persistent violations of fundamental rights by a member state in responding to maritime emergencies, or should *Frontex* become aware of such serious violations following formal inquiries or court judgments, **Frontex should consider terminating, withdrawing or suspending Frontex's activities with the member state in question**".⁴³ Many legal proceedings against *Frontex* are pending. So far, *Frontex* has escaped from any kind of responsibilities - despite the amount of evidence gathered against the activity since 2014.

The dubious role of *Frontex*' Fundamental Rights Office

Frontex uses two structures to publicly claim that fundamental rights are crucial to the agency. Apart from the consultative forum, which gathers NGOs and international organisations with a purely advising and consultative function, *Frontex* has its own "Fundamental Rights Office", which is allegedly independent and advises the office. *Frontex*' Fundamental Rights Office has mechanisms in place "in case of serious human rights violations". Advice and recommendations of the *Frontex* fundamental rights office are non-binding. Has it brought any changes? No. On the contrary, it is a facade for *Frontex* to claim that fundamental rights are respected. *Frontex* Fundamental Rights Office is a cover up for human rights violations committed by the agency and does not replace any legal accountability in front of the courts.

32

33

³⁸ See: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/whatsapp-nachrichten-an-die-libysche-kustenwache/>.

³⁹ See: <https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/2200-frontex-emails-to-libya/>.

⁴⁰ See Human Rights Watch and Border Forensics' researches: "Our statistical analysis supports the conclusion that the EU's approach is designed not to rescue people in distress but to prevent them reaching EU territory. The statistics indicate that *Frontex*'s use of aerial assets under its current strategy has not had a meaningful impact on the death rate. However, there is a moderate and statistically significant correlation between aerial asset flights and the number of interceptions performed by the *Libyan Coast Guard*. On days when the assets fly more hours over its area of operation, the *Libyan Coast Guard* tends to intercept more vessels." Available at: hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2022/12/08/airborne-complicity-frontex-aerial-surveillance-enables-abuse.

⁴¹ See for instance the "cover up" in the Crotone shipwreck: lighthousereports.com/investigation/the-crotone-cover-up/.

⁴² See the press release: sea-watch.org/en/eu-court-frontex-wrongfully-withholds-evidence/.

⁴³ See the decision on how the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (*Frontex*) complies with its fundamental rights obligations with regard to search and rescue in the context of its maritime surveillance activities, in particular the Adriana shipwreck (OI/3/2023/MHZ): ombudsman.europa.eu/en/decision/en/182665.

In 2024, Sea-Watch's Airborne observed a massive activity of Frontex with its aerial assets. Still, NGOs were not systematically informed of boats in distress, and Frontex's presence led to interceptions at sea by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, including in the Maltese SAR zone.



On the morning of the 12th November, the civilian hotline *Watch the Med - Alarm Phone* was contacted by 23 persons in distress in the Maltese SAR zone and alerted the authorities and NGOs accordingly. The NGO ship *Life Support*⁴⁴ started heading to the boat in distress. Two hours later, *Seabird 2*'s crew saw *Frontex*' aircraft *Osprey2* heading back to Lampedusa and asked them on the radio whether they had sighted any cases. After a silence, *Frontex*' aircraft shared the co-

ordinates of the boat in distress. *Seabird 2* immediately changed course to the given position and had to witness the interception of the persons by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in the Maltese SAR zone. According to open sources, *Osprey2* was operating in the area of the boat in distress earlier in the morning. *Frontex*' aircraft never informed the nearby NGO ships *Life Support* and *Nadir*, but only *Seabird 2*'s crew, eventually and upon request.

44 The NGO vessel *Life Support* is operated by the NGO EMERGENCY.

The yellow line is the flight track of the *Frontex* aircraft.
Source: adsbexchange.com.



