

Fifty dead as another migrant ship sinks off Italy

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12 October 2013

Dozens of migrants died yesterday when their boat capsized in heavy seas 100 kilometers south of the Italian island of Lampedusa, only one week after a similar disaster claimed the lives of at least 339 migrants within sight of the island.

Italian news agency Ansa said approximately 50 bodies, including women and 10 children, had been pulled from the water.

The navies of Italy and the nearby island nation of Malta worked to rescue survivors of the sinking. A Maltese ship reported having picked up approximately 150 people, while the Italian navy said it had rescued around 50 survivors and was sending more rescue boats to the scene.

“The operation is in progress. The navigational conditions are difficult, with a strong wind,” a Maltese navy spokesman told Agence France-Presse last night.

Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat told a news conference in Valletta that Maltese officials could confirm the death of at least 27 people, and “the number is expected to rise, possibly drastically.”

An Italian helicopter flew 10 rescued children to Lampedusa—where the survivors of last week’s sinking are being held under guard, threatened with deportation and fines of up to €5,000.

Initial reports indicated that the migrant ship ran into difficulty from the heavy seas and decided to signal for help. The boat allegedly capsized when those aboard gathered at one end of the vessel to catch the attention of a military aircraft flying nearby.

This shocking tragedy again underscores the terrible toll in lives from the European Union’s (EU) reactionary Frontex anti-immigrant legislation. Designed to keep immigrants from reaching Europe, it forces them to take unsafe routes into Europe and trust their lives to unseaworthy vessels, with tragic results.

Over the past 20 years, an estimated 25,000 people have died trying to enter Europe, many of them in the Mediterranean.

Public anger over the legislation has risen since last week’s Lampedusa sinking, with protests in Africa and in Italy, including a candlelight vigil on Lampedusa itself. When Manuel Barroso, the head of the EU Commission, arrived in Lampedusa on Wednesday, he was met with cries of “shame.”

The nationalities of the victims of yesterday’s sinking are not yet known. UN officials told the Associated Press that migrants today are generally fleeing persecution and wars in countries like Syria or Egypt.

Escalating fighting triggered by NATO-led proxy wars in Syria and Africa is forcing ever larger numbers of people to flee for their lives. The ship that sank on October 3 was carrying migrants from the East African countries of Eritrea and Somalia. Somalia has been the target of US drone strikes, invasions by regional military powers, and escalating tribal fighting.

Some 30,100 migrants arrived in Italy and Malta in the first nine months of 2013, compared with 15,000 in all of 2012. The 2013 figure included 7,500 refugees from Syria and 3,000 from Somalia.



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