

1



Heavenly Protection

Saint Nicholas becomes the patron saint of sailors.

3



Perilous Coast

The Massachusetts Humane Society is founded in Boston, USA.

5



Royal Protection

The Royal National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck is founded in Britain.

7



On the North Sea Coast

Under King William IV, the Kingdom of Hanover attempts — unsuccessfully — to set up a state-run sea-rescue service.

9



An Gorta Mór

The Great Famine. On overcrowded ships, hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women flee their homeland. Disease and infection spread on board of these “coffin ships.”

11



Emigration

The migrant ship *Johanne* sinks off the island of Spiekeroog. Eighty-four of the 216 passengers drown.

13



Professionalisation

The German Maritime Search and Rescue Service (DGzRS) is founded in Kiel.

15



Powerful Poetry

Otto Ernst publishes his ballad *Nis Randers*, telling of a dramatic sea rescue.

17



Inspector Pfeifer Says Hello

The German Maritime Search and Rescue Service (DGzRS) launches its first motorised lifeboat.

19



Unsinkable — For Two Days

On her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York, the RMS *Titanic* strikes an iceberg and sinks in the North Atlantic with some 2,200 people on board.

4


1786

The Society establishes the first rescue huts and boats along the American east coast.

2


4th century AD

He is said to have calmed storms and saved those in peril at sea.

8


1837

Although the islands of Borkum and Norderney each have a lifeboat, irregular staffing means the service is largely ineffective.

6


March 1824

Today known as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), it operates with some 10,000 volunteers along the British coast — on 400 lifeboats, from 238 stations, and across 250 beaches.

12


November 1854

The tragedy leads to the founding of the first private sea-rescue associations along the German coast.

10


1845 – 1852

High death rates from illness and malnutrition prompt Britain to introduce stricter passenger-ship and quarantine rules.

16


1901

The ballad begins with the lines:
Crashing and howling and bursting night,
Darkness and flames in a frenzied chase -
A cry through the surf!

14


May 1865

From the outset, it is a non-governmental organisation. As of 2023, it employs over 300 people and coordinates more than 1,400 volunteers aboard 60 lifeboats on the North and Baltic Seas.

20


April 1912

Around 1,500 people drown — many due to too few lifeboats and the freezing water. Among the dead are many migrants trapped deep inside the ship.

18


March 1911

The Oberinspector Pfeifer measures 10 metres in length, nearly 3 metres wide, and draws about 60 centimetres of water.

21



Never Again!

In response to the sinking of the RMS Titanic, London hosts the first International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS).

23



Nationalising Sea Rescue

The United States formalises sea rescue by founding the United States Coast Guard.

25



Closed Borders

The MS St. Louis, carrying over 900 Jewish refugees from Germany, seeks refuge in Cuba and the USA. Both countries deny entry, forcing her to return to Europe, where many passengers face deadly persecution.

27



#FreeAndEqual

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is proclaimed in Paris. Article 1 reads: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

29



Dignity

"Human dignity is inviolable. Respecting and protecting it is the duty of all state authority." The Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of the Federal Republic of Germany comes into force.

31



Modern Times

The Theodor Heuss enters service for the German Maritime Search and Rescue Service. She is the first self-righting rescue cruiser with a daughter boat.

33



Everyone (!) Is To Be Saved

The International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) is adopted in Hamburg, Germany. It regulates international cooperation in the search and rescue of shipwrecked persons at sea.

35



No Idle Watching

The rescue ship Cap Anamur begins its first mission to save people fleeing Vietnam by sea across the South China Sea.

37



Safety First

The fifth version of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS 74) is ratified. Germany had already signed it five years earlier.

39



Duty to Rescue

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) enters into force. It governs the use and protection of the oceans and the rights and duties of coastal and inland states.

24



January 1915

Its motto is Semper Paratus. The Coast Guard is uniformed, armed, and under the Department of Homeland Security (as of 2025).

22



November 1913

However, the convention never enters into force due to the outbreak of the First World War in the early summer 1914.

28



December 1948

The UDHR establishes rights due to every person everywhere from birth, including life, freedom, and bodily integrity. In Germany's Basic Law, human rights are called fundamental rights.

26



May–June 1939

This tragic story shows the need to protect people from arbitrary state actions. Rights such as asylum, prohibition of return to unsafe countries, and rescue at sea are essential.

32



1953

This marks the beginning of the modern era of sea rescue on German coasts.

30



May 1949

Valid for West Germany until 1990, it has been the constitution for all of Germany since 3 October 1990.

36



August 1979

Journalist Rupert Neudeck, his wife Christel, and the German author Heinrich Böll charter the vessel Cap Anamur. Over three years, the ship saves more than 9,500 lives.

