

THE NEWSCAST

AFTER EUROPE'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUPPORTING MAURITANIA WITH 510 MILLION EUROS: EUROPEAN-MAURITANIAN NEGOTIATIONS ON AN AGREEMENT TO COMBAT ILLEGAL MIGRATION HAVE BEGUN

Representatives of the Mauritanian government and the European Border Agency "Frontex" announced last Monday the start of negotiations between the two parties regarding an agreement to combat illegal migration. The negotiations involved experts from the security, defense, interior, and coast guard sectors in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott.

These official meetings between the two parties come after a meeting between the Mauritanian president, the Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen last week to discuss ways to combat illegal migration through establishing a strategic partnership that respects the sovereignty of both parties and preserves their vital interests. This includes European economic support to Mauritania, which amounts to 510 million euros, with 200 million euros from Spain alone.

Both sides discussed ways to establish an appropriate framework for identifying the challenges related to managing migration and refugees, setting expected goals, determining means and mutual commitments, as well as sharing common burdens commensurate with the risks and challenges faced by each party.

The head of the Mauritanian delegation emphasized the necessity for the European side to commit to ensuring the benefit of Mauritanian citizens by empowering youth in development and resilience, and obtaining privileges for them when migrating to Europe. Mauritania bears a heavy burden in the field of migration as it is a transit country.

Opponents of the Mauritanian-European agreement argue that it will turn Mauritania into a policeman for Europe, protecting its borders and territorial waters and preventing the influx of migrants. Furthermore, there are concerns about the possibility of Mauritania becoming a geographical location for receiving illegally deported migrants from Europe and establishing detention camps to accommodate hundreds of thousands of Africans deported from various European countries.



CYPRIOT-LEBANESE NEGOTIATIONS TO DETERMINE THE FATE OF 116 SYRIAN MIGRANTS

The fate of 116 Syrian illegal migrants remains unknown as negotiations continue between Cypriot authorities—where the migrants arrived—and the Lebanese government—where the migrants departed from—regarding the mechanism for dealing with the migrants. The migrants, mostly Syrian refugees fleeing war and poverty, departed from Lebanese shores towards European coasts. The journey faced difficulties at sea, where the migrants endured a tragedy due to a technical malfunction in the unauthorized boat before reaching Cypriot shores. A distress call was made and the matter was addressed, leading them to arrive at Cypriot shores, but they were soon intercepted by the coast guard. Our platform then continued communication with the "Alarm Phone" platform to follow up on the case.

Cypriot authorities refused to allow the migrants entry into their territory and continued negotiations with Lebanese authorities. Cyprus returned the migrants to the Lebanese shore on the second day, but Lebanese authorities prevented them from entering their territory. Under pressure from international organizations, Cyprus placed them in migrant shelters.

The migrants face three possibilities: Cyprus agreeing to their entry, their return to Lebanon, or deportation to Syria, with Cypriot authorities demanding that Syria be considered a safe country. The Cypriot government has taken a stance against receiving migrants, with the number of arrivals decreasing, with only 4,259 irregular migrants arriving in 2023 compared to 937 migrants in 2022. Asylum applications in Cyprus decreased by 46% in 2023, while repatriation and voluntary departure increased by 66%.

Overall, Cyprus recorded approximately 10,991 incoming migrants in 2023, a decrease of about 6,447 from 2022. The United Nations Refugee Agency expressed concern about the policies of the Cypriot government in returning Syrian migrants to Lebanon without assessing whether they need legal protection. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees office in Cyprus stated that deportation and transportation between countries "without legal and procedural guarantees for individuals who may need international protection contravenes international and European law. Transportation operations may result in returning individuals to a country where they face the risk of persecution, torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment."

Regarding Lebanon, the UN Refugee Agency in Lebanon revealed that during 2023, the agency confirmed the departure of 59 boats from Lebanon carrying approximately 3,528 passengers, including 3,298 Syrians, 76 Lebanese, 5 Palestinians, and 149 individuals whose nationality could not be confirmed. The agency indicated that 29 boats carrying 1,558 people managed to reach Cyprus, with three later returned to Lebanon, including 109 passengers. Additionally, there were 45 boats whose departure locations could not be confirmed, whether Syria or Lebanon.

International organizations emphasize Cyprus's violation of the principle of non-refoulement, as stipulated in the 1951 Geneva Convention and the EU Asylum Law, by preventing migrants from accessing its territory and seeking asylum, as well as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the European Convention on Human Rights regarding the prohibition of collective expulsion, and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.



