Sea-Watch.org

Airborne Annual Report 2021



Photo: David Lohmüller

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Glossary

▶ **AFM**
Armed Forces of Malta
(MALTESE COAST GUARD)

▶ **Alarm Phone**
Transnational project that operates a 24-hour hotline for people in distress at sea and relays information about distress cases to authorities and surrounding vessels.

▶ **Bouri**
An offshore platform operated by the Italian company *ENI* in partnership with the Libyan *National Oil Corporation*. Offshore supply vessels run by the shipping company *Augusta Offshore S.p.A* primarily operate in its vicinity

▶ **Colibri 2**
Civil aircraft operated by the NGO *Pilotes Volontaires*

▶ **EUNAVFOR MED (European Union Naval Force) IRINI**
European military operation to enforce the UN arms embargo to Libya. Under EUNAVFOR MED IRINI, capacity building of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard takes place. On the flight route in the Central Mediterranean, IRINI operates exclusively with aircraft.

▶ **Farwah**
A Libyan floating storage/production facility operated by *Mabruk Oil Operations* on behalf of the Libyan *National Oil Corporation* and *Total EP*. The offshore supply vessels run by the shipping company *Vroon* primarily operate in its vicinity

▶ **Frontex**
European Border and Coast Guard Agency

▶ **Geo Barents**
Civil rescue vessel operated by the NGO *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF)

▶ **HPI**
Humanitarian Pilotes Initiative

▶ **IMO**
International Maritime Organization

▶ INMARSAT C
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 and vessels in distress

▶ IOM
International Organization for Migration

▶ Italian MRCC
Italian *Maritime Rescue Coordination Center*

▶ JRCC Tripoli
Libyan *Joint Rescue Coordination Centre*. A Joint Rescue Coordination Centre is a Rescue Coordination Centre responsible for both aeronautical and maritime search and rescue incidents

▶ 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

▶ Nadir
Civil rescue vessel operated by the NGO *RESQSHIP*

▶ Nautical Miles (nm)
Nautical Miles is the unit of measurement used at sea. 1 nautical mile is equal to 1,852 kilometers

▶ NGO
Non-Governmental Organization

▶ Ocean Viking
Civil rescue vessel operated by the NGO *SOS MEDITERRANEE*

▶ Open Arms
Civil rescue vessel operated by the NGO *Open Arms*

▶ RCC Malta
Maltese *Rescue Coordination Centre*

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

▶ Sabratha
An offshore platform operated by *Mellitah Oil & Gas,* a company owned by the Libyan *National Oil Corporation* and *ENI*. The offshore supply vessels run by the shipping company *Augusta Offshore S.p.A* primarily operate in its vicinity

▶ SAR
Search and Rescue

▶ SAR Zone / Region
A Search-and-Rescue zone or region is "an area of defined dimensions associated with a rescue coordination centre within which search and rescue services are provided", according to the SAR Convention, Annex, 1.3.4. SAR zones overlap with international waters

▶ Sea-Eye 4
Civil rescue vessel operated by the NGO *Sea-Eye*

▶ Sea-Watch 3
Civil rescue vessel operated by the NGO *Sea-Watch*

▶ Sea-Watch 4
Civil rescue vessel operated by the NGO *Sea-Watch*

▶ UNHCR
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction

In 2021, 1.553 people drowned while attempting to cross the central Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Nevertheless, the European Union and its Member States do not consider it necessary to create safe and legal escape routes. The situation in the Central Mediterranean is politically intentional and is being decided upon again every day. European migration policy is designed to prevent migration to Europe as much as possible.

Additionally in 2021, the steady expansion of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* enabled and politically legitimised by the EU and its individual Member States, resulted in 32.425 people being intercepted at sea and returned to Libya in violation of international law. These people are deprived of their right to asylum. After their return, they often re-enter a cycle of violence which consists of severe human rights violations in Libya, the dangerous attempted flight to Europe, being returned again, and fleeing once more.

Since 2015, *Sea-Watch* has been working to counteract the politically initiated rescue gap in the Central Mediterranean. Initially, this was enacted using ships for the direct rescue of people from distress at sea.

Since 2017, *Sea-Watch* has also operated reconnaissance aircraft - our *Airborne* operations. The monitoring flights undertaken by *Airborne* are aimed both at sighting people in distress, whereupon information is passed on to the relevant authorities and surrounding ships in order to push for a swift rescue, and also at maintaining a focus on documenting human rights violations. The operations are conducted together with the Swiss NGO *Humanitarian Pilots Initiative* (HPI).

Numbers

Monitoring aircraft: *Moonbird*[1], *Seabird*[2] and *Skybird*[3]

121 monitoring flights:
45 with *Moonbird*
72 with *Seabird*
4 with *Skybird*

A total **flight time of 714 hours and 45 minutes,** which is equivalent to **29 days, 18 hours and 45 minutes** in the air

190 boats, carrying around **11.137 persons in distress**



1 *Moonbird*'s last operation was on September 23th 2021. *Airborne's* joint operations with *HPI* started in 2017 with this aircraft. Since 2017, we flew more than 270 operations and spotted around 200 boats in distress thanks to *Moonbird.* Due to its age and related high maintenance needs,the aircraft has recently been retired and replaced by *Seabird 2.*

2 In December 2021, together with the French NGO *Ciel Solidaire* and *HPI*, *Sea-Watch* started conducting test flights with the aircraft *Skybird.*

Numbers

The numbers shown represent only the cases *Airborne* has spotted and not the total number of boats in distress in the Central Mediterranean.



29 boats with **1.630 persons in distress** were rescued by 7 different **NGO vessels** and disembarked in **Lampedusa and Sicily, Italy**



52 boats with 3.791 persons in distress were rescued by the **Italian authorities** or **arrived independently** in **Lampedusa, Italy**



49 boats with **2.863 persons in distress** were intercepted by the so-called ***Libyan Coast Guard*** and subsequently **pulled back to Libya**



3 boats with 172 persons in distress were rescued by the **Maltese authorities** and disembarked in **Malta**



4 boats with 309 persons in distress were rescued by merchant vessels and were **partly disembarked in Italy and Malta, partly transferred to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and subsequently pulled back to Libya**



The outcomes for 53 boats with around 2.372 persons in distress remain unknown

SICILY, ITALY

LAMPEDUSA, ITALY

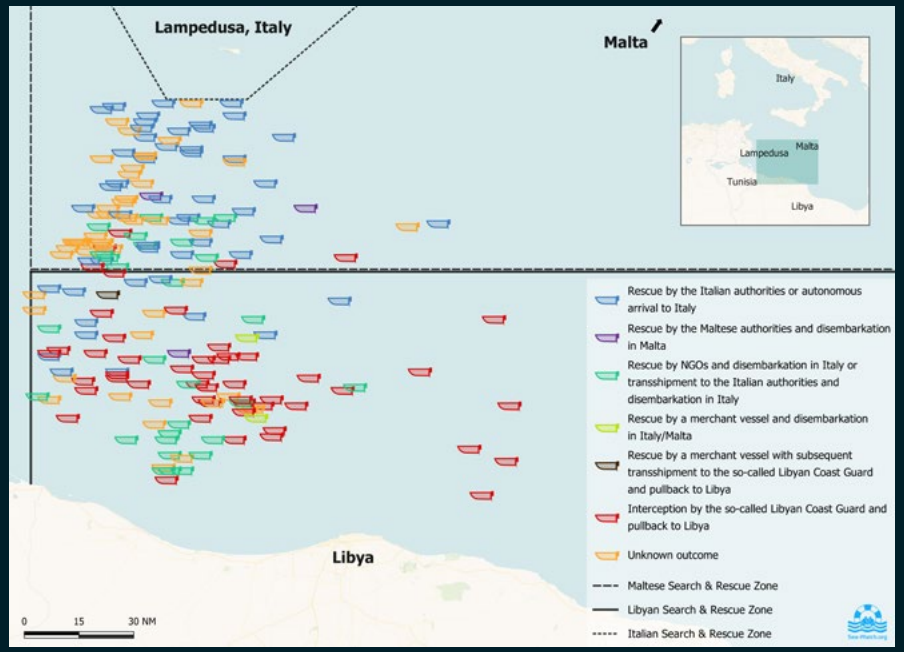
MALTA

TUNISIA

LIBYA

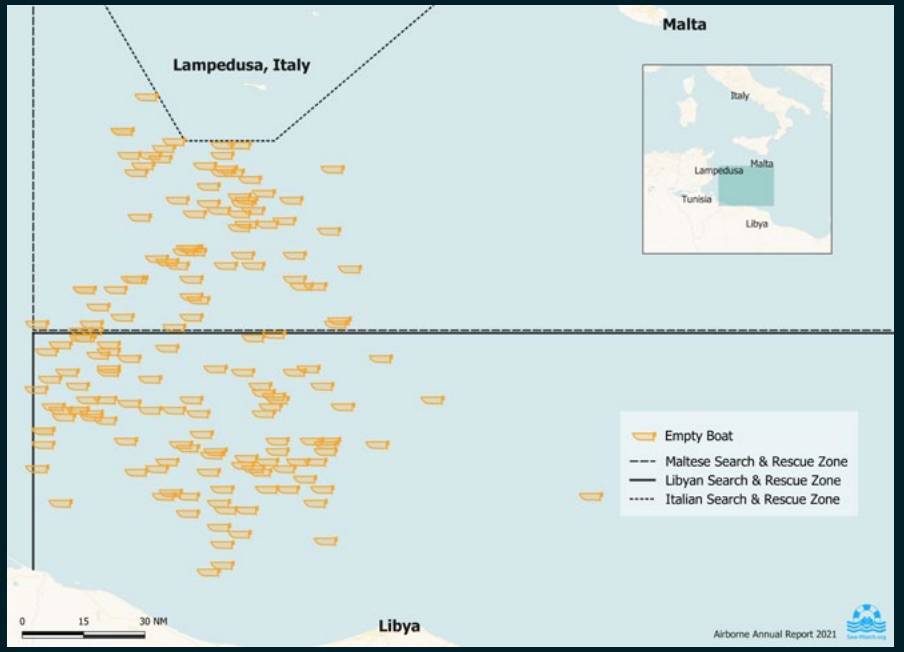
Karte: Mabbox / OpenStreetMap

All Boats Spotted



Colour coded according to the outcome of the distress case.