34



April 1979

Coming into force on 22 June 1985, it obliges signatories to establish and operate search and rescue systems for their sea areas and cooperate internationally to save lives at sea.

40



November 1994

Article 98 obliges ships to provide assistance at sea. According to this article, every ship must immediately rescue people in distress at sea, provided this can be done without serious danger to the ship itself and its crew, and must bring shipwrecked persons to a place of safety as quickly as possible.

38



May 1980

It sets minimum standards for ship safety and protection of lives at sea, covering construction, equipment, operation, and emergency measures for merchant vessels.

41



Cross-Party Initiative

The German Bundestag commits to comprehensive refugee protection with the Easter Appeal "Respect humanitarian principles in refugee policy."

43



What Is People Smuggling?

Stefan Schmidt, captain of Cap Anamur, rescues 37 people in distress in the Mediterranean. Shortly after, Italian prosecutors charge him and two others with people smuggling.

45



Border Control à la Europe

EU member states establish Frontex to secure the EU external borders.

47



Setting The Course

German federal election: CDU/CSU, with Angela Merkel as candidate, narrowly defeats Gerhard Schröder (SPD).

49



Can Dictators Be Our Friends?

Under the Italo-Libyan Friendship Treaty, Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi modernises the coast guard by purchasing new patrol boats from Italy.

51



Sea Rescue Is Not Smuggling!

Stefan Schmidt, former captain of the vessel Cap Anamur, is acquitted of smuggling charges five years after being indicted.

53



Surprise: Human Rights Apply

Hirsi Jamaa v. Italy – The European Court of Human Rights rules that Italy violated multiple provisions of the Human Rights Convention by intercepting and returning rescued people at sea to Libya without proper assessment.

55



Lampedusa Opens Europe's Eyes

In two closely spaced shipwrecks near the Italian island of Lampedusa, 636 refugees drown.

57



Humanitarian Dream: Our Sea

The Italian government launches the rescue mission Mare Nostrum – a military and humanitarian operation to address the emergency in the Mediterranean.

59



Getting the Wrong People?

In Greece, a new law on immigration and social integration (4251/2014) is passed to help combat human smuggling.

44



July 2004

The three face long prison terms and fines of 400,000 euros each.

42



June 2000

Initiated by Christian Schwarz-Schilling (CDU) and Claudia Roth (Greens), it gains wide support from 230 MPs across all parliamentary groups at the time.

48



November 2005

Merkel would serve as Chancellor for 16 years, handing over office only in 2021 to Olaf Scholz.

46



October 2004

Originally Frontex is tasked with controlling EU external borders and coordinating border checks.

52



October 2009

Since 2004, Schmidt had faced charges for rescuing 37 people from distress at sea with the Cap Anamur.

50



2008

Italy and Libya are historically linked by Italy's violent colonial rule, which begins in 1911 and brutally oppresses the Libyan people until the Second World War.

56



October 2013

The tragedies cause a major media response, bringing the plight of people fleeing across the Mediterranean to the attention of many in Europe.

54



February 2012

The judgement reaffirms the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits states from returning individuals to countries where they risk torture or inhuman treatment.

60



April 2014

Articles 29 and 30 stipulates up to 10 years in prison for those piloting boats carrying refugees — and even more if lives are endangered. In practice, refugees are often prosecuted instead of real smugglers.

58



October 2013

The participants: Navy and air force units, the Carabinieri, financial police, coast guard, harbour authority, Red Cross military corps, and state police. They use Italian navy ships.

61



Civilian Sea Rescue Begins

The Phoenix, operated by Malta's Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), is the first NGO ship to start search-and-rescue operations in the central Mediterranean.

63



Sound the Alarm!

One year after the Lampedusa shipwrecks, activists from Africa and Europe launch the civil emergency hotline Alarm Phone.

65



Humanitarian Nightmare

The Italian government ends Operation Mare Nostrum after just one year.

67



Border Protection Over Sea Rescue

The Frontex operation Triton replaces Italy's Mare Nostrum search and rescue mission.

69



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 3,289 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year the Ice Bucket Challenge goes viral

71



800 Preventable Victims

An estimated 800 people lose their lives in a shipwreck off Libya's coast.

73



Günther Jauch Silenced

During a Günther Jauch* talk show, Sea-Watch co-founder Harald Höppner calls for "one minute of humanity" in silence.

*one of Germany's most popular TV personalities

75



Civil Society Takes Action

As the EU remains passive in the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean, numerous NGOs spring up across Europe. The goal: provide sea rescue.

77



The Boy on the Beach

The photo of Syrian boy Alan Kurdi travels around the world. The body of the three-year-old lies on the shore at Bodrum, Turkey.

79



EU Sends Sophia to the Med

The EU launches the military operation EUNAVFOR MED — known as Sophia — in the central Mediterranean.