TUNISIA: DEATH OF 9 MIGRANTS OFF THE COAST... AND RESCUE OF 52 OTHERS



The General Directorate of the National Guard announced that 9 people died after their boat sank off the Tunisian coast on Thursday. The Directorate stated in a statement that "the rescue operation took place 4 miles off the coast of Jdaira, where 52 migrants of various nationalities, including critical cases, were rescued, while the bodies of 9 migrants were recovered. Tunisia is considered a major departure point for thousands of migrants heading to Europe, especially the Italian coast. The Tunisian National Guard intercepted 69,963 migrants from January to November 2023, compared to 31,297 during the same period in 2022."

Qaswa Al-Khulali attacks illegal immigrants and confirms: They represent a burden on the Egyptian economy



TV presenter Qaswa Al-Khulali criticized illegal immigrants, stating that "those with illegal residency in Egypt represent a significant burden on the Egyptian economy." During her television program, she expressed her support for the government decision to suspend services provided by the state to foreigners exempted from residency for purposes other than tourism in the country, effective the end of June next, "according to the specified deadline," if they do not hold the residency exemption card issued by the Passport Administration. She stated: "Granting illegal residents in the country a 3-month grace period to regularize their status will prevent discrimination between them and Egyptians because it is the Egyptian citizen who bears the economic burden." She added, "It is not logical to allow others to be present illegally, and the Egyptian state suffers from illegal immigration amid economic pressures. It has opened its doors to everyone, but now we need to regulate the situation and deal with violators according to the law." She also said, "Illegal immigration deprives Egyptians of many services, given the current difficult economic conditions."

TEXAS CONFRONTS ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION WITH A MILITARY BASE WHOSE STRENGTH REACHES 2,300 SOLDIERS

As part of Texas state's policy against illegal immigration, the state is constructing a military "base" in the city of Eagle Pass near the border between the United States and Mexico to deter illegal immigration. The base will be a complex covering 80 acres on the banks of the Rio Grande River, with a capacity ranging from 1,800 to 2,300 soldiers.

This initiative is part of Texas's plan, where the governor has deployed thousands of National Guard troops on the US-Mexico border to prevent illegal immigration flows, which have reached unprecedented numbers. Additionally, the governor of Texas has constructed a temporary border wall in Eagle Pass using shipping containers and barbed wire to deter migrants, as well as issuing a law allowing state authorities to arrest and deport individuals suspected of illegally crossing the border, which will be implemented starting from March 5th.

Governor Abbott states that there is a need to continue and effectively expand our efforts to deter illegal immigration, emphasizing the necessity of building this base. The camp will allow Texas to "assemble a large army in a highly strategic area and increase the speed and flexibility of the National Guard in Texas to deal with crossing operations."



DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS RESCUES 80 IRREGULAR MIGRANTS OFF THE LIBYAN COAST

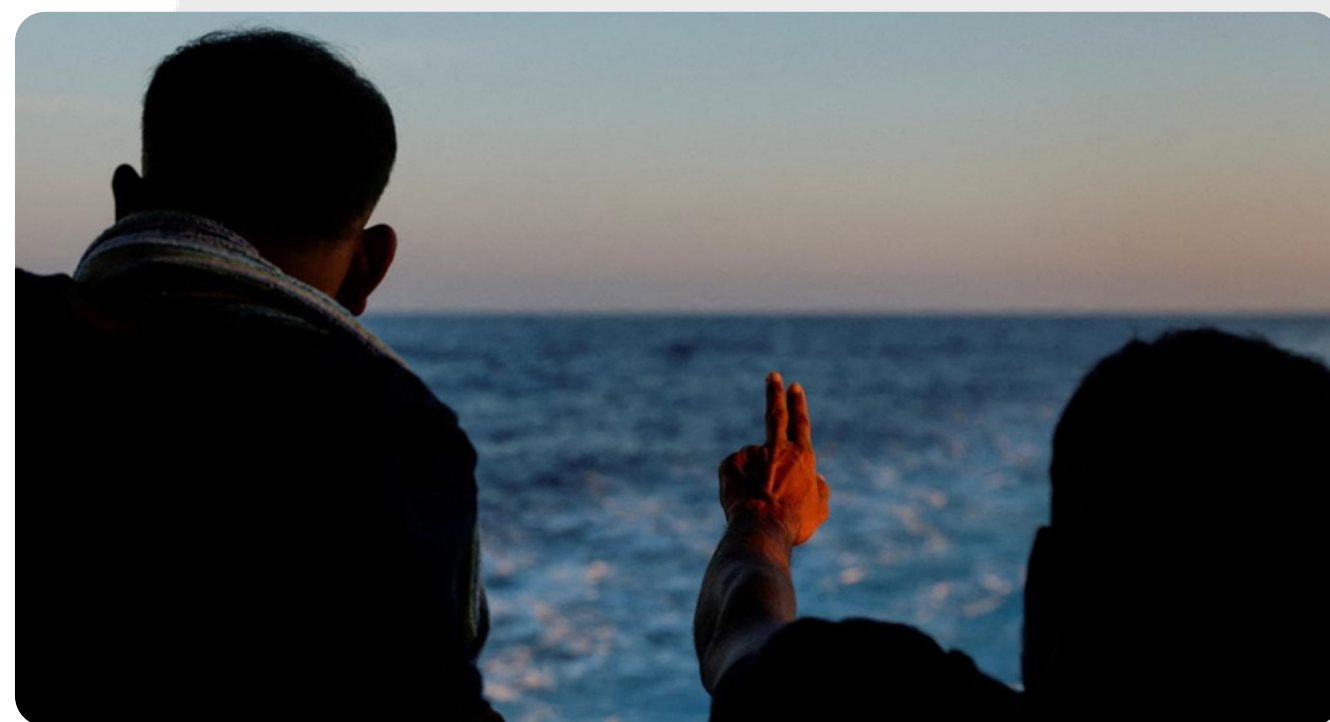
Doctors Without Borders rescued 80 migrants last Saturday after two maritime rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya. Two of them were found dead, while three others were lost during the rescue operation.