Empty Boats Spotted



169 empty boats: Empty boats can sometimes be matched to known distress cases, meaning that it can be reconstructed as to whether the persons reached Europe or whether they were illegally pulled back to Libya by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*. However, the outcomes for many empty boats remain unknown:

- 4 empty boats were the result of rescue operations conducted by NGO vessels
- 6 empty boats were likely rescued by the Italian authorities and disembarked in Lampedusa, Italy
- 21 empty boats were likely resulting from interceptions by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in which the people were pulled back to Libya
- The outcomes for 138 empty boats remain unknown

Seabird


Our civil monitoring aircraft *Seabird* can cross the Atlantic with just a single fuel-stop. Cruises at up to 400 km/h, climbs to 3.000 m within seven minutes. Carries 30 % of its empty weight in fuel - to stay airborne for up to 10 h.
HPI

Main Findings

The Airborne operations carried out in 2021 and the resulting documentation of human rights violations reveal once again:

- The systematic, calculated delays and non-assistance of European Member States and the delegation of the duty to render assistance to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*, even from European SAR zones
- The coordination and facilitation by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency *Frontex* and the European military Operation *EUNAVFOR MED IRINI* in interceptions and pullbacks to Libya undertaken by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*
- The systematic exclusion by *Frontex* of civil rescue ships from information about distress cases, with the knowledge that these vessels would bring rescued persons to Europe
- The need for the continuous involvement of merchant vessels in Search-and-Rescue events due to the lack of European rescue assets and the lack of support from authorities for merchant vessels engaged in rescue operations, which as a consequence results in the non-assistance of distress cases by merchant vessels
- The need for NGO vessels in order to uphold the law and save human lives in the Central Mediterranean

Moonbird

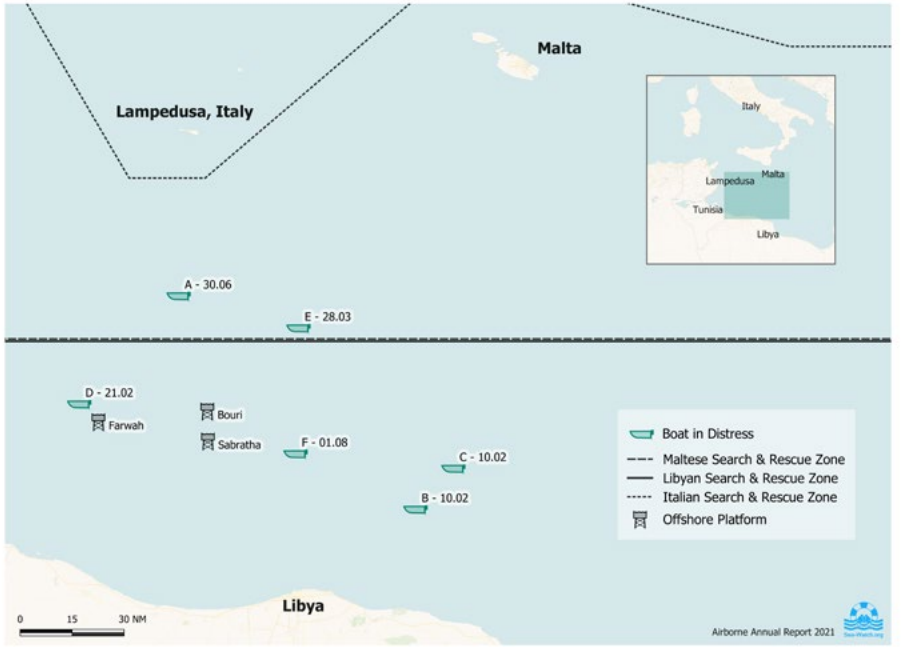


Our civil monitoring aircraft *Moonbird* is the first single-engine aircraft with a whole -aircraft emergency parachute. Flies a crew of three at 200 km/h on only 15 l/100 km.

Photo: David Lohmueller

Reconstruction of Selected Boats in Distress

In this chapter reconstructed distress cases which were either intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* or in which the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* violently intervened.



The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* as the Executive Force of Hostile European Isolation Policies

The European Union and its Member States externalise their border policies far beyond the actual European external borders. With the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and it's *Joint Rescue Coordination Centre* (JRCC), they have a partner that carries out human rights violations at sea in the name of the EU, using its funds, its equipment and its political backing. **The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* realises the ultimate goal of European migration policy: Preventing people on the move from safely reaching European shores.** It has been known for years that the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* does not comply with the law, endangers the lives of persons in distress at sea and returns them to an unsafe place.

> A **Rescue Coordination Centre** (RCC) is "a unit responsible for promoting efficient organization of search and rescue services and for coordinating the conduct of search and rescue operations within a search and rescue region", according to the SAR Convention, 1.3.5. According to point 2.3.3., RCC staff must ensure that assistance is provided to people in distress, be reachable 24/7 and speak fluent English.

The Libyan JRCC does not fulfil the criteria laid down in the SAR Convention. The staff of the JRCC usually do not speak English and are often unresponsive on the phone.

20.01.: Unresponsiveness of the Libyan authorities regarding a shipwreck and people in distress.
According to reports provided to the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* and later confirmed by the IOM and UNHCR, a boat with around 53 persons capsized on 19.01. in the Libyan Search-and-Rescue (SAR) zone, from which only 10 persons survived. When *Moonbird's* ground crew attempted to call the Libyan authorities 16 times that day in order to request more information and offer support in looking for the missing persons, they were unreachable. In 2 cases, an exchange was not possible due to a lack of English. For 1 number the line was occupied, and in 4 other cases the call ended automatically, the phone was switched off or the answering person immediately hung up. In 9 cases, nobody answered.

30.06., distress case A, with 63 people: Use of violence and dangerous manoeuvres by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in the Maltese SAR zone.



The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* exposing the people in distress case A to acute danger by firing shots into the water, approaching the boat too fast and too close, and trying to ram it.

Seabird's crew overheard a communication over the radio regarding a position of people in distress. When *Seabird* arrived in the area, a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* vessel was heading at full speed towards the scene. On-scene, there was a fishing vessel taking a wooden boat to its side. The Maltese authorities were informed on the phone and said that they were "investigating the case", but hung up when the ground crew reminded them about the illegality of a potential pullback. Meanwhile, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat had arrived on-scene. Attempting to stop the boat, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* fired into the water, circled the people who were trying to flee, attempted to deploy a rope to catch the boat and also attempted to ram the boat, approaching it too fast and too close.[3] When *Seabird's* crew urged them on the radio to stop these illegal and dangerous manoeuvres, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* replied that they "had to rescue as it is bad weather tomorrow". More than an hour after arriving on-scene, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* started to head south again, without having taken the people on board. The people arrived safely and autonomously in Lampedusa, Italy.

3 sea-watch.org/en/libyan_coast_guard_shots_fired/

Following this incident, the prosecutor of Agrigento opened investigations against the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* for "attempted shipwreck".[4]

> According to the SAR Convention, Annex, 1.3.2, **a rescue** is defined as "an operation to retrieve persons in distress, provide for their initial medical or other needs, and deliver them to a place of safety".

The European authorities illegally delegate their duty to render assistance to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*.

Both the Italian and Maltese RCCs often deny their responsibility and refer to the JRCC as the competent authority. Furthermore, European aircraft collect information on boats in distress and forward this information to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* thus taking over tasks of aerial reconnaissance and facilitating interceptions. According to the SAR Convention, a rescue only ends with the disembarkation of the people in a place of safety. **Libya, however, cannot be considered a safe place.** After the persons are intercepted at sea, mostly in an irresponsible and dangerous manner, they are illegally returned to Libya where they are again exposed to severe human rights violations such as torture, gender-based violence and abuse in detention centers. Civil society, human rights organizations, intergovernmental organizations and, above all, people on the move themselves, have been documenting the human rights situation in Libya for years.

The cooperation with and the political legitimization of the Libyan authorities by European actors knowingly leads to the daily violation of maritime and human rights law.

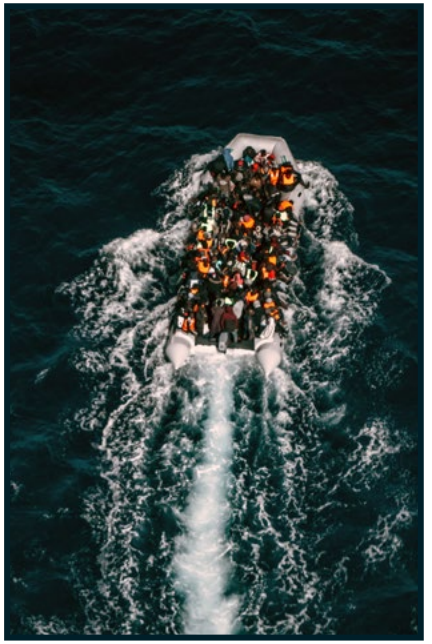
> A **place of safety** is a "place where the survivors' safety of life is no longer threatened and where their basic human needs (..) can be met", according to the IMO Resolution MSC. 167(78), §6.12 et seq. **Libya disqualifies itself as a place of safety.** According to law, rescued persons cannot be disembarked there, they must be disembarked in Europe.