64



October 2014

Refugees in (maritime) distress can call for help; Alarm Phone then informs the relevant rescue centres and keeps, whenever possible, contact with those at risk.

62



August 2014

MOAS is a private initiative based in Malta. In partnership with Doctors Without Borders, it saves lives off the Libyan coast. The group also stresses the responsibility of EU governments for sea rescue.

68



November 2014

Triton is a border security operation, not a rescue mission. Frontex runs it on behalf of Italian authorities, but the operation is restricted to 30 nautical miles off Italy's coast.

66



October 2014

Lack of EU support brings Mare Nostrum to a close, despite having rescued over 100,000 people in one year.

72



April 2015

During the night of 3 April, a boat capsizes between Libya and Italy; about 700–900 die, 58 bodies are recovered, and only 28 survive.

70



December 2014

The Missing Migrants Project starts tracking deaths and disappearances.

76



May 2015

Groups like Sea-Watch, SOS Méditerranée, and Sea-Eye are founded in this time. This makes clear: Civil society will no longer look away while EU member states neglect their duty to save lives of migrants in distress.

74



May 2015

Days later, Höppner and other activists set sail with Sea-Watch 1 toward the Mediterranean to rescue refugees in distress.

80



October 2015

Sophia's mission: combating human trafficking and smuggling.

78



September 2015

Alan's death becomes a symbol for the brutality of the EU's border policies.

81



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean:
by year's end*, 4,044 dead and missing
are recorded — with the true number much
higher.

*the year the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is signed

83



Intended Escalation?

The EU and Turkey strike a deal to
manage migration.

85



Naive or Cynical?

EU military operation Sophia is expanded: it
now includes training the so-called Libyan
coast guard, known to be run by criminal
militias.

87



Frontex Gets New Powers

EU member states upgrade Frontex into a full
European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

89



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean:
by year's end*, 4,574 dead and missing are
recorded — with the true number much
higher.

*the year Pokémon Go is launched

91



Green Light for Fortress Europe

Italy, with EU backing, signs a migration
Memorandum of Understanding with Libya.
A day later, an EU summit issues the "Malta
Declaration."

93



Bird's Eye View

Moonbird, Sea-Watch's first aerial
reconnaissance aircraft, enters service.

95



Please Sign Here!

Italy introduces a non-binding code of
conduct for search and rescue organisations.

97



Old Allegation, New Drastic Measures

Iuventa, the ship run by German NGO Jugend
Rettet, is seized by Italian authorities for
allegedly "aiding illegal immigration."

99



Millions for Libyan Militias

The so-called Libyan coast guard receives
financial support via the EU Trust Fund for
Africa (EUTF).

84



March 2016

The EU-Turkey Agreement imposes strict border controls to stop refugees entering the EU this way — pushing many onto dangerous routes like the central Med.

82



December 2015

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

88



October 2016

Frontex now has its own resources to “protect” the EU’s external borders and conduct deportations; it is also tasked with sea search and rescue.

86



June 2016

The partnership is widely criticised: the so-called “Libyan coast guard” is seen as neither legitimate, lawful, nor respectful of human rights or rescue law.

92



February 2017

The EU and Italy deepen cooperation with the so-called Libyan coast guard. These measures underpin the EU’s toughened border policy in the central Med.

90



December 2016

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

96



July 2017

Many NGOs refuse to sign the code of conduct, saying it restricts their operational capacity and risks basic humanitarian principles like neutrality and independence. All rescue organisations continue operating under international maritime law.

94



April 2017

Acquired with significant support from the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), Moonbird supports civilian sea rescue missions, the documentation of human rights violations, and the reporting of distress cases from the air.

100



August 2017

The project features training, equipment deliveries (fast boats, vehicles), and vessel maintenance. In total, €57.2 million are allocated.

98



August 2017

This marks the start of an investigation into Jugend Rettet, its crew, and related organisations.

101



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 2,853 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year the film Dirty Dancing celebrates its 30th anniversary

103



Frontex Keeps Information to Itself

The operation Themis of the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex replaces Operation Triton.

105



Enter: Matteo Salvini

Matteo Salvini, of the far-right Lega party, becomes Italy's Minister of the Interior in the Conte I cabinet.

107



State harassment

The Sea-Watch 3 is detained in Valletta, Malta, after Maltese authorities raise concerns about the ship's registration and safety during an inspection.

109



Harbour closed

The Maltese government announces the closure of its ports to ships of civilian sea rescue. Italy's Interior Minister Salvini also declares Italian ports closed to NGO rescue ships.

111



Humanity Does Not Count Here

The NGO vessel Aquarius, operated by SOS Méditerranée, faces the "closed ports" policy: after rescuing 629 people, the ship is denied a safe harbour in both Italy and Malta, making the situation on board intolerable.

