„Keine Lösung, aber eine notwendige Intervention"

Das Watch The Med Alarmphone

Simon Sontowski

Einleitung

Das Mittelmeer ist in den letzten 25 Jahren für all jene Migrant_innen zu einer tödlichen Falle geworden, denen kein anderer Weg nach Europa offensteht, als eine gefährliche Bootsüberfahrt zu wagen. Neueste Zahlen gehen von mehr als 29.000 Menschen aus, die allein seit dem Jahr 2000 auf ihrem Weg nach Europa zu Tode gekommen sind (The Migrants Files 2015). Das Bootsunglück vom 3. Oktober 2013, bei dem in unmittelbarer Nähe zur italienischen Insel Lampedusa 366 Menschen starben, ist damit nur eine von vielen tödlichen Tragödien, für die das europäische Grenzregime verantwortlich zu machen ist. Nur acht Tage später, am 11. Oktober 2013, ertranken erneut mehr als 200 Menschen, als ihr Boot zwischen Malta und Italien in Seenot geriet. Zwar setzten sie bei den italienischen und maltesischen Küstenwachen Notrufe ab, diese reagierten jedoch zunächst nicht und so verstrichen wertvolle Stunden, in denen das Boot schließlich kenterte und sank. Hätten die Küstenwachen früher reagiert, diese Todesfälle hätten ohne weiteres verhindert werden können.

Zahlreiche *No Border*-Aktivist_innen auf beiden Seiten des Mittelmeeres nahmen diesen Fall unterlassener Hilfeleistung Anfang 2014 zum Anlass, um ein transnationales Netzwerk aufzubauen, das eine unabhängige Notruf-Hotline für Migrant_innen in Seenot betreibt.[1] In einem Unterstützungsaufruf fragten

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[1] Zu diesem Netzwerk gehören, neben über 100 Einzelpersonen, unter anderem die Netzwerke Afrique Europe Interact, Boats4People, Borderline Europe, die Forschungsstelle Flucht und Migration, No Borders Marokko, Voix des Migrants, welcome2europe sowie das Monitoring-Projekt Watch the Med.
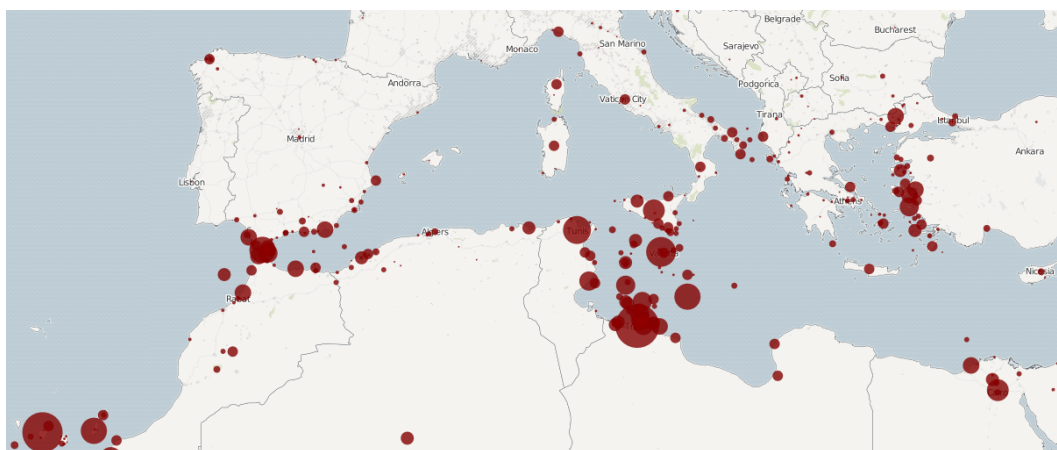
movements. Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung 2015 1 (1)

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Figure 1: Todesfalle Mittelmeer: das europäische Grenzregime verursachte seit dem Jahr 2000 mehr als 29.000 Todesfälle (The Migrants Files 2015)

sie im Herbst 2014: „Was wäre passiert, wenn die Boatpeople einen zweiten Notruf an eine unabhängige Hotline hätten richten können?" Das Ziel des Alarmphones ist es demnach, unmittelbar über Seenotfälle informiert zu werden und die zuständigen Behörden unter Druck zu setzen und zur Seenotrettung zu zwingen: „Wir wollen unmittelbar Alarm schlagen, wenn Flüchtlinge und Migrant_innen in Seenot geraten und nicht unverzüglich gerettet werden. Wir wollen in Echtzeit dokumentieren und sofort skandalisieren, wenn Boatpeople zu Opfern von Push-Backs werden. Wir wollen mit politischem Druck und öffentlicher Mobilisierung eingreifen gegen das Unrecht, das sich tagtäglich an den Außengrenzen der EU abspielt" (Watch the Med Alarmphone 2014).