10.02., distress cases B and C, around 100 and 110 persons: Delegation of the duty to render assistance to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* pullback to Libya, coordinated by a surveillance aircraft.

4 theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jul/05/italy-to-investigate-libyan-coastguard-for-attempted-shipwreck-of-migrant-boat

On 10.02., *Seabird's* crew first spotted 1 boat with around 100 persons in distress in the Libyan SAR zone (distress case B). The crew later overheard via radio an unknown aircraft calling the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and providing them with the position of a "target". *Seabird* flew to the given position and found another 110 persons in distress (distress case C). The same unidentified aircraft also eventually provided the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* with the coordinates of "number 2 target", which was distress case B. For the entire operation, the aircraft continued to provide the coordinates of "number 1 target" and "number 2 target" to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.* Observed by *Seabird,* the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat *Ubari* eventually intercepted the people aboard both cases and pulled them back to Libya. Both boats were later matched with reported cases from the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone.*

Based upon aircraft track observations, only an aircraft belonging to the *Armed Forces of Malta* (AFM) was operating in the same area as *Seabird* on this day. We hence believe that this Maltese aircraft coordinated the interceptions.



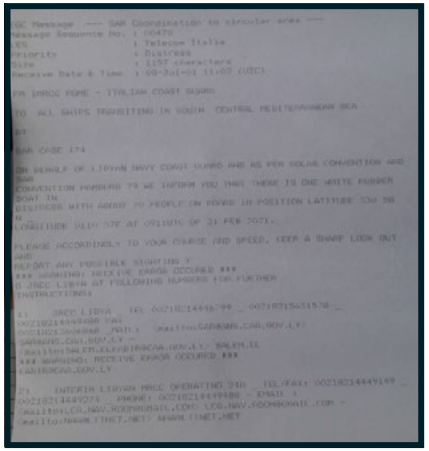
Distress case C, rubber boat with around 110 persons in distress on board. Photo: Black Forest Collective



The ongoing interception of distress case B with the people already on board the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* vessel 660. Photo: Black Forest Collective

21.02., distress case D, around 70 persons: Critical situation of a boat in distress, the Italian MRCC acting on behalf of the Libyan authorities, delegation of the duty to render assistance to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.*

Moonbird's crew spotted around 70 persons aboard a boat without an engine which was adrift in the Libyan SAR zone. *Moonbird's* crew sent out a mayday relay via radio which remained unresponded to. The authorities were informed via emails and calls about the severe risk to life carried by this vessel. Almost 3 hours later, the oil platform *Bouri* confirmed having received the pertinent information and attempted to call vessels in the vicinity on the radio. Meanwhile, the Italian MRCC sent an "INMARSAT C" message to all vessels transiting in the Southern Mediterranean, acting "on behalf of the [so-called] *Libyan Navy Coast Guard*" and providing all information on the boat in distress as well as requiring any vessels to "please accordingly to your course and speed, keep a sharp lookout and report any sighting to JRCC Libya". The message further listed contacts for the JRCC Libya. The civilian aircraft *Colibri 2* later documented the dramatic interception of the people by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* - the tubes of the rubber boat were deflated, according to the NGO, and around 20 persons were in the water.[5] The people were pulled back to Libya.



Caption: INMARSAT C message sent by the Italian MRCC "on behalf of *Libyan Navy Coast Guard*".



The left tube is already losing air and is about to deflate in distress case D.

> States are responsible to coordinate and ensure disembarkation in safe places, as first RCCs contacted and in their SAR zones, according to the IAMSAR Manual Vol. II, 3.6.1 et seq. and SAR Convention, Annex, 2.1.9, 3.1.9. States are also bound to respect human rights law and the non-refoulement principle. **Since Libya is not a place of safety, coordinating interceptions from the Maltese SAR zone is a serious violation of human rights and maritime law**.

28.03., distress case E, 11 persons: Interception in the Maltese (!) SAR zone, coordinated by an unknown aircraft and a merchant vessel.

Seabird's crew overheard a communication between an unknown source and the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat *Fezzan* on the radio, providing the Libyan boat with a position. *Seabird* proceeded to the given position and spotted 11 persons in distress in the Maltese SAR zone. Later, *Seabird's* crew overheard an unknown aircraft on the radio, naming itself "European aircraft in the area", and exchanging with the merchant vessel *Saint George,* which had been ordered by the RCC Malta to change its course and monitor the people in distress. While heading back to the home base, *Seabird's* crew again overheard regular communications and exchanges of positions between at least the "European aircraft", the merchant vessel *Saint George* and the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.* Here, an unidentifiable source, likely the same unknown "European aircraft", relayed positions of the people in distress via radio to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* hence coordinating a pullback from the Maltese SAR zone. We assume that the people were intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and pulled back to Libya. The case was reconstructed in detail in the Italian newspaper *Domani*.[6]

01.08., distress case F, around 88 persons: Likely involvement of an asset from the EUNAVFOR MED Operation IRINI in an interception, pullback to Libya by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.*

The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* informed *Seabird's* ground crew that they had received the position of a boat in distress. Later, the people in distress called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone,* which informed the authorities and *Sea-Watch's Airborne* operations. When the ground crew monitored the track of the EUNAVFOR MED aircraft *Seagull* on

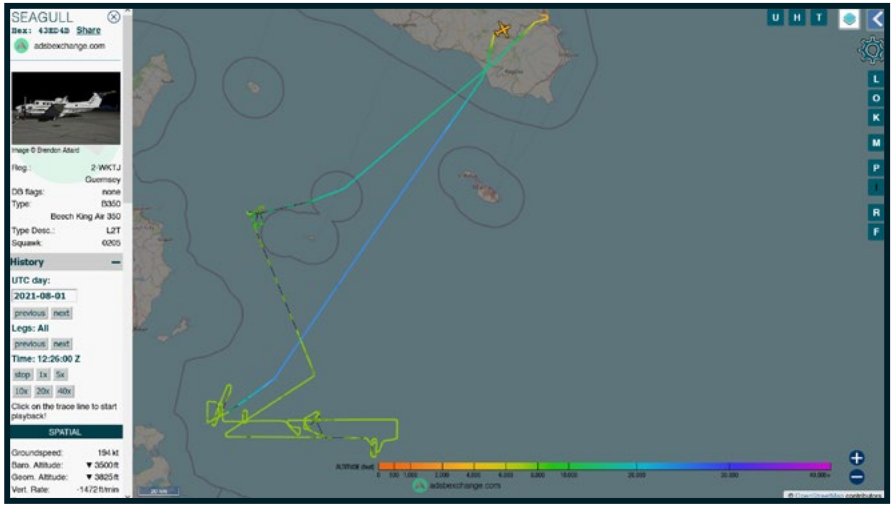
5 twitter.com/pvolontaires/status/1363858440146272257?s=21

6 editorialedomani.it/longform/migranti-libia-torture-respingimenti-frontex-europa-italia-ghbpk0qo

open sources, it appeared to have been at the scene of the people in distress shortly before *Seabird*. *Seabird's* crew spotted the people in distress and observed that the rubber boat was deflating. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat 648 was approaching with around 20 persons already onboard. The people were intercepted and pulled back to Libya.



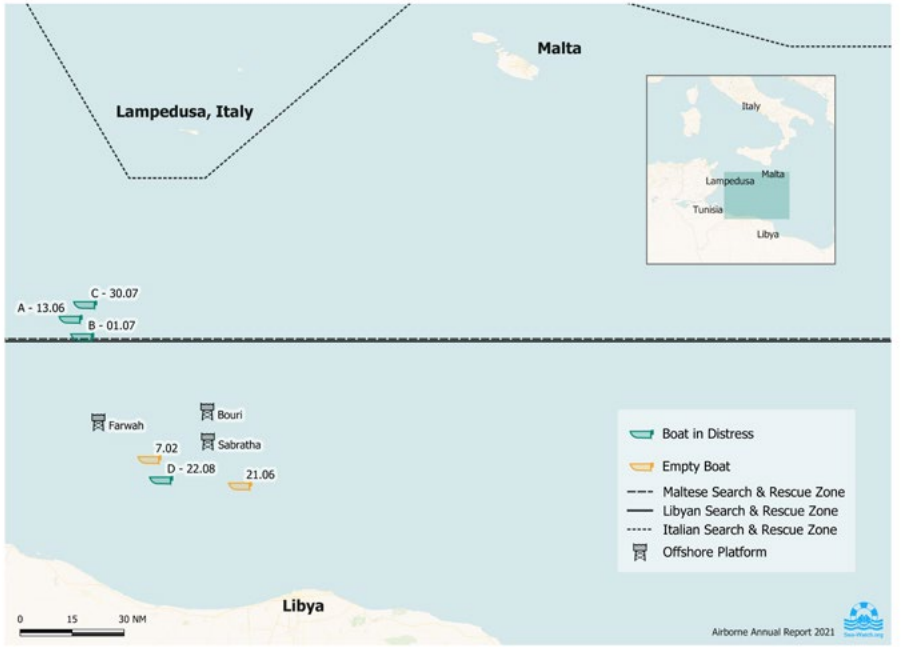
The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* already had about 20 people on deck when it intercepted 88 persons of distress case F and returned them to Libya in violation of international law.
Photo: David Lohmueller



Track of EUNAVFOR MED aircraft *Seagull*. · Screenshot: ADS-B Exchange

Reconstruction of Selected Boats in Distress

In this chapter reconstructed distress cases where we have to assume that *Frontex* was involved and facilitated illegal interceptions - even from the Maltese Search-and-Rescue zone.