113



What Are Human Rights Worth?

Libya registers a Libyan search and rescue zone (SAR zone) with the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The EU supports this and ignores the intolerable human rights situation in Libya.

115



Investigations Launched

The public prosecutor's office in Trapani (Italy) officially informs ten members of the Iuventa crew about an investigation for "aiding illegal immigration".

117



Safe Harbours

The Seebrücke movement emerges. It demands safe escape routes, the decriminalisation of sea rescue, and a migration policy based on solidarity. Cities and municipalities are called upon to voluntarily receive refugees and thus become "Safe Harbours".

119



You Have to Be Allowed to Say That!

The pro-con debate "Sea rescue: Or shall we just leave it?" appears in the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit.

104



February 2018

Themis greatly expands aerial surveillance capacity across the central Mediterranean. The goal: border control by aircraft. Frontex usually refrains from informing civilian rescue vessels about spotted boats in distress.

102



December 2017

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

108



June–September 2018

Despite a Dutch inspection confirming Sea-Watch 3's compliance, Malta denies the ship permission to depart for almost four months.

106



June 2018

Salvini's central concern is fighting migration, and especially civilian sea rescue. Now, as Minister of the Interior, he sits at the lever. His measures often stand in contradiction to international law.

112



June 2018

Finally, Spain assigns a harbour in Valencia 36 hours later. It takes Aquarius another week at sea to reach her destination. The "closed ports" policy leads to unnecessarily long waiting times, with survivors and crew forced to wait at sea while discussions are held about safe places for disembarkation.

110



June 2018

The policy of "closed ports" leads to unnecessarily long waiting periods in which survivors and crew are stranded at sea while negotiations are held over safe places for them to go.

116



June 2018

One of the most extensive criminal proceedings against members of civilian search and rescue organisations begins. It will not conclude until 2024.

114



June 2018

The fact is: there is no functioning rescue coordination centre for this SAR zone, and the so-called Libyan coastguard consists of various militias.

120



July 2018

The article prompts significant criticism: Sea rescue is a question of humanity and human dignity, and there can be no 'con' side to that.

118



July 2018

More than 79,000 people take to the streets in 30 German cities to protest against deaths at Europe's borders. This marks the beginning of powerful civil society alliances across Germany.

121



Brutal Symbolism on Trial?

The Sicilian public prosecutor's office initiates proceedings against Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini for unlawful deprivation of liberty, unlawful detention and abuse of office.

123



Restriction Instead of Rescue

Under pressure from the Italian government, Gibraltar strikes the Aquarius — SOS Méditerranée's rescue ship — off its flag register. The ship is forced to register under a new flag — Panama — in order to continue operating.

125



Violence Against Sea Rescuers

Members of the NGO SOS Méditerranée are violently attacked in Marseille, the seat of the NGO's French headquarter.

127



Law Against Humanity

The "Salvini Decree I" (Security Decree I) is passed in the Italian parliament. It includes a significant tightening of the immigration law.

129



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 1,314 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year the Yellow Vests protests begin in France

131



What Is Terrorism?

In Malta, three teenagers, later known as El Hiblu 3, are arrested and charged with terrorism.

133



Sea Rescue In Parliament

223 members of the German Bundestag sign the Easter Appeal for sea rescue.

135



Humanity Punished

Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini criminalises sea rescue with the "Salvini Decree II".

137



The Bare Minimum

Pastor Sandra Bils preaches at the Protestant Kirchentag in Dortmund: "You do not let people drown. Full stop."

139



Without Permission? So Be It!

Captain Carola Rackete enters the port of Lampedusa with Sea-Watch 3 despite lacking authorisation from the Italian authorities. By this point, Sea-Watch 3 has already spent 17 days waiting with 53 rescued people on board for permission to dock.

124



August 2018

Two months later Panama also gives in to Italian pressure and withdraws its flag. This is an unprecedented case of the political instrumentalisation of a core principle guaranteed by the Law of the Sea: the freedom of navigation.

122



August 2018

The reason: Acting as Minister of the Interior, Salvini kept 190 rescued people on board of an Italian coastguard ship for several days. Since the Italian Senate votes against lifting Salvini's immunity, there is no trial.

128



December 2018

The tightening provides for the abolition of humanitarian protection, the restriction of asylum procedures, and the formalisation of the "closed ports" policy.

126



October 2018

It quickly becomes clear: The attackers belong to the far-right group "Génération Identitaire" (Identitarian Movement). Two of the assailants are sentenced to prison in the subsequent trial.

132



March 2019

The three are initially rescued by a tanker. When the captain tries to bring them back to Libya illegally, they ensure – in accordance with human and maritime law – that they are brought to Malta as the next safe harbour. The prosecution concludes as a result that they are terrorists.