The GeoBarents ship, belonging to Doctors Without Borders, rescued more than 60 people from a rubber boat in international waters off Libya last Saturday. Additionally, one body was recovered, and one of the migrants rescued died shortly after the rescue operation.

Doctors Without Borders stated that another 19 people were rescued from an abandoned Tunisian offshore oil platform nearby, after the migrants swam to it when water began leaking into the boat they were on. The charitable organization added that three people remain on the boat and are now considered missing.

The central Mediterranean route is considered the most dangerous migration route globally for irregular migration, with nearly 2,500 migrants dying or going missing last year, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Doctors Without Borders said, "All survivors are now recovering and being cared for on board the Geo Barents after this painful ordeal," noting that they requested permission for them to disembark at "the nearest safe place possible." This request comes despite recent struggles with the Italian government, which is designating distant ports for disembarkation, requiring several days of sailing to reach them.



UN CONCERNS OVER THE BRITISH "RWANDA SAFETY" LAW REGARDING THE DEPORTATION OF MIGRANTS



United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, criticized the British draft law regarding the UK government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. Türk stated that the measures aimed at deporting asylum seekers to Rwanda are in contradiction with fundamental principles of the rule of law and pose a serious risk to human rights. Despite the Supreme Court's rejection, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government insists on sending illegal immigrants to Rwanda. The government has introduced a new draft law called the "Rwanda Safety" law, considering Rwanda a safe country. If the law is enacted, British judges will be forced to treat Rwanda as a safe third country. Türk stated in a statement that the combined effects of this law, which attempts to shield the government's actions from regular legal oversight, are inconsistent with fundamental human rights principles. He urged the UK government to take all necessary measures to ensure full compliance with the UK's international legal obligations and to uphold the country's proud tradition of effective and independent judicial oversight. Türk raised concerns that the draft law could significantly restrict the application of human rights laws and standards and make the implementation of interim protection orders issued by the European Court of Human Rights relatively discretionary, despite these orders being internationally binding on Britain.

Charged with smuggling migrants, an Egyptian court sentenced 15 defendants to prison

The Zagazig Criminal Court has issued a verdict sentencing 15 defendants, members of a criminal gang involved in smuggling migrants, to prison terms ranging from 5 to 10 years on charges of smuggling individuals seeking illegal migration to European countries via an ill-equipped boat, endangering their lives for financial gain, in exchange for the release of 10 others.

The case dates back to 2021 when the Public Prosecution referred 25 defendants from various governorates, including Sharqia, Gharbia, Minya, Marsa Matrouh, Qena, New Valley, and Kafr El-Sheikh, to the Zagazig Criminal Court, charging them all with attempting to smuggle children and adults illegally to European countries through Libya for profit.

Investigations revealed that the defendants committed the crime of migrant smuggling by establishing a network led by an Egyptian in Sharqia governorate, specializing in smuggling migrants illegally from Egypt to European countries via Libya. Among the migrants were both children and adults totaling over twenty individuals, who were subjected to conditions endangering their health aboard an ill-equipped boat for that purpose, with the intention of directly or indirectly gaining financial or other benefits.

The verdict was issued under the chairmanship of Counselor Salama Gaballah, with the membership of Counselors Haitham Hassan El-Dewy, Yahya El-Sadek, Shadi El-Mahdy Abdel Rahman, and the secretary Nabil Shukri.



AFTER 18 YEARS OF A PERILOUS JOURNEY, NOUR AL-DIN DOESN'T FORGET FACING THE WAVES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND THE BARREN LIBYAN DESERT. HE CONFIRMS: "I LIVED HOMELESS FOR 7 YEARS... AND OBTAINED ITALIAN CITIZENSHIP AFTER 14 YEARS.

"The migrant without language or place is an orphan in the paths of Europe, and aboard the boats of death lies a lifeless end without mercy." This is the conclusion reached by Nour al-Din Hilal, who has been living in the Italian city of Turin for 18 years.