As Sea-Watch, we call upon:

- *Frontex* to transparently communicate boats in distress to all actors at sea
- *Frontex*'s executive director Hans Leijten to terminate *Frontex*' operations in the central Mediterranean Sea, as per Art. 46 *Frontex* Regulation
- European member states to ensure that no budget contribution to *Frontex* contributes to human rights violations
- The European Union to engage in a civil European Search and Rescue programme, detached from any law enforcement activities: *Frontex* must be defunded and its budget used for sea rescue

Persons in distress are left to die in the central Mediterranean Sea

The international legal framework requires state authorities but also private actors, such as shipmasters of merchant vessels, to assist persons in distress and ensure that those are brought to a place of safety. Nevertheless, Sea-Watch's Airborne operations have been witnessing how European coastal states refer to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* or *Tunisian National Guard* and the mere existence of the Tunisian and Libyan SAR zones to refrain from coordinating rescues of persons in distress. Furthermore, merchant vessels are reluctant to

engage in rescue operations or instructed not to do so. And *Frontex* remains passive and refrains from engaging with all actors at sea. Beyond causing potential delays to render assistance to persons in distress,⁴⁵ it is clear that the objective is to ensure that no one crosses the Mediterranean Sea, at any costs. These actions result in deaths at sea that could have been prevented.

What the central Mediterranean Sea needs is not more agreements, but the political willingness to rescue persons at sea.

A Search and Rescue programme is possible!

Since the end of *Mare Nostrum* in 2014, European states have been withdrawing ships from the central Mediterranean, and instead deployed technologies on law enforcement and border related technologies – such as *Frontex*. However, it is actually financially and materially possible for the EU and European member states to engage in a concrete search and rescue programme dedicated to the rescue of persons in distress and their disembarkation in a place of safety. The European Commission can coordinate a civil search and rescue programme with forces and resources of European member states. For more information, read the “*Mare Solidale*” proposal: sea-watch.org/en/mare-solidale/.

⁴⁵ See Airborne factsheet: sea-watch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Sea-Watch-Airborne-Quarterly-Factsheet_April-to-June-2024.pdf distress case L

In 2024, at least 61 persons sighted by Airborne's operations disappeared because of shipwrecks. Such shipwrecks take place because of the criminal non-assistance of the Italian and Maltese authorities, because they only rely on the so-called *Tunisian National Guard* or *Libyan Coast Guard*, or because they actively shift responsibilities between each other.

For instance, on 18th December, when Italy's systematically outsourced its responsibilities to render assistance to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and Tunisian authorities.



Around noon on 18th December, *Seabird 1's* crew overheard two may-day relays by *Frontex* aircraft *Eagle1* about a boat in distress with around 100 persons in the Tunisian and Libyan SAR zones. When *Seabird 1's* crew arrived on scene about an hour later,

they tried to contact five closeby merchant vessels - *Ifrikia III*, *Maridive 51*, *Maridive 70* and *Bos Triton* without success. Only the merchant vessel *STI Finchley* responded that they were told by the port authorities of Lampedusa to contact the *Tunisian National Guard*, which they successfully did. In the meantime, the Italian MRCC issued an inmarsat message on behalf of and referring to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, requesting ships to divert course towards the boat in distress. The civilian hotline *Alarm Phone* was informed about the boat in distress as well and alerted the authorities. According to them, many persons fell in the water. Eventually, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* intercepted 82 persons and pulled them back to Libya. **Still, the *Alarm Phone* reported that at least 15 persons went missing - because no one came to the rescue in a timely manner, as required by the law.**⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See: x.com/alarm_phone/status/1869654395081970173.

In another case, persons died because the Maltese and Italian authorities refused to launch rescue operations for a boat in the Maltese SAR zone.

On 2nd September, *Seabird 2's* crew spotted a distress case carrying around 30 people within the Maltese SAR zone, and alerted the Italian and Maltese authorities. During the following three hours, the crew sent two additional email updates. The last time *Seabird 2's* crew sighted the persons in distress, they were only 26 nm from Lampedusa. Meanwhile, the civilian hotline *Alarm Phone* also alerted the Italian and Maltese authorities regarding a boat in distress that fit with *Seabird 2's* sightings. Despite continuous information, **the Italian Coast Guard only launched a rescue operation two days later, when all but 7 persons from the boat had already vanished at sea.**



Persons in distress in the Maltese SAR zone. All but 7 persons disappeared in the central Mediterranean Sea. Photo: Mika Grunwaldt

38

Main Findings

We seek accountability!

On 12th November, **Ibrahim Hsian** (son of Mohammad Hsian, who drowned in the shipwreck), **three survivors**, and **Sea-Watch** filed a **criminal complaint in front of the Prosecutor of Agrigento in Italy**. They requested the public prosecutor's office to investigate if crimes, such as shipwreck and multiple manslaughter due to negligence, failure to provide assistance, or refusal to perform official duties, were committed by the Italian authorities and other actors potentially involved.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See our press release: sea-watch.org/en/sea-watch-files-charges-against-italian-authorities/. Read the testimony of a survivor: sea-watch.org/en/i-accepted-the-risk-of-dying-on-this-journey/ and of the relative: sea-watch.org/en/my-father-was-a-unique-irreplaceable-person/.

