UNSAFE HARBOURS

The readmissions to Greece from Italian ports and the violations of the migrants' basic human rights

SUMMARY NOVEMBER 2013

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MEDU - Medici per i Diritti Umani, Doctors for Human Rights Italy - is a non-profit humanitarian organisation dedicated to international solidarity, independent of any political, labour union, religious or ethnic affiliation. MEDU aims to bring humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable populations in crisis situations both in Italy and abroad, and to develop democratic and participatory spaces within civil society for the purposes of promoting the right to health and other basic human rights. The actions of Medici per i Diritti Umani are based on the activism of civil society and on the professional and voluntary dedication of medical personnel, in addition to citizens and professionals from other disciplines.

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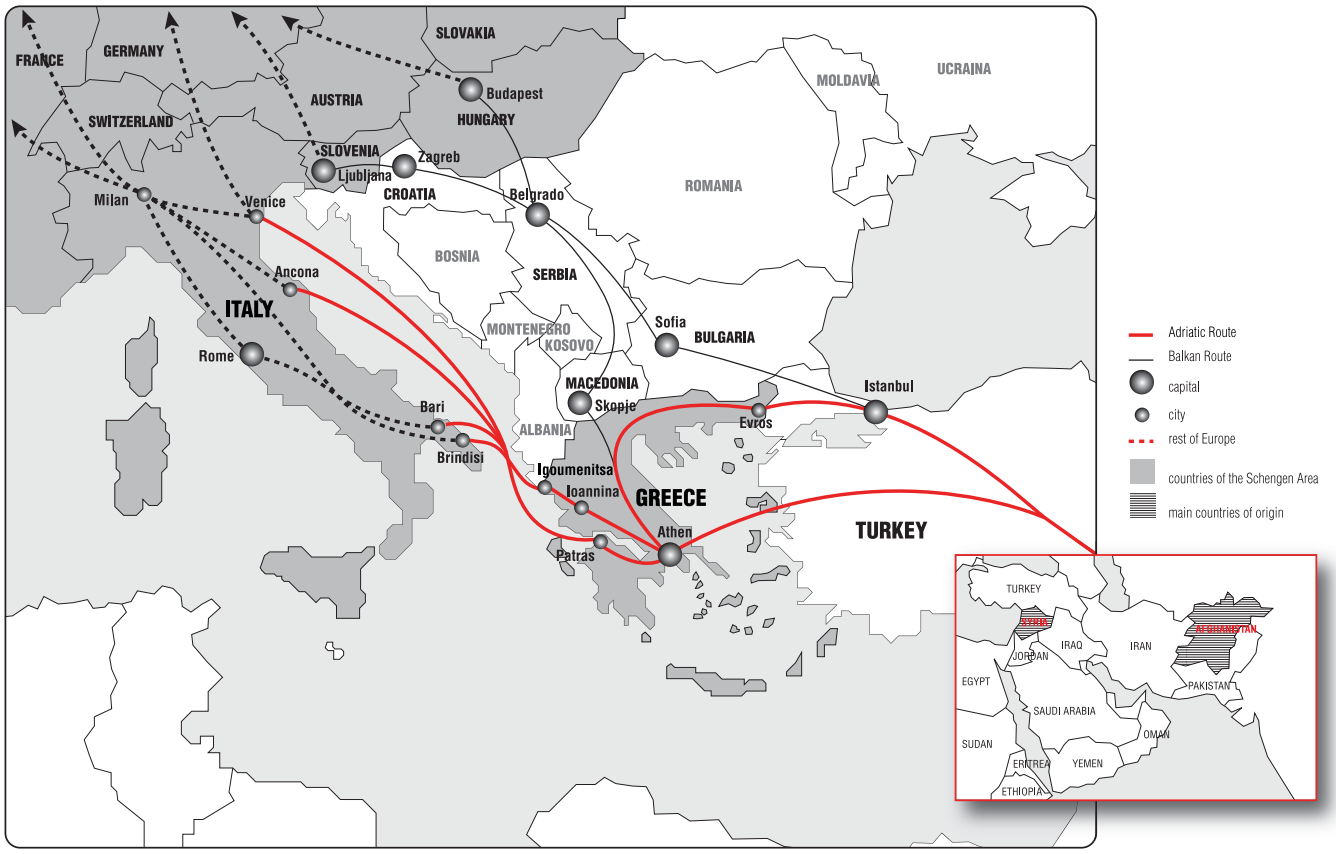
INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the divide between individuals and peoples free to travel from one continent to another and those to who said option is unavailable, save at the price of huge difficulties or even their life itself, seems to grow deeper by the day.
And, if the external borders of Europe are a – frequently unsurpassable – endpoint to a long and arduous escape from the wars and violence of Asia and Africa, some migratory paths within the European Union itself have too long been synonymous with suffering and death, controlled by unscrupulous traffickers.
In 2012 alone five young Afghans lost their lives in an attempt to reach Italy from Greece, stowing away on ferries which link the two free-transit Schengen countries by way of the Adriatic Sea. On June 24th, 2012, two young Afghans about to disembark in Ancona harbor along with another fifteen of their fellow countrymen, concealed behind a false panel in a tourist bus, died of suffocation after a 26-hour journey in inhuman conditions. Another three were taken to hospital in a state of extremis. A few days later, always in Ancona harbor, an Afghan migrant was hit and killed by the very truck on which he had hidden himself during the crossing from Greece. Between May and July two Afghan citizens were found dead of suffocation aboard two trucks which disembarked in Venice.
Most newspapers refer to these events as "tragedies involving illegal immigrants", culpably omitting the fact that those who lost their lives were people escaping from war-torn countries with all the prerequisites for seeking international protection in our country. This begs the question of why, every year, several thousand potential asylum seekers within Europe (including many teenagers just out of boyhood) are forced to risk a journey which is dangerous to their health and carries a concrete risk of ending in failure.
