



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان



Illegal refoulement of 500 migrants to Libya: the EU must condemn Italian authorities

By classifying the refoulement to Libya of 277 migrants intercepted on the 6th of May, and of 240 on the 10th of May, by the Italian Navy in the Strait of Sicily on 6 May as an «historical shift», the Italian interior minister, Roberto Maroni, is not mistaken. However, far from marking progress in the fight against illegal immigration as he claims, this repatriation means that Italy has chosen to turn its back on democratic principles and the commitments that bind it in the field of fundamental rights.

Already in 2004 and 2005, Italy had proceeded to carry out mass expulsions towards Libya of several hundred migrants who had disembarked on the island of Lampedusa, resulting in a solemn condemnation from the European Parliament, which said that it was "*deeply concerned about the fate of the hundreds of asylum seekers [returned to a country that] is not a signatory of the Geneva Convention on Refugees, has no functioning asylum system, offers no effective guarantee of refugees' rights and practises arbitrary arrest, detention and expulsion*".

Four years later, the situation of refugees and migrants has not changed in Libya. Violence, ill-treatment, detention, rapes, torture and deportations are always on the cards in this country that is not bound by the Geneva Convention in the field of asylum. At the start of May, a video shown by the Italian press featured Libyan military personnel stopping, under threat of using their weapons, migrants from setting off by sea towards the island of Lampedusa. This was a sinister illustration of the "friendship treaty" reached between Italy and Libya in autumn 2008.

What has changed is the role now entrusted to Libya by the European Union in combating illegal immigration. Re-integrated within the international community after years of exclusion due to terrorist events, "*Libya has the potential to become a key partner of the EU in the Mediterranean and in Africa*". These words are those of the European Commissioner in charge of external affairs, who went there in February to offer 20 million euros to the country to help it to better control its borders, within the framework of the externalization of Europe's migration policy. In fact, apart from the resources provided by its sub-soil –gas and oil-, the country occupies a decisive place in the map of migration routes towards Europe, and knows how to turn it into money. 20 millions to be able, from now on, to send thousands of women, men and children who are in danger into the Libyan camps?

The European Union has the means not to become an accomplice in this new stage of the war against migrants: The Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network- EMHRN and Migreurop expect a firm condemnation of these refoulements that contravene European and international law from the European Commission, and the start of a judicial procedure against the Italian authorities. Europe, which has signed the Charter of fundamental rights, must also renounce any migration agreement with countries that openly violate human rights.

Contacts :

Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN):

Mr Chadi Sidhom : +32 486 96 86 13

Migreurop : Mrs Claire Rodier : +33 1 43 14 84 81-contact@migreurop.org

Mrs Sara Prestianni : +33 1 536 27 87 81-contact@migreurop.org