The European Border and Coast Guard Agency *Frontex* Coordinating Illegal Returns to Libya

***Frontex*, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has the task of preventing people on the move from crossing the external borders of the European Union.** In the Central Mediterranean, *Frontex* is not present with naval assets but only operates aerial reconnaissance aircraft. Since May 2021, *Frontex* additionally operates a drone[7] from Malta, under a joint operation with the *Armed Forces of Malta*.

Aerial surveillance enables *Frontex* to gather extensive knowledge about developments in the Central Mediterranean Sea and relay information about boats in distress to the "competent authorities", though without having to engage in rescues themselves. When spotting a boat in the Libyan SAR zone, *Frontex* mostly exclusively informs the Libyan authorities about the case, despite NGO or merchant vessels also being in the vicinity. **By forwarding the information to the Libyan JRCC and sometimes even directly guiding the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* to the position of a boat, *Frontex* coordinates and facilitates the interceptions and pullbacks of people in distress to Libya –** thus carrying out the EU's primary aim of preventing people from safely reaching Europe.

Besides the monitoring of open radio communications during operations by our aircraft's crew, *Airborne's* ground crew works on the reconstruction of *Frontex's* contributions to human rights violations: during operations, the ground crew observes *Frontex* flight tracks on open sources and tries to match them with known distress cases. In addition to the distress cases mentioned below, several cases with the involvement of *Frontex* were already reconstructed by *Sea-Watch*[8] [9] and became subjects of journalist investigations.[10]

In 2021, sighted by *Seabird* and *Moonbird's* crews, ***Frontex* was involved in at least 33 distress cases and empty boats, concerning at least 1.429 persons in distress.**

> #DefundFrontex: In 2021, *Sea-Watch*, together with 21 other organizations, called for ***Frontex* to be defunded.**[11] By 2027, the EU is letting *Frontex's* work cost 5.6 billion euros without spending a single euro on saving human lives. Even a tiny portion of 2021's *Frontex* operational budget would be enough to implement a nationwide civil sea rescue program.

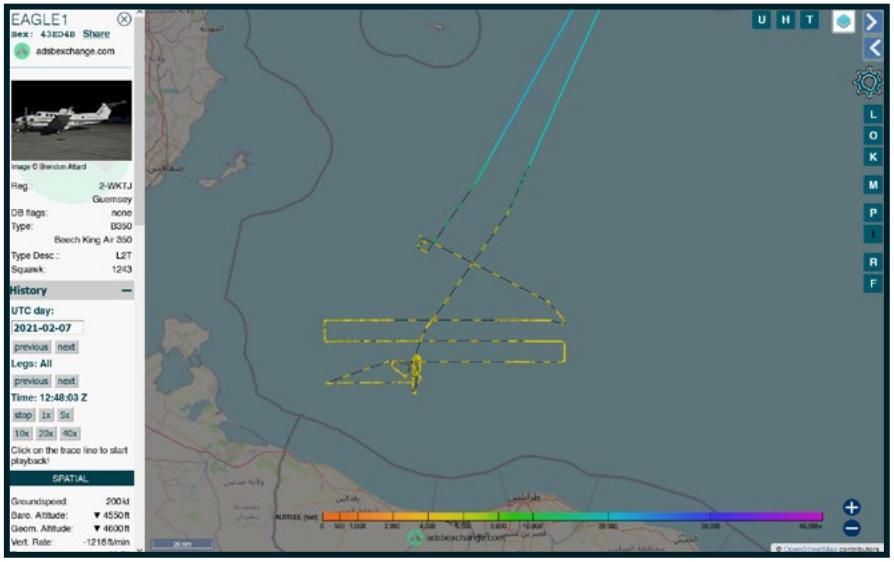
7 The drone used by *Frontex* is of the type "Heron1". With the drone, the agency is able to better detect boats in distress due to improved technical capabilities and a significantly longer flight time.
8 Certain cases involving *Frontex* were compiled in the following factsheet: sea-watch.org/frontex_crimes/
9 twitter.com/seawatch_intl/status/1357787888394653697
10 An example of a journalist investigation focussing on *Frontex* activity in the Central Mediterranean: spiegel.de/international/europe/libya-how-frontex-helps-haul-migrants-back-to-libyan-torture-camps-a-d62c3960-ece2-499b-8a3f-1ede2eaefb83.
11 The campaign #DefundFrontex and a background paper: sea-watch.org/en/defundfrontex-for-a-state-funded-civil-sea-rescue-program/

07.02.: A burning empty boat and interception likely coordinated by *Frontex* aircraft.

On 07.02., *Moonbird's* ground crew observed *Frontex* aircraft *Eagle1* orbiting a position in the Libyan SAR zone. When *Moonbird's* aircrew arrived on scene, an empty boat was burning on the water and a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* vessel was spotted with around 32 persons on its deck, who were later pulled back to Libya. According to the observed *Frontex* track, we have to assume that a *Frontex* aircraft once again coordinated a pullback to Libya of people on the move.



Near the burning empty wooden boat, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* is spotted with about 32 people on board.



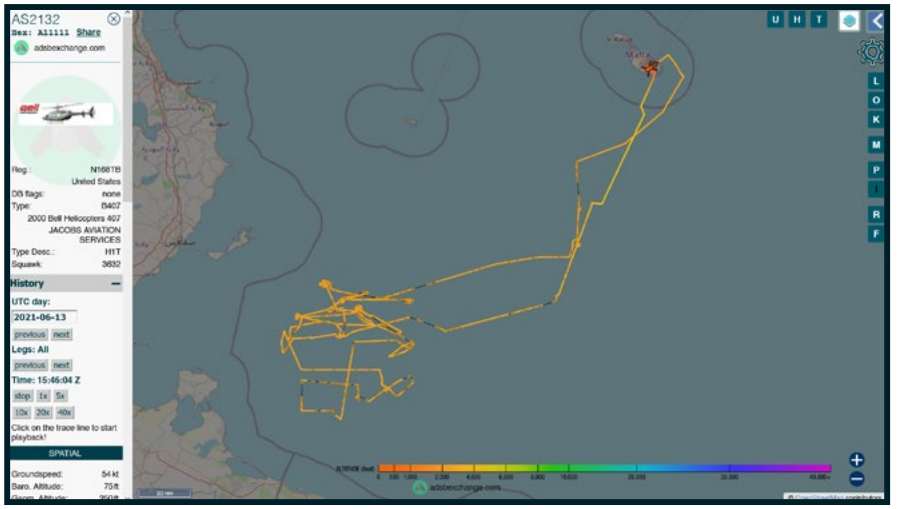
The Track of *Frontex* aircraft *Eagle1* shows orbits over a position where *Moonbird* later found an empty boat. Screenshot: ADS-B Exchange

13.06., distress A, with around 90 persons: Interception in the Maltese (!) SAR zone, likely coordinated by *Frontex.*

The initiative *Watch the Med - Alarm Phone* was called by the people in the Maltese SAR zone and immediately alerted the authorities. While *Seabird* was flying, the ground crew observed the *Frontex* drone orbiting the position given by *Alarm Phone*. *Seabird's* crew spotted the people around 20 minutes later as well as their interception in the Maltese SAR zone by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*. The people were pulled back to Libya.



The ongoing interception of the people in distress case A carried out by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* vessel *Ras Jadir* within the Maltese Search-and-Rescue zone.



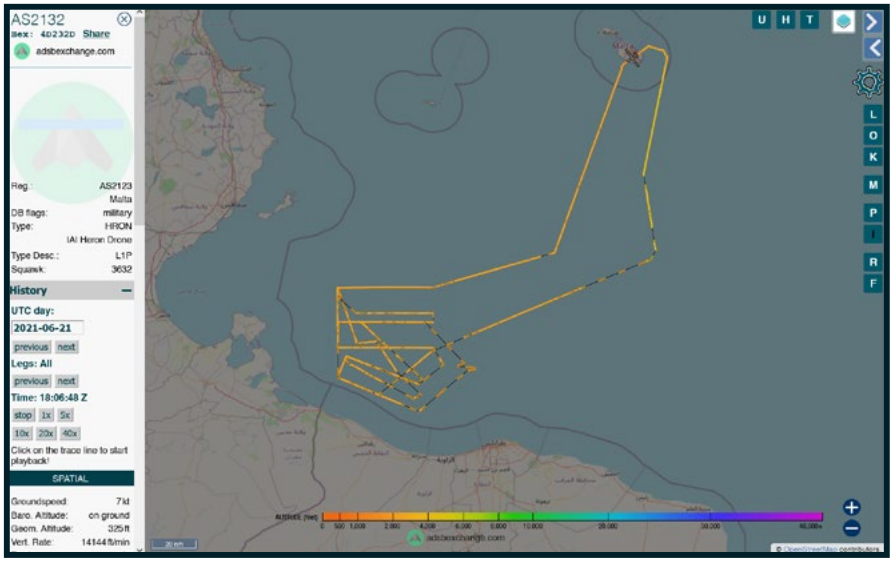
The track of the *Frontex* drone *AS2132* matches a position given bei *Alarm Phone*.
Screenshot: ADS-B Exchange

21.06.: Empty boat in the Libyan SAR zone, interception likely coordinated by *Frontex.*

Seabird's ground crew observed the drone orbiting in the Libyan SAR zone. The JRCC Libya later confirmed that they had received a position via email which corresponded with the observed orbit and that they were sending an asset. Later, *Seabird's* crew spotted an empty boat at the position. The Libyan authorities confirmed afterwards that the people had been intercepted and that the involved so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat was returning to Tripoli.