The truth of the matter is that most of the migrants – most of whom are Afghan or Syrian nationals - intercepted by our country's border authorities in the Adriatic ports are sent back to Greece in accordance with a bilateral readmission agreement which has frequently come under fire from many human rights organizations organizations both due to its contents and the ways in which it is applied. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, for example, 90% of the 1809 irregular aliens detained at the maritime border posts of Venice, Ancona, Bari and Brindisi in 2012 was sent back to Greece by the Italian authorities. For these people, to be remanded to Greece – readmitted, according to the agreement's formal wording – means to return once again to an inhuman and degrading existence in a country on its knees due to economic hardship which is experiencing an unprecedented wave of xenophobic violence, where chances for the integration of migrants are reduced to a bare minimum and protection for asylum seekers is virtually nonexistent.
Since 2006, Medici per I Diritti Umani (MEDU) has provided assistance and socio-sanitary aid to many of the young Afghans who, having disembarked on the Adriatic coast and made their way to Rome, found only a life on the streets, with all its associated risks, to greet them. It has been only recently that a temporary first response structure near Ostiense Station was erected to provide them with assistance. Over the course of the years MEDU's doctors and operators have collected scores of eyewitness accounts from refugees, often underage, who were summarily turned away from the Adriatic ports, abused by the Greek and Italian police, persecuted in Greece by xenophobic groups and forced to endure a degrading lifestyle. Imran is from Afghanistan, and has lived in Italy since 2007. He has been granted subsidiary protection and currently works in a factory. Perfectly integrated into the fabric of our country, Imran has been a MEDU volunteer for many years, acting as a cultural mediator, and is well aware of the suffering experienced by many migrants who have just reached Rome. He too came from Greece and has given an account of how he stowed away on a truck, was beaten by the Greek police, was discovered and readmitted from Ancona harbor without being given the chance of asking for asylum, and was bullied and mocked by the Italian border police.
On the basis of this and other accounts, MEDU began an investigation in 2013 to gain a more in-depth understanding of the issue of readmission from Italy to Greece. For six months, Medici per I Diritti Umani has given medical aid to hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers in Greece and Italy, collected dozens of accounts and met and interviewed NGO staff and organizers.
The evidence which emerges from this investigation, which is collected in the report below, clearly indicates that the Adriatic border posts of our country cannot be considered "safe havens" from a human rights standpoint and that it is necessary to undertake urgent action

to guarantee the safeguarding of the migrants who manage to reach them, especially asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. This is an issue which must be addressed without delay and which calls into question our country's civic values and the European Union's true adherence to the principles of reception and protection.