130



December 2018

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

136



June 2019

This means: ships that enter Italian territorial waters without permission face fines between €10,000 and €50,000.

134



April 2019

223 members of the German Bundestag (Greens, Left, SPD, a few MdB from CDU/CSU and FDP) demand the protection of the rights of people fleeing by sea and the safeguarding of their human rights.

140



June 2019

Rackete is arrested and charged with disobeying orders and endangering a ship. She faces up to 10 years in prison.

138



June 2019

At the same time, over 40,000 people sign a Kirchentag resolution calling on the Protestant Church in Germany to send a ship for sea rescue into the Mediterranean.

141



The Law at Her Back

An Italian court orders the release of Carola Rackete. She is charged with disobeying orders and endangering a ship.

143



Lip Service?

Angela Merkel calls private sea rescue in the Mediterranean a “duty of humanity”.

145



Grounded

The civilian aircraft Moonbird, operated by Sea-Watch, is denied permission for flights to and from Lampedusa by the Italian authorities.

147



Art Money

The British street artist Banksy donates funds for the purchase of the rescue ship Louise Michel.

149



Making the Unfathomable Tangible

World premiere: The “Mediterranean Monologues” bring the world’s deadliest border to the stage at Berlin’s theatre Heimathafen Neukölln.

151



Broad Alliance

United4Rescue is founded. The independent association supports sea rescue in the Mediterranean financially, and is at the same time a broad coalition that campaigns, among other things, for the obligation to conduct sea rescue.

153



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year’s end*, 1,262 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year the first image of a black hole is released

155



#WeSendAShip

After a successful fundraising campaign, the christening of Sea-Watch 4 takes place in Kiel. The ship bears, in addition to its name, the addendum “powered by United4Rescue”.

157



The EU Retreats Even Further

Operation Irini, under the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), replaces Operation Sophia. The goal of the operation is, among other things, to further improve the capacities of the so-called Libyan coastguard through training.

159



Virus Alarm

Italy and Malta declare their ports unsafe by decree, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason. This step has direct consequences for civilian rescue ships.

144



August 2019

A few days later Merkel advocates for a revival of state-organised sea rescue of refugees in the Mediterranean. However, she takes no measures to this end.

142



July 2019

The presiding judge rules: Rackete acted to save lives when she entered the port of Lampedusa with Sea-Watch 3 despite lacking authorisation from the Italian authorities.

148



September 2019

The ship is named after the French author and anarchist Louise Michel. On 22 August 2020, it rescues people in distress at sea for the first time.

146



August–November 2019

The Moonbird crew documents human rights violations in the Mediterranean during its flights, and alerts rescue coordination centres and nearby ships when it spots people in distress at sea.

152



November 2019

United4Rescue goes back to a resolution adopted during the Protestant Kirchentag in June 2019. In it, more than 40,000 people call on the Protestant Church in Germany to send a ship for sea rescue into the Mediterranean.

150



September 2019

In preparation for the play, author and director Michael Ruf conducts 40 interviews with rescuers and refugees.

156



February 2020

United4Rescue and Sea-Watch e.V. buy the ship in January 2020. This is made possible by thousands of donors who together collect the purchase price of 1.3 million euros in just a few weeks.

154



December 2019

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

160



April 2020

The NGO vessels Alan Kurdi (Sea-Eye) and Aita Mari (Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario) are placed, with rescued people on board, under quarantine and subjected to politically motivated port state controls and related detentions.

158



April 2020

EU search and rescue operations are no longer explicitly part of the mandate. The ships of the operation patrol the eastern part of the central Mediterranean, far from the area where most cases of distress at sea occur.

161



Merz Calls for State Sea Rescue

German opposition politician Friedrich Merz affirms during a ZDF talk show: "Sea rescue is a responsibility of the state, and it cannot be left solely to non-governmental organisations."

163



Tug-of-War at the Expense of People

For 38 days, 27 rescued people wait aboard the merchant vessel Maersk Etienne off the coast of Malta for permission to go ashore.

165



Hands Off the Wheel?

In Greece, Amir Zahiri (27) and Akif Razuli (24), two Afghan refugees, are each sentenced to 50 years for smuggling — specifically, "aiding illegal entry."

167



Aerial Surveillance Not Wanted

Sea-Watch's civilian aircraft Moonbird is grounded by the Italian civil aviation authority in Lampedusa.

169



Fire in an Unreal Place

The refugee camp Moria on the Greek island of Lesbos burns down completely. At the time, over 12,000 refugees live there, despite a capacity for just 2,800.

171



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 1,000 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year Covid-19 spreads worldwide

173



Draconian Response

Police raids target members of the NGO Mediterranean - Saving Humans across Italy. Investigations focus on aiding illegal entry.

