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# Europe: Far-right group sends ship to confront boats rescuing refugees in Mediterranean ‘and take them back to Africa’

Anti-Islam group says it plans to ‘guard the borders of Europe’

Sunday 16 July 2017, by [BULMAN May](#) (Date first published: 13 July 2017).

A far-right organisation has launched a boat in the Mediterranean to confront ships rescuing refugees and send them “back to Africa”.

Defend Europe, a group linked to the European anti-Islam and anti-immigrant “identitarian” movement, is currently sailing a 25-crew 422 tonne vessel to the Libyan coast in a bid to block search-and-rescue vessels operated by humanitarian organisations.

More than 85,000 refugees and migrants, most of them sub-Saharan Africans, have been rescued and brought to Italy this year, with fears the total could reach 200,000 by December. More than 2,000 have died in crossings.

NGOs and advocacy groups have expressed alarm at Defend Europe’s mission, telling *The Independent* that if it carries out its aims it will “get in the way of genuine lifesaving efforts” and risk further loss of life.

In May Defend Europe carried out a failed attempt to block an Médecins Sans Frontières ship with a small dinghy, and off the back of the stunt has crowdfunded more than €100,000 and bought the larger boat, the C-Star, to pursue its more ambitious plans in the Med.

The group said in a statement that for the new, larger-scale mission it would “overwatch the doings of the NGOs and disrupt the human trafficking rings by sinking the abandoned boats they leave behind”.

It added that the group would offer the Libyan Coastguard support by “saving anyone [it] can” if the boat receives an SOS signal, but that anyone it saved would be taken “back to Africa”, as part of its bid to “guard the borders of Europe”.

Joe Mulhall, senior researcher at advocacy group Hope Not Hate, said the mission would get in the way of rescue efforts and put lives at risk, claiming the group had started downplaying their true aims due to growing media attention.

“Defend Europe is an explicitly far-right project. The identitarian have got a long track record of pulling stunts for anti-Muslim stuff,” he told *The Independent*.

“For the past few months they’ve been saying they’re going to block the NGO ships. They’ve been clear about this. They’ve changed their tack as more press has become interested and now said they’re going to ‘monitor’ NGO ships and make sure they don’t enter Libyan waters.

“But should they do what they’ve been planning to do for the past few months, they’ll be getting in the way of genuine lifesaving efforts. The fact of the matter is that there’s no question that a bunch of far-right activists on a large ship getting in the way for NGOs trying to save lives will no doubt will be putting lives at risk.

“Getting in the way of any rescue efforts whatsoever, even if you’re just sitting there watching, could result in the loss of lives. All of this stuff in a year when over 2,000 people have already died in the Med is really concerning.”

Hope Not Hate has pulled together a team of researchers to monitor what Defend Europe is saying and will produce a comprehensive legal report of the maritime laws, in order to put pressure on lawmakers and politicians that action must be taken.

“What’s happening in the Med is so dangerous at the moment that the last thing the NGOs and the coastguards and the refugees themselves is a bunch of far-right activists getting in the way.”

He said the mission was also cause for political concern, claiming it has “excited the whole of the international far-right movement” and has attracted funding from extreme right forces from around the world.

“The way they’ve done this has excited the whole of the international far-right movement. It’s raised their profile. The money’s coming from all sorts of extreme forces around the world. Far-right rallying around it,” he said.

“Everyone in the international far-right is animated by this project. In the long term this is going to make them a huge amount of money. We’ll have a network of European far-right network with resources they’ve never had before, and that’s a concern.”

Defend Europe said in a statement to The Independent: “As we have stated clearly from the beginning we never planned to and never will hinder any actual rescuing activities. Our plan is to cooperate with the Libyan coastguard and support their efforts to control their waters, to overwatch and expose the NGOs, especially if they breach the new code of conduct by the Italian government.

“Furthermore we will sink all the abandoned migrant-ships we can find, to drain the financial resources of the trafficking rings.”

The identitarian movement, which started in France in 2002, is a conservative youth movement advocating a return to “traditional western values”. It has recently gained momentum in the UK, with a British branch, Identity Generation, on social media platforms.

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**P.S.**

\* The Independent. Thursday 13 July 2017 13:15 BS:  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/anti-immigrant-ship-mediterranean-ngo-ships-refugee-crisis-migrant-boats-people-smugglers-defend-a7838731.html>