If there is a *specter* which haunts this report, it is that of the European Dublin Regulation, which once again prove to be completely inadequate in protecting asylum seekers and guaranteeing a fair spread of requests for international protection among all European countries.



METHODOLOGY

The results detailed in this report are the product of an investigation undertaken by MEDU in Greece and Italy between April and September of 2013. A team made up of a coordinator, a medic and two cultural mediators carried out the first part of the investigation in Greece from April to July 2013. The team worked mainly in the city of Patras but visits were carried out in Athens, Igoumenitsa, Ioannina and Lesbos. The MEDU team worked as a mobile street unit in Patras, giving medical aid to the migrants. For every patient visited, a medical history brief was drawn up. The operators also collected accounts of the migrants' journey, their stay in Greece and any readmissions from Italy. Through the use of a detailed questionnaire, over 60 people who claimed they had been readmitted from Italy were interviewed. Additionally, MEDU's team met and interviewed the staff of the main Greek organizations involved in the care of migrants in Patras and Athens, among which were the UNHCR, Médecins Sans Frontières Greece, Médecins du Monde Greece and Praksis.

The second half of the investigation took place in Italy. Between April and September 2013, a group of MEDU volunteers (including medics and social assistants) working out of the Proximity Centre in Tor Marancia, Rome (a key primary assistance post for Afghan refugees who manage to reach Italy), while also carrying out their regular duties of social and medical aid, used a questionnaire to collate the accounts of some of the migrants staying at the shelter, who had reached Italy from Greece during 2013. Other accounts were gathered from a daycare center for unaccompanied foreign minors in Rome[1]. Overall, six in-depth interviews were carried out at the two centers with migrants, two of which were minors who claimed to have been previously readmitted to Greece from Italy.

Between July and September, MEDU interviewed NGO staff who, in accordance with the dispositions of the local Prefectures, were carrying out social and legal assistance to migrants at the Venice, Ancona, Bari and Brindisi frontier checkpoints[2]. Additionally, several meetings with staff members of the Venice and Ancona Prefectures, who were asked by Medici per I Diritti Umani to carry out – for a limited time – medical aid for migrants detained at the ports in order to assess their healthcare needs and establish the need for longer-term commitments. At the time of the finalizing of this report, the Venice prefecture had not yet replied, while the Ancona Prefecture refused on the grounds that there was no real need for medical aid beyond that already being offered by the Ambulance services alongside the Border Force[3].

MEDU staff also requested permission to carry out interviews with the officials in charge of the Border Force operating within the Adriatic harbors, as well as with the Central Director of Immigration and Border Force. Said requests never received any answer. The data relating to migrant readmissions from Italy to Greece was provided by the Ministry of the Interior. Medu also handed out a questionnaire to the four main shipping companies which carry out passenger transport from Greece to Italy. Only one company replied.

Overall, then, MEDU has collected the eyewitness accounts of 66 migrants who claimed to have been readmitted to Greece from Italy. Since some migrants claimed to have been readmitted multiple times, a total of 102 readmissions was noted. Of these, 49 allegedly took place in 2013 and 26 involved unaccompanied minors.

All of the migrants we interviewed were informed of the purposes of this investigation and the possibility that their testimony might be made public. The interviewees were provided with no incentive in exchange for their accounts. The interviews were carried out individually, or, in the case of families, in a collective fashion, and took place in those locations were the migrants were temporarily residing (such as, for example, abandoned buildings in Greece or at the Tor Marancia center in Rome) or at aid stations run by NGOs. To protect the identity of the interviewees, the published accounts in this report use initials rather than full names.

