04 2015

Ferries not Frontex!

10 points to really end the deaths of migrants at sea

The Alarm Phone

1. We are shocked and angered at the recent tragedies that have claimed at least 1200 lives in the Mediterranean Sea in the last week. We are shocked, although not surprised, by the unprecedented number of deaths in merely a few days. We are angered because we know that without a radical change these are just the first of many more deaths to come in 2015.

2. We are also angered because we know that what is proposed to us as a "solution" to this unbearable situation only amounts to more of the same: violence and death. The EU has called for the reinforcement of Frontex' Triton mission. Frontex is a migration deterrence agency and Triton has been created with the clear mandate to protect borders, not to save lives.

3. However, even if saving lives was to be its core task, as it was the case for the military- humanitarian operation Mare Nostrum in 2014, it is clear that this would not bring dying at sea to an end. Those who suggest a European Mare Nostrum should be reminded that even during its mission, the most grandiose rescue operation in the Mediterranean to date, more than 3.400 people died. Is this figure acceptable to the European public?

4. Others have called for an international military operation in Libya, a naval blockade or the further enlisting of African countries for the policing of their own land borders. The history of the last 20 years in the Mediterranean shows that stepping up the militarization of migration routes is only cause to more death. Each and every time a route into the Europe has been blocked by new surveillance technologies and increasing policing, migrants have not stopped arriving. They have simply been forced to take longer and more dangerous routes. The recent deaths in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean are the result of the militarization of the Gibraltar Strait, of the Canary Islands, of the land border between Greece and Turkey, and of several land borders in the Sahara. The "successes" of Frontex mean death to thousands of people.

5. International organisations as well politicians from across the whole political spectrum have denounced smugglers as the main cause of death in the Mediterranean Sea. Several prominent politicians have compared the smuggling of migrants to the transatlantic slave trade. There seems no limit to hypocrisy: those who uphold the slave regime condemning the slave traders! We know very well that smugglers operating in the context of the Libyan civil war are often ruthless criminals. But we also know that the only reason why migrants have to resort to them is the European border regime. Smuggling networks would be history in no time if those who now die at sea could instead reach Europe legally. The visa regime that prevents them from doing so was introduced only 25 years ago.

6. Those who have called, once again, for the creation of asylum processing centres in Northern Africa should be reminded of two examples that are the most accurate
examples of what these centres would actually mean. First, the Tunisian Choucha camp managed by the UNHCR, which

abandoned those who sought refuge there from the Libyan conflict. Even those who were recognized as needing international protections were left behind in the Tunisian desert, often without any other choice than trying to cross the sea. Second, the creation by Australia of offshore processing centres on remote "prison-islands", which is now hailed by many as a role model for Europe, only shows how hideous the forceful confinement of asylum seekers can be. These "solutions" serve only to displace the violence of the European border regime away from the eyes of Western publics.

7. Faced with this situation, what is to be done? Comrades and friends with whom we have shared common struggles in the past years have been calling for freedom of movement as the only viable response to this situation. We too make this demand ours, as it is the only one that has managed to open up a space of political imagination in an otherwise suffocating debate. Only unconditional legal access to the EU can end the death of migrants at sea. And yet we think that a general call for the freedom of movement is not enough in the current context. We want to consider the freedom of movement not as a distant utopia but as a practice – enacted by migrants on a daily basis often at the cost of their lives - that should guide our political struggles here and now.

8. These are the reasons why we call for the institution of a humanitarian ferry, that should travel to Libya and evacuate as many people as possible. These people should be brought to Europe and granted unconditional protection in Europe, without undergoing an asylum process which has lost its original purpose to protect and has de facto become yet another tool of exclusion.

9. Is the idea of a ferry unrealistic? In 2011, at the height of the Libyan civil war, humanitarian ferries evacuated thousands of

stranded migrants from Misrata to Bengasi, overcoming obstacles such as shelling, constant fire and sea mines. This shows that even in the current volatile situation of Libya, considering such an action is possible. Moreover, ferries would certainly be immensely cheaper than the prospect of a massive rescue mission at sea and of any military solution.

10. The only reality we know is that any solution short of this will continue to lead to more deaths at sea. We know that no process of externalisation of asylum procedures and border control, no amount of compliance with the legal obligations to rescue, no increase in surveillance and militarization will stop the mass dying at sea. In the immediate terms, all we need is legal access and ferries. Will the EU and international agencies be ready to take these steps, or will civil society have to do it for them?

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