



**PALERMO
MANIFESTO**

ON MIGRATIONS

SOLIDARITY WITH NGOs AND SUPPORT NETWORKS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AMPLIFYING THEIR DEMANDS AND AN OVERALL REVIEW OF THE EU AND MEMBER STATES' MIGRATION POLICIES

The latest tragedy in the Mediterranean that occurred on April 22, 2021 cost the lives of around 130 people. It could have been avoided. The EU and the coastal countries (Italy, Malta and Libya), were informed from the morning of April 21 that rubber boat was in a dangerous situation, but consciously chose not to intervene in time. And unfortunately this is just one episode among many that are turning the Central Mediterranean Sea into the deadliest migration route in the world.

Unfortunately, this is no coincidence but instead the direct effect of the **externalization of EU migration policies**. It is the result of policies that deliberately generate inhumane situations, which we refuse to accept as normal.

This is the result of policies that allow for the existence of inhuman prison camps such as in Moria; for the systematic illegal, violent pushbacks along the Balkan route and in the Aegean Sea; for the deals with Turkey (in violation of the 'right to leave any country' - Article 13.2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights - and the principle of non-refoulement); for the Italy-Libya Memorandum, the legitimization of the Libyan SAR zone, as well as for equipment, training and funding of the so-called Libyan Coastguard who are responsible for mass, illegal pushbacks towards "unspeakable horrors" in Libya itself.

There are concluded agreements to "contain migration flows" with many Maghreb and sub-Saharan African countries, resulting in a drastic downsizing of the reception circuit, the almost complete lack of legal channels towards Europe and the extremely serious absence of structured and widespread humanitarian corridors.

These extremely expensive policies represent the militarization of our borders; the suspension of EU and member states' Search and Rescue missions at sea; the vicious media smears and political campaigns to criminalize the NGOs at sea; the continuous administrative seizures blocking the rescue ships in ports rather than allowing them to save lives (those same lives which European states have decided to abandon).

Only acknowledge declarations are received by Italy and Malta governments for the activities of the so-called Libyan Coastguard.

The Italian and Maltese governments only issue words of congratulations for the work of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. In truth, the latter is managing to intercept ever more people on boats in international waters – and increasingly in the Maltese SAR area as well – due to the high degree of coordination with a range of European agencies: the European Border Surveillance Aircraft assets; the main EUROSUR-led European Safety Agencies operating in the area (Frontex, European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation IRINI, EMSA, EUBAM); the member states' maritime authorities (MRCC); naval units employed in the Central Mediterranean Sea (the Mare Sicuro and Nauras operations, the latter of which has a naval vessel in the port of Tripoli to ensure assistance and maintenance support to "Libyan" patrol boats donated by Italy).

These practices do not prevent drownings and deaths in the Mediterranean, and need to be seen for what they are: pushbacks. “As NGOs we are at sea to fill a void, but we would be ready to step aside if Europe instituted an effective institutional and coordinated Search and Rescue mechanism with the main aim of rescuing people at sea”. This has been stated by the NGOs from the civil solidarity fleet present in the Central Mediterranean Sea, in a recent request to meet the President of the Italian Council of Ministers. But it is the same request that has been posed for a long time.

We want to demonstrate our unconditional solidarity with all the NGOs that have filled this void for years – without other assistance, amid a total lack of patrolling and rescue missions, and despite a wide propaganda effort full of hatred. That have rescued people in danger in the Mediterranean, in accordance with the law of the sea, a sense of humanity and international norms and conventions.

They have done this in order to fill a very real gap created by international authorities.

We stand with them, and have decided to emphasize and amplify their demands:

We demand a coordinated, effective European and/or national system of patrolling the Mediterranean, explicitly aimed at searching for and rescuing people in distress, ensuring their care and escorting them to the closer Place of Safety (which must clearly exclude both Libya and Tunisia).

THIS HAS TO BE, HOWEVER, SIMPLY ONE PART OF A MUCH MORE COMPREHENSIVE AND RADICAL REVISION OF EU MIGRATION POLICIES AND OF THE EU BORDER REGIME. BECAUSE TAKING THE (NECESSARY AND INDISPENSABLE) ACTION OF SAVING LIVES AT SEA MEANS THAT THERE ARE STILL PEOPLE AT SEA WHO SHOULD NEVER NEED TO BE THERE, PEOPLE WHO RISK THEIR LIVES IN SEARCH OF PEACE, SAFETY AND DIGNITY.

Therefore, we call on the European and Member States institutions, in particular the Italian Government and Parliament to work towards:

- the elimination of the extreme inequalities that block people’s right to freedom of movement, enabling the provision of **legal routes** to Europe;
- the establishment of safe, structured, widespread and **stable humanitarian corridors** for all persons who intend to apply for asylum and protection;
- the immediate **cessation** of the campaign of **criminalization of solidarity** and the instrumental attacks - judicial, political and narrational, that foments hatred, racism and xenophobia - against the NGOs operating at sea, as well as the cessation of the systematic use of port authority regulations to remove the NGO vessels from the sea;

- the **immediate end** to violence and violations against people on the move that are taking place across the EU, from the Balkan route to the Aegean Sea, the Central Mediterranean, up to the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and the sea routes to Spain (in compliance with the legal and moral obligations on the authorities to take all necessary measures to prevent degrading situations and monitor their correct application);
- the dismantling of **cooperation agreements with third countries** (for example Libya, Tunisia, Turkey or Morocco), which are clearly aimed at encouraging forced returns and pushbacks, and at outsourcing both border management and the human and legal responsibilities for the violations of the framework of international human rights, the right to asylum and the law of the sea;
- the adoption of international policy instruments as a means of **control** inasmuch as these agreements with third countries do not directly or indirectly involve any **violation of human rights standards**;
- a **radical rewriting of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum** that, as it is currently structured, continues to advance policies of exclusion, the externalization of borders into countries of origin and transit, and the restriction of freedom of movement, all of which cause systematic violations of human rights through selection and return mechanisms which – though disguised as "solidarity and redistribution practices" – actually function to prevent people from setting foot in Europe;
- the guarantee that migrant centres in Europe meet national and international human rights standards, treaties and conventions, and the closure of the current internment camps (be they camps such as Moria, hotspots or quarantine ships) where migrants are forced to stay for extended periods of time, often indefinitely, with no medical or psychological support, information, legal support – where they are effectively abandoned to a state of uncertainty and disorientation.

An alternative migration and asylum policy is possible, but it requires moral courage and a genuinely democratic policy based on the rights of peoples, accompanied by a new economy and vision that puts the well-being of people and the planet before profit.

RAISING WALLS – WHETHER MADE OF BARBED WIRE OR OF WATER – AND REJECTING PEOPLE DO NOT PREVENT THEM FROM TRAVELING. IT DOES NOT STOP THE SO-CALLED “MIGRATORY FLOWS”. IT DOES NOT INTERVENE IN THE CAUSES OF THEIR MOVEMENT. IT DOES NOT COUNTER THE TRAFFICKING OF HUMAN BEINGS, BUT NURTURES IT. IT ONLY MAKES THE JOURNEY LONGER, INHUMANE, DANGEROUS, EXPENSIVE AND DEADLY.

IS THIS WHAT WE WANT? WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, DO NOT.