1 Project Civico Zero Daycare for Minors.

2 These services are guaranteed by art. 11, comma 6, D. LGS n. 286/98.

3 Letter from Vice-Prefect Calcagnini dated October 3, 2013.

SUMMARY

When the ferry arrived at Bari harbour and the truck where we were hidden was unloaded, some policemen discovered us. We were handcuffed and immediately turned around and placed on the same ship we had arrived on. It seemed as though such a procedure was routine for the police, something they did on a daily basis. They didn't even look us in the eye. We tried to explain to them that we were Syrian, but we had neither the time nor the chance to ask for asylum in Italy, never mind being informed of that option. It was like we didn't exist.
M., 24 years old, Syria[4]

Every year several thousand migrants – usually fleeing war or persecution – leave Greek harbours and attempt to reach Italy and the rest of Europe by stowing away on the ships which cross the Adriatic. Every year, the vast majority of aliens discovered at the moment of disembarkation in the harbours of Venice, Ancona, Bari and Brindisi are sent back to Greece by the Italian authorities on the basis of a readmission treaty signed by the two countries. Although the raw numbers of this phenomenon seem to have shrunk due to a variety of factors in the past few years, the Adriatic Route remains a continuing problem both due to the weight of human suffering, not to mention the risk to the migrants' life, and for the serious issues it raises for Italy, Greece and the entire European Union in terms of the inadequacy of their safeguarding of basic human rights, particularly of unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers. Even in 2013, according to eyewitness accounts collected by MEDU, the majority of migrants travels hidden underneath trucks or inside containers loaded onto the vessels, while a smaller number of souls attempts the journey utilizing false papers provided by traffickers in exchange for vast sums of money.

The data and conclusions of this report are based on an investigation undertaken by Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU) in Greece and Italy between April and September 2013, with the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the problem of readmissions to Greece from Italian ports, and the possible violations of the migrants' basic human rights contained therein. A MEDU team has collected the direct testimonies of 66 migrants who declared they had been readmitted to Greece from Italy. As some migrants indicated that they had been denied entry multiple times, a total of 102 readmissions were documented, of which 45 allegedly took place in 2013, and 26 of which involved unaccompanied minors. MEDU operators also interviewed and met with various NGO staff, experts and government employees.

A continuing problem

The official data from the Ministry of the Interior indicates a significant decrease, over the last few years, of the number of irregular migrants apprehended by the Italian authorities in the four Adriatic ports of Venice, Ancona, Bari and Brindisi: 1809 in 2012 and 619 in the first semester of 2013. However, the number of migrants remanded to Greece within the same period (2334 in 2011, 1606 in 2012 and 529 in the first semester of 2013) indicates how the practice of readmission is consolidated and systematic: almost 90% of foreigners apprehended was remanded to Greece.

Forced migrants, especially of Syrian and Afghan nationality, are by far the largest group among those who attempt to travel the Adriatic Route. In the majority of cases, these are individuals who possess all the prerequisites for requesting international protection. If we analyse the data provided by migrants who claimed to MEDU they were remanded to Greece from Italy in 2013, 29 out of 36 were of Syrian or Afghan origin. The other nationalities represented were South Sudan, Eritrea, Iran and Sudan.

I come from Syria. I was about to graduate in Economics when the regime began to recruit young men and students into the army. I didn't want to kill anyone, so I ran away. My family is still there, in Aleppo. Two days ago my house was bombed and part of my kitchen destroyed. Fortunately there was no one inside.
M., 24 years old, Syria[5]

4 M.'s testimony is part of a larger interview given by the young man on July 1st, 2013 in Athens.

5 This statement is part of a larger interview given by M. In Athens on July 1st, 2013.

The socio-legal aid in the Italian ports: an half-service

A ferryboat arriving in the Italian port of Ancona (May 2013)

From the official data detailing the first half of 2013 we can see that only half of the aliens detained at the Adriatic frontier posts was offered access to social and legal aid, as required by Italian legislation and provided by caregiving organizations present in all ports in line with the dispositions of the local Prefectures. This issue appears especially serious in those ports where caregiving NGOs have a reduced footprint. The reduced operating times for assistance and information services offered to migrants, and the fact that said operating times frequently clash with shipping timetables, means that approximately half of the aliens detained upon disembarkation deal exclusively with border patrol police or ancillary personnel. Thus, a crucial service for unaccompanied minors or asylum seekers is severely limited in the majority of Adriatic ports.

