



Lampedusa/Wendland, 26 August 2025

22 people rescued – sailing boat detained in port

After rescuing 22 people yesterday evening, a German sailing boat was prohibited from leaving the port of Lampedusa. The crew is accused of not informing the so-called Libyan coast guard when they rescued the people from an unseaworthy boat. The detention is expected to last for 10-20 days. It took effect yesterday.

On the morning of 24 August 2025, the crew of the TROTAMAR III discovered a fibreglass boat in distress off the coast of Libya, in which three women and 19 men had been exposed to the waves on the open sea for hours. After sending a distress call to the Italian and Maltese authorities, skipper Matthias WiedenlÜbbert decided to take the people directly on board to protect them from drowning and an imminent illegal pullback to Libya by the so-called Libyan coast guard.

Already on the evening before, August 23, 2025, at 9:15 p.m., the TROTAMAR III was severely restricted in its freedom of movement and forced to turn away when a patrol boat of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard approached close to its port side and threatened to use firearms in radio communications. In this case, the crew had responded to a May Day relay from Sparrow 2 (“blue wooden boat adrift, approx. 30 people”) and was forcibly prevented from fulfilling its duty to rescue people in distress at sea.

The TROTAMAR III has been conducting search and rescue deployments off the Tunisian and Libyan coasts for two years. In 18 deployments, 2,345 people have been rescued by the Italian coast guard after being alerted by the relevant rescue coordination centres, having previously been supported for hours by the crew of the civilian sailing boat with life jackets and drinking water. So far, 417 people have been rescued directly onto the sailing boat and taken to Lampedusa. The skippers in charge keep the maritime rescue centres in Rome and Malta updated regularly, but refuse to pass on the position and information about the shipwrecked people to the authorities in Tripoli or Tunis. “If we were to inform the so-called Libyan coast guard of a maritime emergency, we would be accepting that the refugees would be forcibly returned to Libya. This would not be a rescue, but an illegal pullback and thus an aid to the violation of human rights. This is neither compatible with applicable law nor with our conscience,” said Matthias WiedenlÜbbert, skipper on board the TROTAMAR III.

Katja Tempel, press spokesperson for the Compass Collective, explains:

‘If the Italian government, with the backing of many European states, wants to criminalise civilian sea rescue, then we will take them to court. We will take legal action against the detention of the TROTAMAR III and demand the implementation of the UN Convention on Human Rights: Libya and Tunisia cannot offer a safe haven (port/place of safety) for refugees, which is why we will not allow them to coordinate our rescue operations. Every day that a sea rescue ship is detained increases the risk of more people drowning in the Mediterranean.

The people taken on board the TROTAMAR III had set off from Zuwara (Libya) and come from Iraq, Somalia, Egypt, Sudan, Bangladesh and Ethiopia. They have been in Lampedusa since yesterday lunchtime and are being cared for in a hotspot by the Maldusa cultural association until they are taken to the Italian mainland.

The CompassCollective with the sailing boat TROTAMAR III comes from Wendland, a region in Lower Saxony that has been shaped by the debate on nuclear energy for 40 years. Civil society protests ultimately prevented a nuclear waste repository from being built in Gorleben and are now providing the momentum to sail in solidarity against isolation and death in the Mediterranean.

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