175



Charged for Humanity

Following the seizure of the Iuventa, investigations begin charging 21 NGO activists involved in Mediterranean rescues.

177



Setting the sails

The motor schooner NADIR sets out to sea. Behind the rescue ship stands the NGO RESQSHIP.

179



Life Sentence Exceeds Life Expectancy

On Lesbos, Hanad Abdi Mohammad (28) from Somalia is sentenced to 142 years in prison for smuggling with fatal outcome.

164



August–September 2020

Malta refuses disembarkation. Finally, the people are taken on board by the rescue ship Mare Jonio of the NGO Mediterranean – Saving Humans, which brings them ashore in Sicily.

162



July 2020

At this time, Friedrich Merz is campaigning for the CDU party leadership. He loses the vote at the CDU nomination conference in January 2021 to Armin Laschet.

168



September–October 2020

The reason: It allegedly performs commercial activities due to flight frequency and conducts search and rescue operations, supposedly not allowed for private planes.

166



September 2020

Despite no evidence, they are accused of smuggling a boat of asylum seekers from Turkey to Greece in March 2020.

172



December 2020

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

170



September 2020

Years of catastrophic overcrowding preceded the fire. Miraculously, all residents survive. Images of homeless refugees spread worldwide.

176



March 2021

Among them, four Iuventa crew members face charges. Sentences could reach 5–20 years and fines of €15,000 per rescued person.

174



March 2021

For the first time, Italian police are conducting raids against members of a sea rescue organisation. The Ragusa public prosecutor's office is responsible for the investigations.

180



May 2021

In December 2020, Mohammad fled in a rubber boat with 33 other refugees to Greece. When the boat was about to capsize, he took the wheel. Greek courts deemed this enough for his conviction as a smuggler.

178



April 2021

The NADIR is one of several motor schooners in the civil fleet on the Mediterranean. These ships are faster and more flexible than the large rescue vessels - making an important contribution to saving people on the move.

181



Turning Point?

German federal election: Olaf Scholz's SPD unexpectedly wins.

183



Glimmer of Hope

The Scholz government mentions the duty to rescue people at sea under international maritime law in its coalition agreement.

185



Outcry

About 1,000 refugees protest for 100 days outside the UNHCR headquarters in Tripoli. They are trapped in Libya, facing arbitrary detention and deportation.

187



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 1,553 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year Trump supporters storm the Capitol

189



His Time Is Up

Fabrice Leggeri resigns as head of the EU border agency Frontex after seven years.

191



Relentless Justice

After nearly five years of criminal investigations, the trial of the NGO Iuventa crew begins.

193



Post-Fascist Takes Over Italian Government

Giorgia Meloni becomes Italy's Prime Minister. She is the leader of the party Fratelli d'Italia, described as post-fascist and far-right.

195



Salvini Returns

Matteo Salvini becomes Minister for Sustainable Infrastructure and Deputy Prime Minister in Meloni's cabinet.

197



Seems to Work for Everyone

Despite reports of serious human rights violations against refugees by the so-called Libyan coast guard, the Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is automatically renewed.

199



Will to Survive

The film The Swimmers premieres in German cinemas.

184



November 2021

It also declares intent to pursue an EU-led sea rescue programme.

182



September 2021

Following lengthy negotiations, the coalition of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP starts working in December 2021.

188



December 2021

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

186



November 2021–January 2022

Militias storm the protest camp in January 2022 and detain activists, but protests evolve into the foundation of Refugees in Libya.

192



May 2022

Some of the accused face sentences up to 20 years for aiding illegal entry.

190



April 2022

Frontex faces allegations of involvement in at least 22 illegal pushbacks. Since 2024, Leggeri sits in the EU Parliament for the far-right French party Rassemblement National.

196



October 2022

As Minister, Salvini enacts stricter sea rescue regulations, ignoring human rights standards.

194



October 2022

During her campaign, Meloni promised to crack down harder on irregular migration than any predecessor.

200



November 2022

The film tells the true story of the Syrian sisters Yusra and Sarah Mardini, who fled from Izmir across the Mediterranean Sea to Greece.

198



November 2022

The deal includes ongoing Italian support for Libyan border control and search and rescue activities.

201



State Funding

For the first time, the German Bundestag's budget committee approves annual funding for civilian sea rescue.

203



Lady Justice Knows

A Rome court delivers a landmark verdict on the Lampedusa 2013 shipwreck: The Italian coast guard and navy are responsible for 268 deaths.

205



Waste of Resources

The Italian government begins to assign rescue ships to distant ports in the north and east of the country. This contravenes international maritime law, which stipulates that rescued persons must be taken to the nearest port of safety.

207



Wrongful Conviction – Finally Free!