Seit Oktober 2014 ist das Alarmphone von *Watch the Med* nun bereits aktiv und hat schon in zahlreichen konkreten Fällen erfolgreich intervenieren können. Dabei nahmen die Netzwerkmitglieder, die jeweils für acht Stunden eine Alarmphone-Bereitschaftsschicht übernehmen, sowohl Anrufe von Satellitentelefonen direkt aus dem Mittelmeer entgegen, als auch von besorgten Verwandten und Freund_innen. Neben einer Abklärung der konkreten Situation, also der Anzahl der betroffenen Menschen, ihres Gesundheitszustandes und des Zustandes des Bootes, versuchen die Schichtteams, die GPS-Daten und die genaue Position des Bootes in Erfahrung zu bringen. Mit diesen Informationen können sie bestimmen, in welcher nationalen Seenotrettungszone sich das Boot befindet, welche Küstenwache verständigt werden muss und ob eventuell kommerzielle Schiffe in der Nähe sind, die von der Küstenwache zur Rettung verpflichtet werden könnten. Anschließend versucht das Schichtteam gleichzeitig,

die Küstenwache zur Rettung zu drängen sowie mit den Anrufer_innen in Kontakt zu bleiben. Sollten Rettungsaktionen ausbleiben, kann das Schichtteam jederzeit ein breites Netzwerk aus Unterstützenden mobilisieren.

Dieses konkrete Vorgehen wird von den Beteiligten als eine dringend notwendige Intervention gegen das massenhafte Sterben im Mittelmeer verstanden. Sie bedienen sich dabei in Teilen der Techniken, die auch von den Apparaten der staatlichen Kontrolle verwendet werden — satelliten-gestützte Kommunikation und Überwachung, GPS-Tracking, Sichtbarmachung von Bewegungen — und wenden diese gegen das europäische Grenzregime selbst. Das Alarmphone-Netzwerk kann und will dabei jedoch nicht stehenbleiben: „Das Sterbenlassen auf See, die Menschenrechtsverletzungen der EU-Grenzschutzagentur Frontex und der Grenzpolizeien in allen Teilen des Mittelmeeres müssen sofort gestoppt werden. Wir brauchen ein zivilgesellschaftliches Netzwerk auf beiden Seiten des Mittelmeeres, das politischen Druck entfalten kann für das Leben und die Rechte der Boatpeople, und wir wollen ein Teil davon sein. Ein solches alternatives Alarm-Netzwerk ist nur ein erster, aber dringend notwendiger Schritt auf dem Weg zu einem euro-mediterranen Raum, der nicht von einem tödlichen Grenzregime geprägt ist, sondern von Solidarität und dem Recht auf Schutz und auf Bewegungsfreiheit" (ebd.).

Dahinter verbirgt sich eine grundlegende Kritik, die weit über eine konkrete Intervention in den umkämpften Grenzraum im Mittelmeer hinausweist. Es ist eine Kritik, die das unhinterfragte Geschehen-Lassen des Sterbens an Europas Grenzen nicht länger hinnimmt, sondern Verantwortlichkeiten klar benennt und Alternativen aufzeigt. So betont das Netzwerk immer wieder, dass es gar keine Bootsmigration und damit auch keine Toten im Mittelmeer gäbe, wenn legale Zugangsmöglichkeiten nach Europa existieren würden. Schließlich waren es erst die seit den 1990er Jahren verschärften Visumspflichten, die dazu führten, dass klandestine Reisen über das Mittelmeer für viele Flüchtlinge und Migrant_innen zur einzig verbliebenen Option geworden sind. In einem ersten Schritt setzt das Netzwerk der europäischen Abschottungspolitik also eine transnationale strategische Intervention entgegen, die sich mit den Bootsflüchtlingen solidarisiert und sie wo es geht unterstützt. Letztlich fordert das Netzwerk allerdings mehr. Erfolgreich wäre es erst dann, wenn das tödliche europäische Grenzregime abgeschafft und das Recht auf Bewegungsfreiheit für jede und jeden eingelöst ist.