Nour al-Din, who works as a football coach in the city of Turin, hasn't forgotten his journey to reach the European dream. He affirms that he experienced a danger that cannot be forgotten, and wouldn't wish it upon a friend or foe, when he faced the waves of the Mediterranean Sea and lived in the desolate Libyan desert during his illegal migration journey in 2006.

Nour al-Din wasn't alone in his journey; he was accompanied by his friends from the city of Aforar in Morocco, where their boat carried 320 other migrants. They all left for Italy, considering it the only salvation from unemployment and despair, through clandestine brokers responsible for securing migration trips. His journey began by flying from Rabat, Morocco to Tunisia, then to Sfax, and finally to the Ras Jedir border crossing between Tunisia and Libya.

For a full 7 years, Nour al-Din lived as a homeless person in Italy, without seeing his parents, unable to find job opportunities, chased by the police, and living in sewage canals, until he found an opportunity to showcase his talent in playing and coaching football.

Nour al-Din's life began to improve when he learned Italian and studied football coaching, eventually joining as a talent scout with Inter Milan and AC Milan.

The Italian citizenship was a dream fulfilled in 2020 after many years of work as a football coach in several Italian clubs. However, he never forgot his suffering and despair during the long years he wished to return to his homeland in Morocco.



AFTER DISCOVERING A LEGAL LOOPHOLE FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING, SPAIN REQUIRES SENEGALESE TO HAVE AN "ENTRY VISA"

The Spanish authorities are working on issuing a new strategy to combat illegal immigration after discovering a legal loophole that allows smugglers to circumvent Spanish laws regarding the reception of Senegalese migrants. The new strategy will require Senegalese citizens to present an airport transit visa. Spanish authorities have arrested 12 smugglers belonging to a mafia group involved in trafficking Senegalese migrants, enabling them to reach European countries like France via Madrid as a transit point. The Spanish authorities have revealed the exploitation of human traffickers of the "international transit" system at airports, where illegal migrants request asylum upon arrival at Madrid Airport, before being transported to their destination countries in exchange for financial payments. This international crime has succeeded in smuggling 200 Senegalese to France, Germany, and Belgium by exploiting transit laws, as migrants deceive authorities by purchasing travel tickets to countries that do not require visas when stopping in Madrid. Most departure flights originated from Casablanca, Morocco, headed to various South American countries, requiring transit in Madrid, where all migrants stopped at Barajas Airport and claimed asylum upon arrival after tearing their passports, alleging they were "minors" or from conflict countries like Mali and Ethiopia. However, upon transfer to reception centers, they were transported to different European countries. The Spanish authorities have revealed that the criminal organization, comprising 12 members, including 11 Senegalese nationals led by a Spanish citizen. Spain struggles with the influx of illegal migrants by sea and air, as Madrid Airport received 188 unaccompanied minors in just 17 days during the first half of the current year. In a related context, a court in Poitiers, France, sentenced a Senegalese-origin citizen to ten months in prison for assisting in transit between Spain and France. The man was transporting four migrants in his car when he was caught, and the four migrants were returned to the Spanish border.



MOROCCAN PARLIAMENT: 60% OF AFRICAN MIGRATION OCCURS WITHIN THE SAME CONTINENT



The 17th session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean discussed the issue of illegal migration, hosted by the Moroccan Parliament in the capital, Rabat, over the past two days.

The Moroccan Parliament witnessed extensive discussions about the problems and issues that concern politicians and officials in the region, in light of the developments and changes experienced by the peoples of the region regarding climate change, health security, migration issues, human trafficking, and organized crime, which require common Mediterranean cooperation.

Parliamentarians believe that Europe has negative perceptions about migration, but Morocco views migration as an "opportunity for the African continent," emphasizing that migration is not just between Europe and Africa but is largely internal, with more than 60% occurring within the continent and only a small percentage involving migration between Africa and Europe.

They emphasized that Africa needs a development model that invests in its existing human resources, rather than exporting them outside the continent, at a time when they are much needed within it.

TUNISIAN NATIONAL GUARD: DISMANTLING A NETWORK ORGANIZING ILLEGAL MIGRATION OPERATIONS IN TATAOUINE GOVERNORATE

The Tunisian National Guard announced on Wednesday the dismantling of a network specialized in organizing illegal migration operations in the city of "Remada" in the Tataouine governorate, southeast of the country.

The National Guard added in a statement that one of the patrols managed to apprehend two Tunisians who were transporting African migrants towards one of the border towns in exchange for payment, clarifying that legal measures have been taken against the suspects.

In a related context, Tunisian National Guard units managed to apprehend a dangerous element specializing in recruiting and sheltering illegal migrants in the city of Jebeniana in the Sfax governorate.