Even when dead bodies are sighted, the authorities do not fulfill their duties to retrieve bodies.

From 7th to 8th of June, *Seabird 2's* crews sighted and subsequently reported 12 dead bodies floating in international waters to the Maltese, Italian and Libyan authorities.⁴⁸ In cooperation with NGO vessels *Ocean Viking* and *Geo Barents*, which already had 160 people on board from a recent rescue operation, the bodies were recovered from the water. *The Ocean Viking* was then assigned the distant port of Genoa, 650 nm away

from their original position. Calls to the Libyan authorities to assist in a wider search to recuperate any other possible deceased persons went unanswered. It cannot be confirmed that the 12 bodies recovered were indeed the same sighted by the *Seabird 2's* crews, and due to the lack of response by Libyan, Maltese and Italian authorities and the failure to conduct a thorough search, it will never be known if more deaths occurred.

Airborne Annual Report 2024

39

As Sea-Watch we demand:

- Italy and Malta must rescue persons as soon as possible, including persons in their own SAR zones
- Dead bodies must be retrieved and buried in order to ensure their dignity
- Each disappearance at sea must be followed by transparency and accountability - in the form of criminal and administrative investigations by the Italian and Maltese authorities. Persons responsible for deaths at sea must be held accountable

⁴⁸ For more information, see: sea-watch.org/en/12-bodies-discovered-by-sea-watch-monitoring-aircraft-in-the-mediterranean/.

Our Demands

Based on the above findings, we call on all involved actors to end violent border practices and respect the human rights of all people, especially those who try to flee.

- **The EU and its member states** must immediately terminate any policy, funding, or program that aims at the externalization of European borders in Tunisia, Libya and beyond as well as the prevention of migration to Europe.
- **The Italian and Maltese authorities** must abide by the law and engage in sea rescue operations. This includes immediately terminating the collaboration and information sharing with Libyan militias, including the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and to stop its practice of systematic non-assistance. The Maltese RCC must react to cases of distress, and refrain from instructing merchant vessels not to rescue until urgently necessary.
- **Italy** must immediately end its policies of criminalizing flight and civil sea rescue. This means revoking the *Piantadosi* (Law 15/2023) and *Flussi* (Law 145/2024) frameworks, ending the policy of assigning distant ports, and stopping all attempts of criminalization of our Airborne operations.
- **Italy and Malta** must ensure complete transparency around its SAR operations and border management, including regular, comprehensive public reporting on all maritime incidents, with a particular focus on documenting any loss of life, violence, abuse, or human rights violations at sea. Italy and Malta must ensure full public scrutiny and accountability of their actions.

Airborne Annual Report 2024

40

41

Demands

- **Germany** must immediately end any engagement in and support of (European) externalization policies. This includes, for example, the deployment of German federal police officers in Tunisia in the context of migration prevention. Furthermore, it must support German-flagged civil rescue ships when they are subjected to attempts to obstruct them.
- **The EU** must urgently introduce a European search and rescue program. This program should be non-military, financed and coordinated by member states, and must have the sole aim of rescuing people in distress at sea in line with maritime and human rights law.
- **The EU Commission** must fulfill its task as Guardian of the Treaties and end the crisis of the rule of law along European borders, instead of encouraging the criminalisation of people on the move and NGOs with the Facilitators package. This means to hold member states accountable for violations of applicable EU law, and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in particular.
- **Shipping companies** must support rescue operations by shipmasters, instead of hindering them and rendering shipmasters accomplices of violations of the law. The duty to render assistance applies to anyone.
- **The UNHCR and IOM** must ensure compliance with international law, especially the Geneva Convention, instead of becoming accomplice to illegal activities of EU member states and the European Union. Both must withdraw their support to the Italy-Albania protocol or any agreement of this kind.

Ending the deaths in the Mediterranean can be politically realized. We need safe and legal passages for everyone.

AIN'T NO BORDER HIGH ENOUGH

Sea-Watch e.V. is a non-profit organization that conducts civil search and rescue operations in the central Mediterranean.

We demand and push for a European search and rescue program, stand up for safe and legal escape routes as well as freedom of movement for all.

