

The rights of migrants in the deepest point of the Mediterranean

Sunday 23 July 2023, by [MANIATIS Giorgos](#) (Date first published: 11 July 2023).

On Saturday, June 10, the fishing boat Adriana, an old 30 metre vessel, set off from Tobruk in Libya loaded with 750 migrants. Bound for Italy, it sank in the early hours of Wednesday, June 14 fifty miles southwest of Pylos in the Peloponnese. Only 104 men survived, and 82 bodies were recovered from the sea. All the women and children, along with many more men, sank with the boat, trapped in its holds in the deepest point of the Mediterranean, a 5,300-meter-deep trench created by the meeting of the African and Eurasian plates. The survivors were rescued by the superyacht Mayan Queen IV owned by Mexican billionaire Alberto Baillères.

Modern migration is, along with the climate crisis, a constant reminder of global exploitation, poverty and racism. The shipwreck on the 14th of June in Pylos is, however, not only unimaginable injustice and pain, a tragedy. It is an event that condenses an entire period because in the unfolding of the dramatic events of the shipwreck the way a rescue operation is decided is brought to light; a decision that is equivalent to which lives are worth saving and which are expendable for the Greek state, the E.U. and the developed capitalist countries as a whole.

The fateful course of the vessel, which was monitored for 12 hours and escorted for more than 4 hours by Frontex and the Greek coast guard, exposed the way the European and Greek coast guards operate when they detect migrant boats trying to avoid Greece and sail directly to Italy on the so-called Calabrian route. [1] Three months earlier, a boat that started from Turkey and crossed the entire Aegean Sea had also sunk under the watch of the Italian and European coast guards off Coutro, Calabria. More than 100 men, women and children drowned in this wreck only 40 meters from the shore. As in Pylos, the vessel was located by a Frontex aircraft in international waters but within Italy's search and rescue area.

Both Frontex and the Italian coastguard downplayed the incident and withheld information in their reports about the circumstances and the seaworthiness of the vessel. They monitored the vessel for several hours without ordering a rescue operation, even when the weather worsened. Finally, the rescue operation was launched. After the vessel had sunk.

The avoidance of Greece and the use of larger, usually aged and unseaworthy vessels has become widespread in the last three years. It is the result not of weakness, but of the "success" of the policies of the New Democracy party and the EU: the implementation of the policy enforcing violent, illegal deportations/pushbacks to the islands of the eastern Aegean and Evros, and the closure of the Balkan route, as well as the policies of confinement, isolation and deprivation of rights in refugee camps. Migration routes have gradually shifted from the narrow passages of the eastern Aegean to the open sea and have become extremely dangerous, as is the case in the Central Mediterranean.

In these cases, the primary objective of the countries whose waters are crossed by migrant boats is to prevent migrants from landing on their territory. The practices they follow range from toleration

to facilitating the continuation of their journey to the neighboring country; from Greece to Italy, from Italy to Malta and so on. It is significant that in 2021, 1/6 of the arrivals in Italy, about 150 boats and 12,000 migrants, went via the Calabrian route under the nose of the Greek Coast Guard. However, in recent years in Greece, fatal shipwrecks tend to become commonplace, insignificant news, even when they happen near tourist destinations such as Kythera, Folegandros, Paros, Mykonos or Lesvos.

The shipwreck off Cutro's naval vessel had already exposed Frontex which in the Mediterranean, as in the case of illegal deportations/pushbacks in the Aegean, colludes and covers up illegal and murderous practices by national border guards. However, Pylos is not only a case of refusal to rescue, but a case of the active involvement of the Greek coastguard in causing the shipwreck, as is evident from the testimonies, the contradictory statements of the coastguard and, finally, the overt attempt to impose silence and cover up responsibility. Frontex, which had initially covered the actions of the Greek coastguard, chose to distance itself, denying any responsibility and thus exposing the Greek party.

Certainly, the Pylos shipwreck is one of the moments when a public space in which the voice of migrants can be heard opens up and facilitates the development of the anti-racist movement and social solidarity after a long period of retreat. But it would be delusional to expect a change of attitude on the part of the European Union, e.g. with the withdrawal of Frontex from Greece! The migration management model imposed in 2016 with the establishment of hotspots and the restriction of access to asylum by introducing the concept of a third safe country in the Euro-Turkish Agreement not only hasn't faltered, but has been generalised in the new Pact on Immigration and Asylum.

Obviously, the European Commission would prefer preventative operations with fewer deaths, detention camps with less abuse, police checks without overt racism. It is also very likely that the European Social Democrats and Greens are concerned about the shrinking of asylum and the criminalisation of activists and private rescue boats. Yet they still succumb to the right-wing correlation and probably equally share the fear of a repeat of the 2015-16 border opening. They consent to the core of the Europeanisation of immigration policy, the rapid increase in deportations under agreements/deals with transit countries, accept mass detention in countries with external borders and ultimately compromise on the dominant logic of reducing the 'pull factors' of migration.

For the anti-racist movement, the left and the a/a space, it is now an opportunity and a duty to fight back against violence and the devaluation of the lives of migrants. At this particular moment, when the death politics of borders is being revealed and the contradictions between national and European institutions are intensifying and, to a certain extent, the deep hegemony of the discourse on the migratory threat and border protection is being destabilized, we have the opportunity to return to a multifaceted solidarity with migrants and to reorganize ourselves on an international level. [2] It is a top priority today to confront the majority racist views and attitudes in society and to confront the unprecedented rise of fascism in Europe.

The successive marches and mobilisations for the crime at Pylos, as well as the Lawyers' Initiative against the cover-up and for the investigation of the criminal liabilities of the Coast Guard [3], and the support for the survivors including the solidarity shown for the scapegoats of this state crime - the nine Egyptians persecuted as "traffickers"- indicate that the first steps have already been taken.

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P.S.

• IVP. TUESDAY 18 JULY 2023

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8175>

[Magazine "4" No 11, July 2023](#)

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