01.07., distress case B, with 30 persons: *Frontex* drone likely involved, attempted interception by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in the Maltese (!) SAR zone, rescue by a civilian vessel.

The people in distress called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone,* which immediately alerted the authorities. The NGO vessel *Ocean Viking* and the NGO aircraft *Colibri 2,* as well as our aircraft *Seabird,* were heading towards the position. Meanwhile, *Seabird's* crew observed a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat also heading at full speed in the direc-



The track of the *Frontex* drone *AS2132* shows search patterns in the Libyan SAR zone.
Screenshot: ADS-B Exchange

tion of the people. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and the NGO vessel *Ocean Viking* were both around 10 nm away from the people when *Seabird's* crew found the people in the Maltese SAR zone. The patrol boat was later overheard urging the *Ocean Viking* to "change course". Around 20 minutes later, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat was spotted heading towards another direction. *Seabird's* ground crew tried on two occasions to call the Maltese authorities: the first time, the officer took the information and stated that he was "only the operator" and refused to forward the ground crew to the "duty officer" since he/she was "busy" and "currently handling other cases". The second time, the officer tried to forward the ground crew to the duty officer but "the call didn't go through". Around 30 minutes later, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and the *Ocean Viking* were both on-scene with the people in distress. The boat in distress was firstly near the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat, and then was heading towards the *Ocean Viking*. Ultimately, the people were rescued by the NGO vessel *Ocean Viking* and disembarked in Augusta on 09.-10.07.

Through monitoring the track of *Frontex's* drone, we have to assume that the drone was involved in the attempted pullback. When the ground crew called the Libyan authorities in the morning, the Libyan officers shared two positions which they had received "one hour ago". One of these positions coincided with a position around which *Frontex* was orbiting and where the people in distress case may have been. Hence, we have strong reasons to believe that *Frontex* again attempted to coordinate a pullback to Libya.



The track of the *Frontex* drone *AS2132* matches with one of the positions the Libyan authorities received. Screenshot: ADS-B Exchange



The boat in distress was already alongside the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* vessel *Fezzan*. It then still managed to head towards the NGO vessel *Ocean Viking*.



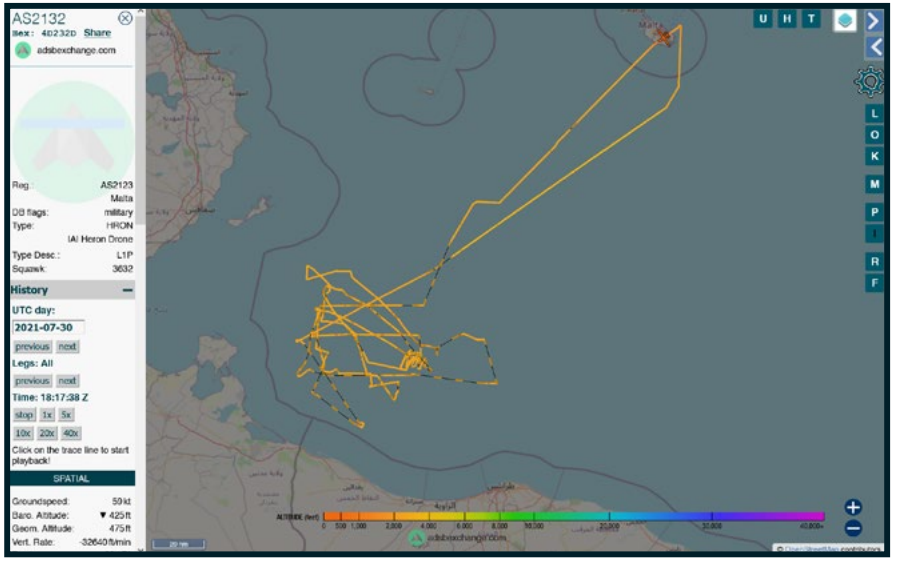
The RHIBs of the *Ocean Viking* are shuttling the persons from the wooden boat to the Ocean Viking.

30.07., distress case C, around 20 persons: Illegal interception and pullback by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in the Maltese (!) SAR zone, likely coordinated by *Frontex*, NGO vessel in the vicinity not informed.

Seabird's crew spotted the illegal interception of around 20 persons in the Maltese SAR zone by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* which already had around 50 persons on its deck. As well as the monitoring aircraft *Seabird,* the rescue vessel *Sea-Watch 3* also had a visual on the interception and was the closest vessel with rescue capacity, though was never informed by any authority. The *Frontex* drone was on-scene with the distress case three times before the interception. We must then assume that *Frontex* coordinated the interception.



The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* intercepting the distress case C with around 20 persons on board within the Maltese Search-and-Rescue zone.
Photo: David Lohmueller



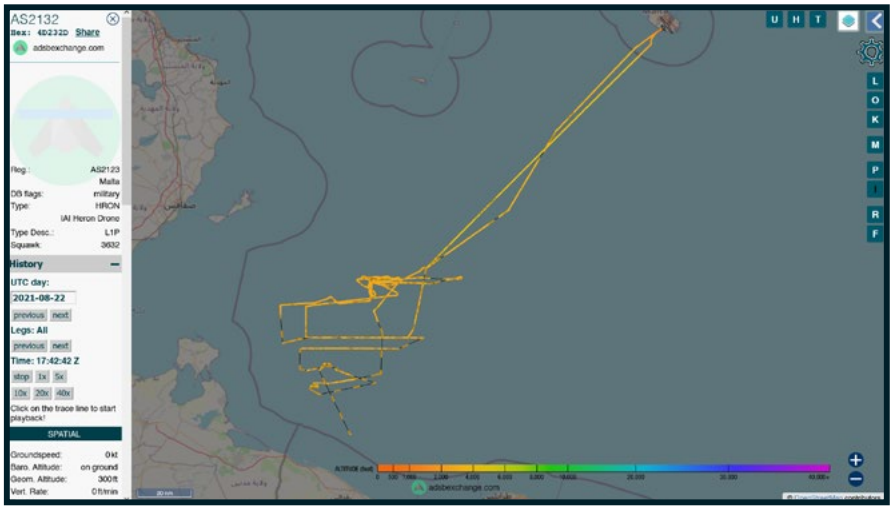
The track of the *Frontex* drone *AS2132* shows orbits over the position of the distress case.
Screenshot: ADS-B Exchange

After a request under the Freedom of Information Regulation about *Frontex's* operation on 30.07.2021, the border agency repeatedly refused to release the requested information. With the support of the organization *FragDenStaat, Sea-Watch* has therefore filed a lawsuit against *Frontex* before the General Court of the European Union to obtain the release of the withheld information in order to prove that *Frontex* is complicit in Human Rights violations in the Central Mediterranean.

sea-watch.org/en/sea-watch-takes-frontex-to-court/

22.08., distress case D, around 30 persons: *Frontex* cooperating with the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* interception and pullback to Libya.

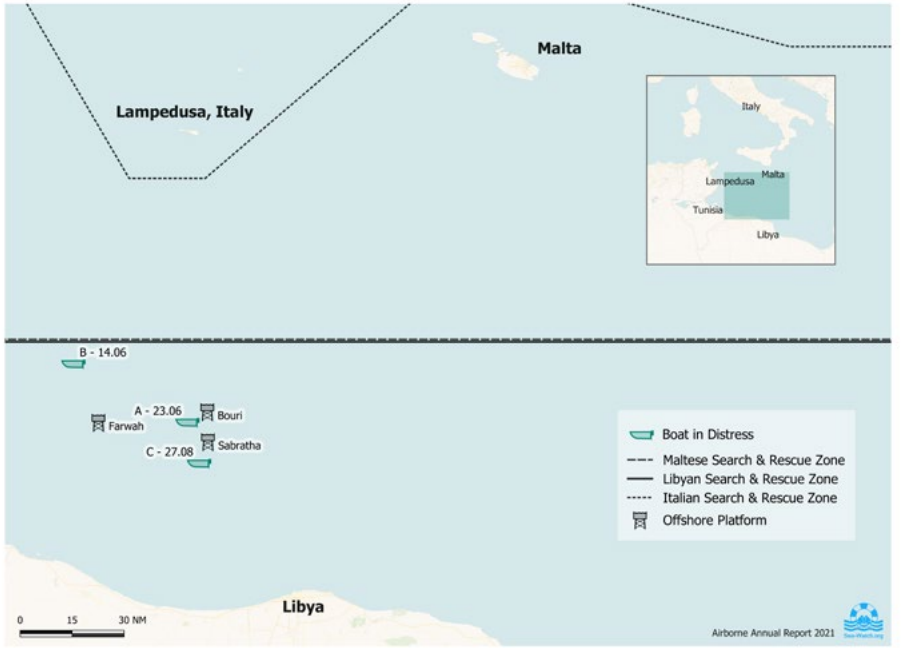
Moonbird's crew spotted the people in the Libyan SAR zone. *Frontex* was in the area. On the next day when *Airborne's* ground crew called the Libyan authorities, they confirmed that the boat had been intercepted by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.* They also informed us that they were **"having a lot of information from *Frontex* drone"** and that the *Frontex* drone had shared the position of the people beforehand. We must then conclude that *Frontex* again coordinated an interception and pullback to Libya.