A Greek appeals court overturns Akif Razuli's smuggling conviction; he is freed. Amir Zahiri's sentence is reduced to 8 years, with the prospect of early release on parole.

209



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 1,417 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher

*the year Russia invades Ukraine

211



Not Quite Legally Sound

Under Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, Italy issues the "Piantedosi Decree" with administration rules for sea rescue NGOs, incompatible with international maritime law.

213



Top-Down Racism

Tunisia experiences a wave of attacks against Black people, accelerated by racist comments by President Kais Saied.

215



Failure to Assist

Amid rough weather, a boat capsizes near Cutro, Italy, with around 200 people aboard. At least 94 die, including 35 minors.

217



No Place for Human Rights

An independent UN fact-finding mission's final report reveals severe abuses in Libya: refugees face systematic crimes against humanity.

219



Kind-of Stable Civil Society

A German survey finds over 60% of the citizens support civilian sea rescue of refugees.

204



December 2022

The judges stress: Distress calls at sea must be prioritized and rescue measures initiated immediately.

202



November 2022

Between 2023 and 2026, €2 million per year will be paid to rescue organisations upon application.

208



December 2022

Razuli is compensated €15,920 for unlawful detention in September 2023. Zahiri remains a convicted felon.

206



December 2022

The practice of remote ports places an unnecessary burden on survivors and keeps rescue ships away from the area of operation. The rescue ship Humanity 1, operated by the NGO SOS Humanity, is the first to be affected: she is assigned Bari as its port of disembarkation, 650 km from the location where she rescued 261 survivors.

212



January 2023

The decree provides for administrative detention of ships in the event of non-compliance, with fines ranging from €3,000 to €10,000. In the event of repeated violations, the rescue ships may be detained for longer or even confiscated completely.

210



December 2022

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

216



February 2023

Sea rescue does not come, even though the state authorities and Frontex are informed and are therefore legally obliged to initiate search and rescue operations.

214



February 2023

Since 2019, Tunisia under Saied has evolved into an increasingly autocratic presidential system, endangering human rights.

220



May 2023

Among the surveyed Green Party supporters, approval for civilian sea rescue is particularly high at 86 percent, while among AfD supporters it is a meager 20 percent.

218



March 2023

The EU-funded so-called Libyan coast guard is implicated in violent detention and human trafficking networks.

221



36° North, 21° East

A shipwreck near Pylos kills 600 after an overcrowded boat flips in Greek waters.

223



Is Europe's Border in Tunisia?

The EU signs a cooperation agreement with Tunisia, including €150 million for border management and building up rescue capacity.

225



Deadly Plan

At least 2,000 people are deported by Tunisian authorities to desert regions near Algeria and Libya.

227



On the Right Side of History

The civilian sea rescue organisation SOS Méditerranée receives the Right Livelihood Award (aka Alternative Nobel Prize) for its life-saving humanitarian missions in the Mediterranean.

229



Taxpayer Money for Sea Rescue

The German Bundestag approves funding for civilian sea rescue in the Mediterranean for the first time.

231



Outsourcing

Italy and Albania agree that Albania is to operate reception centres for people rescued at sea. Rescued individuals will be transferred from Italy to Albania.

233



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 2,526 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year Taylor Swift's Eras Tour begins

235



Criminalisation Instead of Legal Paths

The German government is tightening the law on criminalising irregular entry, thereby creating the potential of criminalising civilian sea rescue operations as well.

237



Libya Is No Option

Italy's Supreme Court confirms once more: Libya is unsafe; people rescued from distress at sea cannot be returned there.

239



Game Over

SOS Méditerranée's rescue ship Ocean Viking is detained in Brindisi, Italy, under the "Piantadosi Decree."

224



July 2023

The European Parliament criticizes the deal and funding sharply.

222



June 2023

Despite warnings from Frontex and the Alarm Phone hotline, Greek authorities fail to initiate rescue measures. Only 104 survive.

228



September 2023

The Right Livelihood Award annually honours people and initiatives creating a better world.

226



July 2023

Left without food, water, or shelter, at least 27 die.

232



November 2023

In Albania, people go through expedited asylum procedures under detention-like conditions based on Italian law.

230



October 2023

Up to €2 million annually is allocated to European rescue NGOs and actors on migration routes.

236



January 2024

Following protests, an exemption for sea rescue remains, but refugees and humanitarian aid remain vulnerable to criminal charges.

234



December 2023

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

240



February 2024

Immediately upon the arrival of the Ocean Viking in the port of Brindisi, the authorities present a pre-signed declaration of a 20-day detention and a fine of €3,333. The crew is not interviewed.

238



February 2024

The court upholds the conviction of the captain of the merchant vessel Asso Ventotto who handed over rescued persons to the so-called Libyan coast guard in 2018.