Spätestens Mitte April 2015 hatte das Alarmphone seine erste große Bewährungsprobe zu bestehen. Als innerhalb weniger Tage mehr als 10.000 Menschen von Libyen aus die Überfahrt in Richtung Italien wagten, gingen

auf der Alarmphone-Nummer mehr als 20 Anrufe ein. Die Schichtteams waren an zahlreichen Rettungsaktionen beteiligt und konnten überlebenswichtige Informationen über zahlreiche Seenotfälle an die italienischen und maltesischen Küstenwachen weitergeben. Alle Boote, mit denen das Alarmphone in dieser Zeit in Kontakt war, konnten von der italienischen Küstenwache aufgegriffen und sicher ans Festland gebracht werden (Watch the Med Alarmphone 2015). Dennoch kenterten und sanken am 14. und am 19. April 2015 zwei Boote, wobei mindestens 1300 Menschen ihr Leben verloren.

Im Folgenden dokumentiert *movements* den Zwischenbericht des *Watch the Med* Alarmphones, der zwei Monate nach dem Start der Notruf-Hotline Anfang Dezember 2014 veröffentlich wurde, sowie die Stellungnahme „Ferries not Frontex! 10 points to really end the deaths of migrants at sea", die im April 2015 als Reaktion auf das tausendfache Sterben im Mittelmeer veröffentlicht wurde.

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After two Months in Operation: Insights into the Watch The Med Alarm Phone

On the 10th of October 2014, the Watch The Med Alarm Phone went live. It is operated by a transnational network of activist and migrant groups, located in various settings on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The hotline is run by multilingual shift teams day and night, 24/7. The Alarm Phone initiative has gained the support of various migrant communities, individual members of civil society, as well as human rights activists and organisations. While not
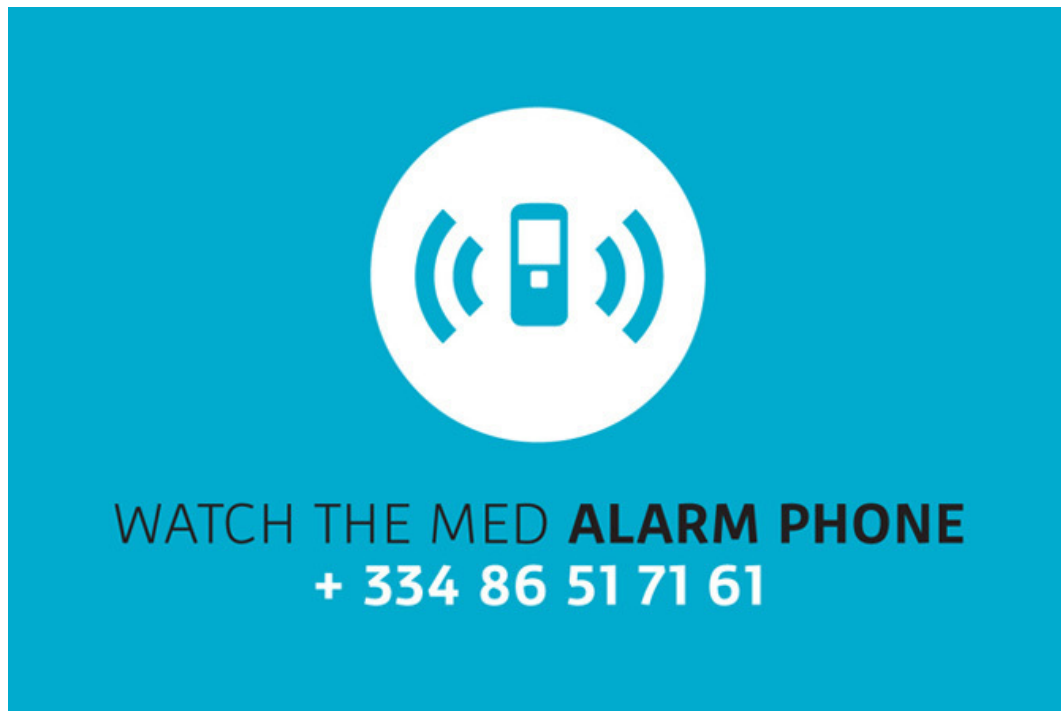
Figure 2: Watch the Med Alarmphone Visitenkarten (Quelle: http://www.watchthemed.net/media/uploads/page/12/AP-visitercards-english.pdf

able to physically intervene itself, with no available boats that could carry out rescue operations, it offers advice and raises alarm when people in immediate distress are not promptly rescued or even pushed-back by European border authorities.

The Alarm Phone seeks to intervene immediately, in real time, when receiving calls from boatpeople. It is still in its beginning to distribute the hotline number amongst migrant communities in transit. The Alarm Phone seeks to offer an alternative avenue for those on the move to reach out when in need and to protect themselves from human rights violations that occur all too often in Europe's Mediterranean border regions.