The track of the *Frontex* drone *AS2132* shows orbits over the position of the distress case.
Screenshot: ADS-B Exchange

Reconstruction of Selected Boats in Distress

In this chapter reconstructed distress cases with the involvement of merchant vessels.



Merchant Vessels both as Active Rescue Actors and Complicit in Human Rights Violations

Due to the non-existence of a civil, state-funded and coordinated European SAR program and the temporary blockade of NGO vessels, **the shipping industry has become a major actor in rescuing people from distress at sea in the Central Mediterranean.**

Instead of considering merchant vessels as additional capacities for rescue, **the competent authorities tend rather to leave merchant ships alone in dealing with distress cases, for which the vessels often lack adequate equipment, supplies and training.** The authorities primarily order merchant vessels only to stand by, thus accepting acute risks of loss of life. European authorities know that merchant vessels are obliged to disembark rescued persons in a European harbour, and therefore try to artificially delay orders for rescuing people in distress and prefer to wait for the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* to pull the persons back to Libya.

Captains of merchant vessels are caught in a dilemma between the legal duty to render assistance to any person in distress on the one hand, and the attempts by states to block and criminalise vessels with rescued persons on board on the other, carrying the risk of ending up in a highly sensitive political space. Economic considerations such as the delays of goods and cancellations of contracts leading to financial losses for shipping companies may also contribute to the often passive role of merchant vessels when it comes to rescue operations at sea.

When we spot distress cases during our air operations, merchant ships always represent potential rescue capacities. While state actors are often unresponsive or refuse to cooperate, our crews try to push merchant vessels to comply with their duty of rescuing people from distress at sea. Our crews assist them in rescue operations in the best possible way. **However, as a consequence of restrictive measures by states against sea rescue in the Central Mediterranean, merchant ships mostly remain unresponsive and often ignore distress calls.**

When merchant vessels decide to comply with the law and respond to urgent calls to assist people in distress, *Sea-Watch's Airborne* operations witness that **shipmasters and crews are often left alone by European RCCs.** The Italian and Maltese authorities either refuse to support the vessels, refer to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* as the "competent" body, or they refer to one another and thus leave the merchant ship in an uncertain situation by not fulfilling their duty to coordinate.[12] **The authorities of European Member States must comply with international maritime law,** support any vessel engaged in sea rescue operations and coordinate a prompt disembarkation in a safe place.

20.02.: Shipwreck, at least 41 persons drowned or missing, a merchant vessel rescuing persons left alone by the authorities.

On 19.02., around 120 persons in distress in the Libyan SAR zone called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone,* which immediately informed the authorities. *Moonbird's* crew then spotted the merchant vessel *Vos Triton,* flying the flag of Gibraltar, with 77 persons and 1 dead body on board. The *Vos Triton* confirmed having conducted a rescue operation in the position of the mentioned boat. The *Vos Triton* had then waited for guidance from the authorities, which did not provide any. Due to a lack of support and in compliance with the law, the vessel sailed to Lampedusa on its own. *Moonbird's* crew spotted the vessel again on 21.02., where the rescuees on deck had gathered in a circle around the deceased person, likely having a small ceremony. After the



Several of the 77 rescued persons gather around a deceased person and likely hold a ceremony. The deceased person is one of presumably 41 people who died on that crossing.

12 For more information about distress cases involving merchant vessels: sea-watch.org/airborne_factsheet_merchant_vessels/

vessel waited for a time off the coast of Lampedusa, it was finally assigned a port in Porto Empedocle, Sicily, where the people were disembarked on 22.02.[13]

According to testimonies provided to the IOM, the UNHCR and the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone,* the boat was carrying around 120 persons when it departed from Libya. At some point it began to take on water, and **6 persons fell into the water while 2 drowned attempting to swim towards a sighted boat in the vicinity. The survivors reported that several other persons died during *Vos Triton's* rescue operation,** in which the merchant vessel was able to take 77 persons and only 1 dead body on board. **Therefore we have to assume that at least 41 persons lost their lives.**

Four months later, the same vessel transshipped persons to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.* See below distress case B on 14.06.

23.06., distress case A with around 20 persons: Non-assistance by several Italian merchant vessels, non-cooperation by European authorities, *Frontex* involvement, resulting in interceptions and pull-backs to Libya.

On 23.06., *Moonbird's* crew spotted around 20 persons in the Libyan SAR zone. The merchant vessels *Asso Ventinove* and *Asso Venticinque,* both flying the Italian flag, were respectively 2 and 7 nm away from the people. Neither of the vessels responded to any of the attempts at communication from *Moonbird's* crew on the radio. The merchant vessel *Almisan,* flying the Italian flag, was near the oil platform *Sabratha* and also remained unresponsive. Later, the oil platform *Bouri* informed *Moonbird's* crew on the radio that they were waiting for the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* to instruct one vessel to undertake the rescue, likely as the "competent" authority. The Italian authorities were informed but refused to provide any information as to which vessel would assist the persons in distress. The Italian shipping company operating the merchant vessels, *Augusta Offshore S.p.A,* was unaware of the situation and asked for a description in written form. When the ground crew called 2 different numbers for the Libyan authorities, either nobody answered or they could not speak English. When the Italian authorities were called again in the evening, they refused to share any information as "the boat is not in Italian area". On the next day, 24.06., the Italian authorities still did not provide any information and said "[they] are doing [their] job". The position of the people coincided with the position of the orbit of a *Frontex* operated drone on 23.06. in the morning - before *Moonbird's* crew was on-scene. This leads us to conclude that *Frontex* at least knew about the distress case and possibly passed the information on to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.* According to information provided by the JRCC Tripoli, the people were intercepted and pulled back to Libya.

In 2021, *Sea-Watch's Airborne* operations also encountered situations in which **merchant vessels were knowingly complicit in human rights violations by cooperating with the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*** and allowing them to transship rescued persons onto their vessels and subsequently pull them back to Libya.



The oil platform, one of the *Asso* vessels and the wooden boat are in the vicinity of one another.

13 See also the Twitter thread of the case with additional footage: twitter.com/seawatch_intl/status/1363222880348217345

In October 2021, a shipmaster of the Italian flagged vessel *Asso Ventotto,* operated by the Italian shipping company *Augusta Offshore S.p.A,* **was convicted to a year in prison by a Court in Naples for having disembarked 101 rescued persons in Libya in July 2018.**[14] This conviction is the first of this kind. Although the result is to be welcomed in terms of respect of the international law of the sea, **the impunity of shipmasters and European authorities unfortunately remains.**

14.06., distress case B, with between at least 120 and 270 persons:[15]
The merchant vessel *Vos Triton* transshipped persons to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in the Libyan SAR zone.[16]
The initiative *Watch the Med - Alarm Phone* received a call from a boat with around 120 people on board and immediately alerted the authorities. *Seabird's* crew spotted the people adrift in the Libyan SAR zone while the merchant vessel *Vos Triton,* flying the flag of Gibraltar, was in the direct vicinity. Several people jumped overboard and attempted to swim to the vessel, which then started its engine. The people were eventually rescued by the *Vos Triton. Seabird* left the scene. *Seabird's* ground crew later observed that the merchant vessel had started to head south. *Seabird's* aircrew overheard a communication on the radio between the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and the oil platform *Farwah* mentioning that the *Vos Triton* would hand over the people to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.* During the late afternoon, *Seabird's* crew witnessed the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* boarding the merchant vessel in order to transship the people and pull them back to Libya. Due to a lack of fuel, *Seabird's* crew was obliged to leave the scene. The UNHCR and IOM confirmed later that the *Vos Triton* had transshipped "over 270" people to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.* The people were pulled back to Libya.

Throughout the entire operation, *Seabird's* crew unsuccessfully reminded the *Vos Triton* over the radio of its obligations to ensure that the persons would be disembarked in a place of safety, which can only be in Europe.

14 infomigrants.net/en/post/35764/ship-captain-sentenced-to-prison-for-returning-migrants-to-libya
15 There are discrepancies in the numbers provided. The initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone* reported 200 persons, while our crew estimated more than 120 persons on the deck (excluding others below the deck). The IOM and UNHCR mentioned 270 persons in their press release.
16 For a more detailed report on this incident: sea-watch.org/en/shipping-company-vroon-complicit-in-forced-return/ Also video footage was published, from min 25:00: youtube.com/watch?v=M0oWJIkRQTA&t=1270s



Several persons of distress case B jumping over board and swimming to the merchant vessel *Vos Triton.*



The *Vos Triton* transshipped the people of distress case B to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.*

23.07.: Illegal transshipment of around 200 persons from the merchant vessel *Vos Aphrodite* to a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat, almost one month after *Vos Triton's* transshipment.

Moonbird's crew spotted a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat alongside the offshore supply vessel *Vos Aphrodite,* flying the flag of Gibraltar. Around 200 persons had been transshipped from the *Vos Aphrodite* to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.*



Transshipping rescued persons to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* means sending them back to an unsafe country in violation of international law.

This illegal transshipment happened only around a month after a similar act of complicity in human rights violations perpetuated by the *Vos Triton.* Both vessels belong to the Dutch shipping company *Vroon* and are operated by its Italian office.