241



Jet Another Deal

The EU signs a multimillion pact with Egypt to block refugee entry into Europe, following similar deals with Turkey and Tunisia.

243



Farewell, Asylum?

The European Parliament approves the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) reform.

245



It Could Have Been Quicker

After seven years, an Italian court drops all charges against the Luventa crew, ending the longest and costliest prosecution of a sea rescue NGO.

247



Airspace Closed

Italian authorities ban NGO planes over the Mediterranean.

249



Does Tunisia Know How to Do SAR?

Tunisia, with EU and Italian support, establishes a search and rescue (SAR) zone off its coast.

251



Good-bye, you beauty

The rescue ship MARE*GO, formerly Sea-Watch 1, goes into semi-retirement at the age of 107.

253



Constitutional Questions

The Ocean Viking detention case is referred to Italy's constitutional court.

255



After All, Not So Simple...

For the first time, twelve people rescued at sea are taken by an Italian navy ship to an Albanian detention centre, but a Roman court soon overturns this externalisation.

257



Further Escalation

Italy's Meloni government tightens rules on rescue ships and planes with the "Decreto flussi."

259



A Different EU Is Possible

On the day of the inauguration of the Von der Leyen II EU commission, 13 rescue NGOs present a proposal for an EU sea rescue mission: Mare Solidare.

244



April 2024

The reform undermines human rights and asylum law without addressing deaths in the central Mediterranean.

242



February 2024

Human rights groups condemn deals with countries systematically violating human rights as part of EU border externalisation.

248



May 2024

The aircraft may be grounded if the ban is not observed. Sea-Watch and Pilotes Volontaires are continuing their flights anyways.

246



April 2024

The court states: Authorities' evidence deemed insufficient, and the witness credibility is questioned.

252



August 2024

Since 2023, the NGO Zusammenland has been operating the MARE*GO. In the future, the ship is to embark on gentler missions focused on animal, environmental, and climate protection. However, retirement is out of the question.

250



June 2024

Critics call it another tool for EU illegal border closure; people are intercepted and returned to unsafe places instead of rescued per international law.

256



October 2024

The court decides: The people's countries of origin (Bangladesh, Egypt) cannot be deemed safe; therefore, their detentions are rejected.

254



October 2024

The "Piantedosi Decree" grounding the ship faces constitutionality review.

260



November 2024

The proposal: Implementation of an European search and rescue programme that complies with human rights, recognises sea rescue as part of European civil protection and builds on the experience gained from previous sea rescue missions.

258



December 2024

NGO ships may be detained up to ten days; repeated breaches risk confiscation. Civilian aircrafts face the same rules as ships under the "Piantedosi Decree."

261



Mass Grave for Migrants

Deadly crossing of the central Mediterranean: by year's end*, 1,810 dead and missing are recorded — with the true number much higher.

*the year breakdancing premieres as an Olympic sport

263



CDU Prioritises Closure

German federal elections: CDU/CSU with Friedrich Merz wins ahead of the far-right AfD.

265



Charges: Negligence

The criminal trial against six Italian officials in connection with the Cutro shipwreck on 26 February 2023 begins.

267



Justice's Long Breath

Six activists of NGO Mediterranea - Saving Humans are charged with aiding illegal entry in 2020.

269



Stay safe

The famous German rapper Smudo christens the reconnaissance aircraft Seabird 3.

271



Sad Anniversary

Many European sea rescue NGOs mark their 10th founding anniversary.

273



Boundless Humanity

In 10 years, civilian sea rescue ships saved over 175,000 lives in the Mediterranean.

275



Other Priorities

The German Foreign Ministry under Johann Wadephul ends its funding for civilian sea rescue.

264



February 2025

In May, CDU/CSU and SPD sign their coalition treaty omitting sea rescue.

262



December 2024

The Missing Migrants Project has tracked deaths and disappearances since 2014.

268



March 2025

After years of investigation, six activists are being charged for taking 27 people from the merchant ship Maersk Etienne on board and bringing them ashore in 2020.

266



March 2025

Six officers from the Italian coastguard and financial police are being charged by the Italian public prosecutor's office with negligent shipwreck and multiple manslaughter.

272



May 2025

No reason to celebrate: civilian rescue fills the void left by state and EU inaction.

270



April 2025

After a successful fundraising campaign by United4Rescue, the Aircraft Seabird 3 of HPI takes to the skies. It is supporting rescue operations in the Mediterranean ever since.

276



June 2025

Chancellor Merz justifies the stop of €2 million annual funding, saying rescue "is not a private sector task." What he means by that remains unclear.

274



June 2025

Nevertheless, civilian sea rescue operations continue to be blocked politically. At the same time, the EU is investing money in sealing off its external borders, often through agreements with authoritarian regimes such as those in Tunisia and Libya.