In the first two months of operation, the Alarm Phone has received various calls and has actively engaged in 12 cases so far. The cases had different dimensions and have drawn the attention of the shift teams to several locations, varying levels of distress and scales of human rights abuse. So far, distress calls have been received from the Central Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea, as well as from survivors of Greek push-back operations who were back on Turkish territory.

In most cases, the Alarm Phone has been notified by contact persons and groups within migrant communities, residing for example in Sweden, Italy and Switzerland. Amongst them is Father Mussie Zerai who has, for many years now, operated an alarm phone himself, particularly for refugees from Eritrea. He advised the Watch The Med activists and encouraged them to begin the Alarm Phone project. Just like Father Zerai, several individuals and groups in Europe receive phone calls from people in distress. The Alarm Phone does not aim to replace these structures that have, at times, existed for a long time in different communities and regions, offering their important advice. The past two months have demonstrated that the Alarm Phone project may offer some additional support to these structures and function as a catalyst to bring people together who may not have known one another beforehand and who can contribute to a collectivisation of experiences and expertise.

As experienced so far, challenges and cooperation scenarios with authorities have differed according to the distress-situation and the locations of the incidents: It has become clear that in cases of distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea, the Alarm Phone is required to immediately notify the Italian and Maltese coastguards. When the shift teams gained the impression during phone conversations that rescue operations were not immediately initiated, they reached out to the UNHCR and other organisations to increase the pressure on the coastguards to begin rescue operations.

With the end of Mare Nostrum and the beginning of the Frontex led operation Triton, the Alarm Phone began to operate in a time when it was and is open, if 'left to die' will become again an often occurring practice in the sea between Libya, Malta and Italy. The concept of the Alarm Phone, the option of real-time documentation and scandalisation, might be an important practice of intervention.

In the Aegean Sea, the Alarm Phone has experienced situations in which Greek coastguards have conducted illegal push-back operations back to Turkish territory. In cases of calls from those who had already reached Greek territory, the shift teams have sought to prevent push-back operations by notifying organisations, by demonstrating their awareness of the situation and by remaining in contact with the individuals/groups in question. In other cases, the Alarm Phone received calls from individuals and groups on Turkish territory, only after the push-back had already occurred. In these situations, the shift teams documented the situation by collecting witness accounts and by remaining in contact with the push-back survivors.

We have gained the impression, in all of these cases, that our ability to offer psychological support to the ones calling our number was very significant and cannot be overstated. It seems very important for those calling in or after situations of life-threatening danger to know that what they experienced does not remain invisible, and that, in fact, they belong to a European civil society that seeks to intervene and visibilise human rights violations at sea.

The Alarm Phone has made three cases accessible to the larger public:

1) »They want to see us drown«

A survivor of a push-back operation notified the Watch The Med Alarm Phone of an illegal push-back operation by the Greek coastguards in late October 2014. Thirty three Syrian refugees were attempting to cross the Aegean Sea when their vessel was intercepted and boarded by Greek coastguards who then disabled the engine and punctured the vessel, leaving the refugees behind at sea. The passengers were able to call the Turkish coastguard which rescued them and brought them back to Turkish territory (case name: 2014_10_25_pushback_CHIOS-GR-CESME-TR)

2) Danger of push-back after arrival on European territory

The Alarm Phone was in contact with a group of up to 75 Syrian refugees who had arrived on the Greek island of Symi in October. They were in a precarious situation, without food, water and orientation and were scared to be pushed-back by Greek authorities. The shift teams were able to engage directly with them, follow their movements and notify organisations and authorities (case name: 2014_19_21-Symi).

3) Distress in the Mediterranean Sea

A vessel carrying up to 200 refugees off the coast of Libya was in danger of capsizing, with no other vessels in vicinity. The Italian coastguard alerted vessels to the situation of the refugees and a vessel directed itself to them. The shift team accompanied the refugees through repeated phone calls and reassured them that help was on its way. The vessel reached the refugee boat and conducted a successful rescue operation. This was the first case in which the shift team was in direct contact with people in distress at sea (case name: 2014_11_14-CM1).

As mentioned in our press release in October, we consider the Alarm Phone not as a solution but as an emergency intervention. The project is another contribution to support the increasing struggles against a repressive European border regime. Within the first weeks of its existence new connections between and amongst migrant and activist communities have been established in the practice of assisting people in distress to remain unharmed or to protest against human rights abuses. And also in future, the project seeks to strengthen the process of transnational networking for the freedom of movement.