27.08., distress case C, 34 persons, 5 missing: Capsized boat with 5 missing persons, merchant vessels unresponsive, illegal transshipment of rescued persons to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* by a merchant vessel, pullback to Libya.

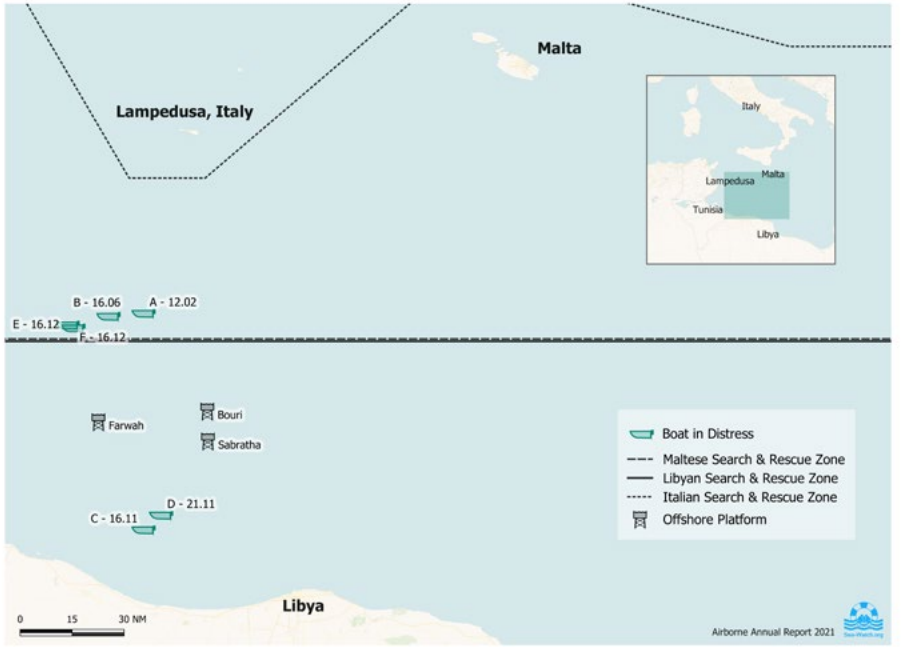
Seabird's crew found a wooden boat that had capsized, with around 20 persons sitting on the hull and several persons in the water wearing life vests. The crew immediately sent out a mayday relay on the radio. The closest merchant vessels in the vicinity, *Asso Venticinque* and *Asso Trenta,* both flying the Italian flag, as well as the oil platform *Sabratha,* were unresponsive. A Turkish military aircraft informed *Moonbird's* crew via radio that the Maltese RCC was informed about the situation. One and a half hours after the first sighting, a so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat, already with around 150 persons on its deck, was heading to the position, and ordered the merchant vessel *Asso Venticinque* to proceed to the people in distress. While the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* were intercepting the people, under observation by *Asso Venticinque, Seabird's* crew noticed that many more people were still in the water. The *Asso Venticinque* changed course towards these people, but asked the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* to take them on board. The *Asso Venticinque* then launched a RHIB in order to rescue 2 persons in the water, and confirmed that they would be disembarked in Italy. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* requested to take the people, for the purposes of family reunification. Via radio, the merchant vessel confirmed to us that the transshipment of the 2 rescued people would happen due to an alleged need for "medical assistance". The vessel handed these people over to the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* despite reminders by *Seabird's* crew about the illegality of this action. The *Asso Venticinque* informed via the radio that it was "in contact with the Italian MRCC", likely regarding this whole operation. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* also declared via radio that the intercepted people had reported that 5 persons were still missing. The persons could not be found despite an extensive search by *Seabird's* crew. 34 persons were pulled back to Libya by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard.*



The boat has already capsized. About 10 people are sitting on the upturned hull and others are in the water. The people reported 5 missing. • Photo: Sarah Hüther

Reconstruction of Selected Boats in Distress

In this chapter reconstructed distress cases in which people in distress were rescued by NGO vessels and subsequently disembarked in Europe.



Civil Society Upholds Human Rights in the Central Mediterranean Sea

The political unwillingness of the EU and its Member States to end the deaths in the Mediterranean continues to force civil society to fill the state-initiated rescue gap. While European coast guards outsource their responsibilities to Libya, while the European Border and Coast Guard Agency *Frontex* conducts aerial reconnaissance for the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard,* and while merchant ships often ignore distress cases due to economic considerations and political intimidation, NGO ships, supported by civil monitoring aircraft, often represent the only rescue capacities in the Central Med and must uphold human rights and international maritime law.

Besides practically filling the gap left by authorities, in many situations in 2021 the presence of NGO aircraft and vessels obliged authorities to refrain from committing illegal actions. The documentation of the human rights situation and the unlawful behaviour of state actors by civil society is an indispensable contribution to ensuring that the Central Mediterranean does not become an invisible spot. **Once again, NGOs are needed in the Central Mediterranean Sea to safeguard human rights and uphold the law.**



So-called *Libyan Coast Guard* blocking the RHIB of the NGO Open Arms in the Maltese Search-and-Rescue zone. • Photo: David Lohmueller

12.02., distress case A, 40 persons: *Frontex* and Maltese aircraft involvement, non-assistance of merchant vessels, so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* intimidation of NGO crew in the Maltese SAR zone, rescue by a civil actor.

Seabird's ground crew observed in the morning that *Frontex* aircraft *Eagle1* was orbiting a position in the Maltese SAR zone. When arriving on-scene, *Seabird's* crew found 40 persons in distress who were not wearing life vests. The waves at this time were higher than 1 metre. The merchant vessel *Vos Triton,* flying the flag of Gibraltar, was

the nearest vessel. The port authorities of Lampedusa were informed via radio about the people in distress and confirmed that they would coordinate with the *Italian Coast Guard* regarding the case. *Vos Triton* first confirmed that it will proceed to the distress case but then changed its course away from the boat in distress. The merchant vessel *Asalet,* flying the Turkish flag, altered its course to assist the people. The Maltese authorities only



The merchant Vessel *Vos Triton* heading away from the people in distress. • Photo: David Lohmueller

took the information provided by *Seabird's* ground crew but provided no information in return, insisting that they were busy with many cases. The Italian authorities confirmed having received the email from the ground crew but also did not provide any further information and advised a call to the "competent authorities", namely the Maltese. Proceeding with the operation, *Seabird's* crew found the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat *Fezzan* in the Maltese SAR zone, heading at full speed towards the people in distress. The Libyan authorities were never informed by *Seabird's* ground crew concerning this boat in distress, since the boat was located in the Maltese SAR zone. Therefore we have to assume that the presence of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* in the Maltese SAR zone must have been coordinated by one of the European actors involved in the case. The NGO vessel *Open Arms* then also arrived on-scene and proceeded towards the people. *Seabird's* crew observed the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* next to an *Open Arms* RHIB, trying to block the RHIB by driving in front of it and using the ensuing waves to disrupt its course. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* patrol boat then headed south, passed by another deployed RHIB. When *Seabird's* crew checked on the people in distress for a final time, it overheard an aircraft belonging to the *Armed Forces of Malta* approaching the scene.



An aircraft by the *Armed Forces of Malta* on-scene the distress case. • Photo: David Lohmueller

The people were rescued in the evening by the NGO vessel *Open Arms* and disembarked in Porto Empedocle, Italy, on 16.02.

16.06., distress case B, with 86 people: NGO vessel left alone by the authorities, attempted pushback in the Maltese SAR zone likely coordinated by the Maltese authorities.

The people in distress had called the initiative *Watch the Med - Alarm Phone,* which informed the authorities. *Seabird's* crew spotted the people in the Maltese SAR zone, not wearing any life vests. The Maltese authorities were called by the ground crew and replied that they were busy though would have a look at the respective emails and get back to *Sea-Watch* - which they never did. When called again, the Maltese authorities stated on the phone that *Seabird* was "an NGO aircraft, not an RCC, [they are] not in the position to give [us] such information". The monitoring sailing vessel *Nadir* was on-scene, stabilised the situation and took some of the people on board. *Nadir* was informed that RCC Malta was coordinating the case. According to *RESQSHIP,* the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* arrived on-scene, requesting that *Nadir* hand over the people, which was refused by the NGO. The so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* then left the scene, came back and left again. The *Italian Coast Guard* ultimately transshipped the people from the *Nadir* and disembarked them in Lampedusa, Italy.[17]



Due to the presence of the NGO sailing vessel *Nadir,* the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* left the scene again and did not pull the people in distress back to Libya.

17 twitter.com/resqship_int/status/1405132874555215879

16.11., distress case C, 99 persons and 10 dead bodies: Joint rescue efforts by civil actors, 10 dead bodies recovered due to delay and lack of state intervention and rescue capacities, involvement of *Frontex* drone.

The people on board called the initiative *Watch The Med - Alarm Phone,* which then informed the authorities. Afterwards, *Seabird's* crew spotted the double decker wooden boat, informed the authorities and sent out a mayday realy on behalf of the people in distress. The boat was listing heavily to one side and only a few people were wearing life jackets. The civil rescue vessel *Geo Barents* was also in the area, acknowledged the distress call and changed course towards the position. After having been able to take 99 persons safely on board, the crew had to recover 10 dead bodies from the lower deck of the wooden boat, who had died from suffocation. According to its track, *Frontex's* drone had been orbiting the position of the boat between the sighting by *Seabird* and the rescue operation by *Geo Barents.*



The double-decker wooden boat carries 109 persons and is visibly affected by the waves.