We call on all members of civil society to distribute the Watch The Med Alarm Phone number as widely as possible and circulate it in migrant communities in need. Pass it to all friends who have relatives and friends trying to cross the outer borders of Europe. For us, this is the most important task for the weeks and months to come — and in order to achieve this, we need the broad support. Please contact us if you have further questions or if you need materials (for example: leaflets 'Safety at Sea Aegean and Morocco' in several languages, short descriptions of the project in various languages, visitors cards with the number). Since we depend on an efficiently functioning network including translators, we call for wider active participation in the Alarm Phone project.

If you can imagine to support please contact us:

- Email: wtm-alarm-phone@antira.info

- Alarm Phone Number: +334 86 51 71 61

You can also support the Alarm Phone Project financially by donating to:

- Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht & Migration.

- Sparkasse der Stadt Berlin

- IBAN: DE68 1005 0000 0610 0242 64

- BIC: BELADEBEXXX

- Please note: Watch the Med

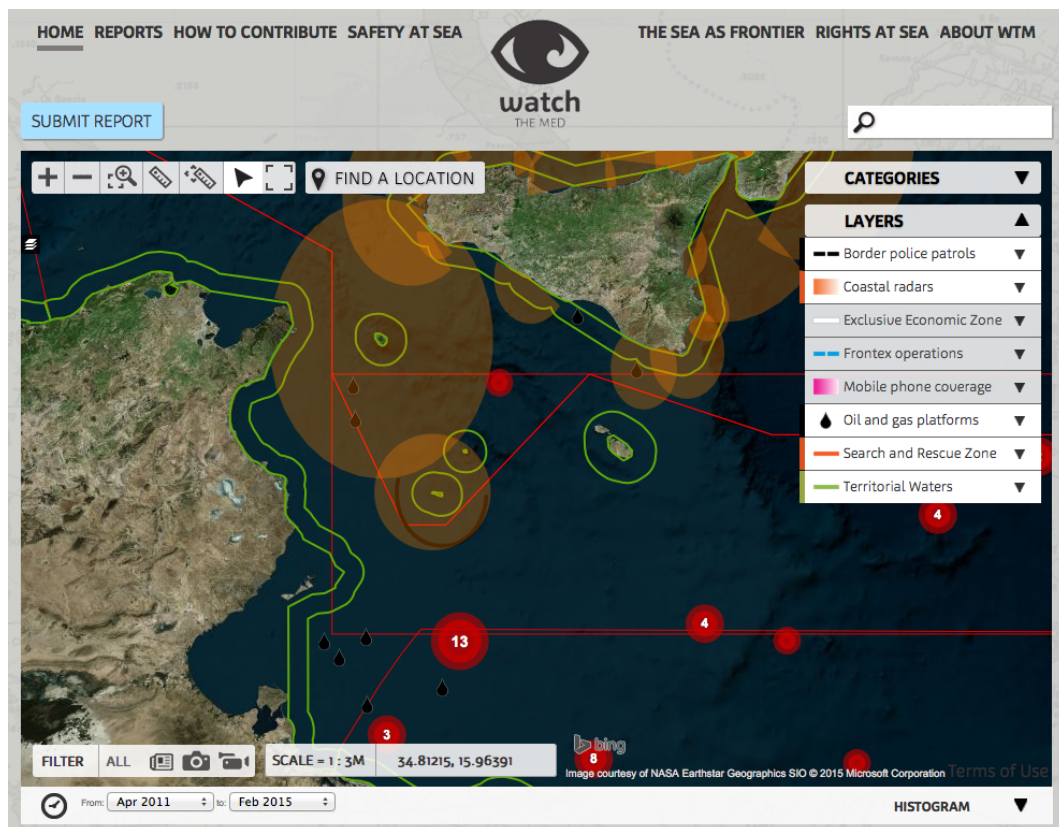*Quelle: Watch The Med Alarm Phone (04.12.2014).* http://www.watchthemed.net/media/uploads/page/12/WTM-Interim-Report-AlarmPhone.pdf

Figure 3: Watch The Med Homepage (Quelle: http://www.watchthemed.net)

Ferries not Frontex! 10 points to really end the deaths of migrants at sea

On April 20, the Joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council of the EU released a ten-point action plan outlining their response to the recent deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. Many other proposals have also been made over the last few days. We are activists who have been involved in the struggles against the European border regime for several years and who have been in touch on a daily basis with hundreds of people who have crossed the Mediterranean through Watch The Med and the Alarm Phone project. Faced with the hypocrisy of the 'solutions' that have been proposed so far, we feel compelled to undermine their falsity and attempt to open up an alternative space for reflection and action.

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 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?

The Alarm Phone (wtm-alarm-phone@antira.info)

Quelle: Watch the Med Alarm Phone (23.04.2015)

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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Lizenz