21.11., distress case D, 73 persons: Violence and dangerous manoeuvres by the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* putting people on board at acute risk, rescue by a civil society actor.

The civil rescue vessel *Sea-Watch 4* spotted a boat in distress with two Libyan vessels closeby. *Seabird's* crew was also on scen- monitoring the situation from the air, and saw the Libyan patrol boats attempt to intercept the rubber boat in distress. Both the vessel *656* of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* with intercepted people already on deck and the other Libyan patrol boat *ALQAYID 1* later stayed at a distance



A white rubber boat carrying 73 persons which could later be rescued by the NGO vessel *Sea-Watch 4.*

and did not intervene. The *Sea-Watch 4* was able to conduct a rescue operation and safely embark 73 persons. According to testimonies from the rescued persons on board the *Sea-Watch 4,* the Libyan vessels had fired into the water and put the people at acute risk.



Both the vessel *656* of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* and the patrol boat *ALQAYID 1* from the *Stability Support Forces* were on-scene. The people in distress could nevertheless be rescued by the *Sea-Watch 4.*

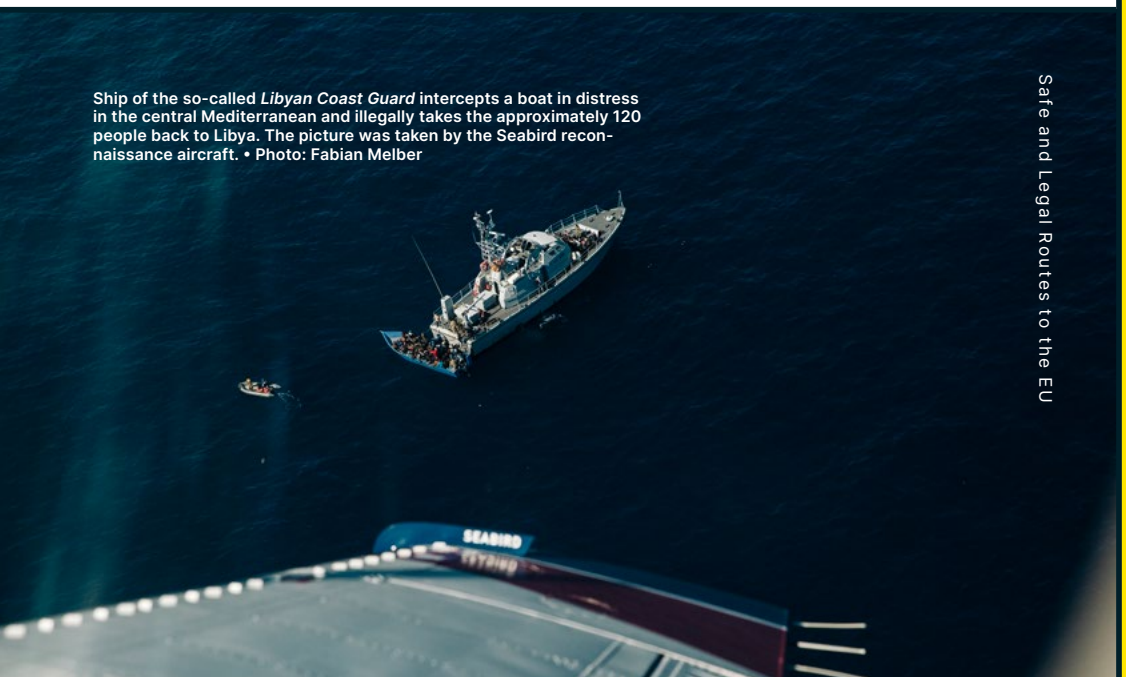
16.12., distress cases E and F, 126 persons: Successful rescue operation by NGO vessel with the support of civil actors, civil society again fills the gap left by European Member States in the Central Mediterranean Sea.

For case F, the initiative *Watch the Med - Alarm Phone* was called by the people in distress and informed the authorities and *Airborne. Skybird's* crew spotted both boats in distress in the Maltese SAR zone. Due to a lack of European rescue assets in the Central Mediterranean, the NGO vessel *Sea-Eye 4* changed course towards the people and rescued them. The people were disembarked in Pozzallo, Italy, on December 24th.

Safe and Legal Routes to the EU

With the help of our monitoring operations carried out in 2021, it is obvious that European isolation policies are increasing in the Central Mediterranean Sea. European states are continuously withdrawing their maritime assets from the Central Mediterranean and instead deploying aerial and unmanned assets.

In doing so, they are consciously opting for more surveillance of the European external borders and against rescuing people from distress at sea along with the subsequent necessary disembarkation in European ports. The European Union and European Member States do not even hide their growing cooperation with their dubious partner of choice, the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard*. The aim is clear: no one should safely arrive in Europe.



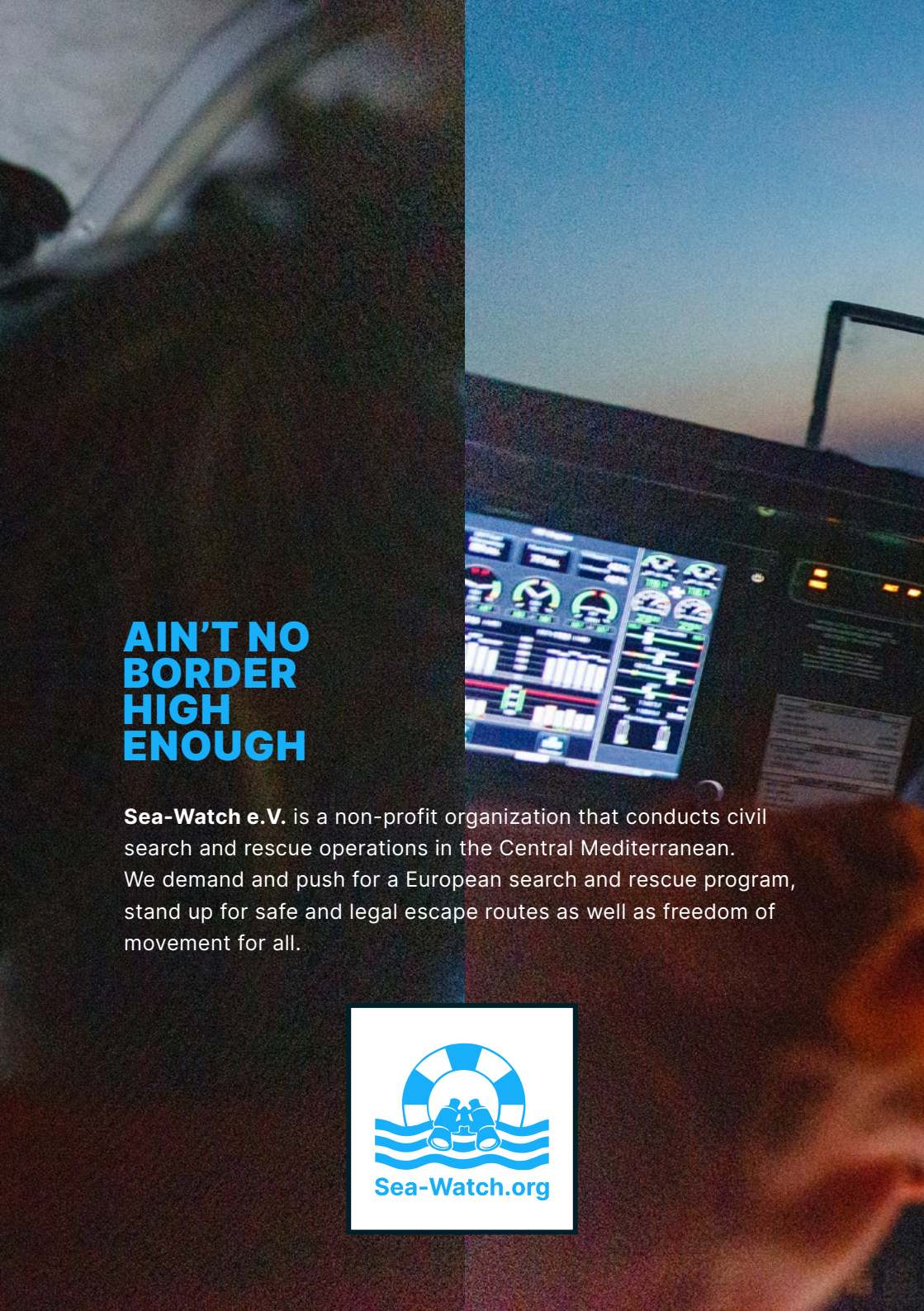
Ship of the so-called *Libyan Coast Guard* intercepts a boat in distress in the central Mediterranean and illegally takes the approximately 120 people back to Libya. The picture was taken by the Seabird reconnaissance aircraft. • Photo: Fabian Melber



Guest disembarks from Sea-Watch 3 in Trapani, Italy. Photo: Adrian Pourviseh

What Sea-Watch has been tirelessly demanding since the beginning, remains unchanged:

- **Freedom of movement** for all. People must be able to decide for themselves where they want to live.
- **Safe and legal routes** to the European Union. No one should be forced to make the dangerous crossing over the Central Mediterranean to reach safety.
- **A civil, state financed and coordinated European Search and Rescue operation.** States must fulfil their duty and rescue people from distress at sea as long as migration and flight take place across the Central Mediterranean, due to the lack of existence of a safe passage.



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.

Sea-Watch.org