The slim budgets available to caregiving organizations – further reduced by the Prefectures between 2012 and 2013 – affect the quality and effectiveness of basic aid services by adversely affecting the number of staff the NGOs are able to hire. Additionally, assistance and information services throughout the ports is further compromised due to the extremely limited timescales available to NGO staff to carry out interviews with migrants, and by the lack of suitable locations for said interviews. In the absence of clear directives from the Ministry of the Interior, the four ports apply their own, frequently very different, procedures that are ultimately inadequate in terms of the access provided to the docks for organizations in charge of social and legal assistance.

The aforementioned issues have been amply highlighted by the 102 cases of readmission documented by MEDU. All the migrants, save one, declared they were unable to meet with any NGO staff and were not informed of their basic rights. An interpreter was only present alongside security forces in 5% of cases. Thus, it appears evident that the migrants were de facto denied access to the process which might have led to their certification as refugees.

> *All three times they turned us away they never asked us for our personal information, or explained what was happening to us in a language we could understand, because there was no interpreter and we met no lawyers or anyone from any institution other than the Police.*
> H., N. and I., 38, 28 e 19 years old, Syria[6]

Summary readmissions continue

A room inside an abandoned factory used as an house in front of the new port of Patras (June 2013)

Readmissions from the Adriatic ports to Greece, which the Ministry of the Interior confirms it undertakes regularly, seem to be carried out summarily and with a grave disregard for the migrants' basic human rights by the Italian authorities, especially in the case of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. According to declarations made by the Ministry of the Interior, readmissions allegedly take place in accordance with the bilateral readmission agreement signed by Italy and Greece in 1999 – which, among other things, pledges both parties to respecting both the migrants' human rights and the relevant articles of the Geneva Convention on refugees. On the basis of the eyewitness accounts collected by MEDU, however, readmissions are undertaken in 80% of cases within a few hours, with the migrants being placed in the care of the vessel's Captain and returning to Greece on the same ship on which they arrived. This procedure is not countenanced in the

6 This family's account is part of a larger interview given on June 22nd, 2013 at Ioannina.

1999 bilateral agreement, and, as already observed by other independent organisations, appears to be more in line with a "rejection at the border" procedure as laid out by Article 10 of the *Testo Unico sull'immigrazione* (Unified Document on immigration), even though this is in open contradiction of the fact that rejection procedure cannot take place on the internal border of two Schengen nations (such as both Italy and Greece are), but only in situations where an alien must be remanded to a non-Schengen country.

The numerous accounts collected both in Greece and Italy clearly indicate that the Italian border authorities continue to carry out migrant readmissions without them having had the chance of accessing services which might enable them to ask for international protection or, in the case of unaccompanied minors, the correct procedures for establishing their effective status as minors. According to the migrants, the readmission process takes place within an extremely short timeframe, without the migrants being given occasion to familiarize themselves with their rights or avail themselves of legal counselling offered by NGOs, and in almost cases without having access to an interpreter. It is worth noting that in eight out of ten cases the migrants interviewed by MEDU declared that they had, to no avail, attempted to communicate to the Italian authorities their wish to seek international protection or to remain in Italy for fear of what might occur to them upon repatriation. None of the 66 readmitted migrants were given any information with regards to the procedures they were subjected to, nor were they notified of any formal written instance of readmission, duly motivated and translated, which would have enabled them to appeal. In this regard, readmission offers even fewer safeguards than "rejection at the border" procedure.

Due to their readmission to Greece, migrants are once again exposed, in addition to the risk of being subjected to xenophobic and racist persecution, to the serious violations towards aliens present upon its territory (particularly asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors) of which the Greek government is guilty. MEDU's team were able to directly verify the severe shortcomings presented by the living and sanitary quarters which many migrants, asylum seekers and underage aliens are forced to endure in the cities of Patras, Athens and Ioannina. In addition to the very real possibility of being subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment, migrants readmitted to Greece run the risk of being arbitrarily repatriated to their country of origin, i.e. Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan or Eritrea.

When the ship was making for port,
the ferry workers found me.
They had blue and white t-shirts on.
They might have been police, but I'm not sure.
They never let me off the boat.
They handcuffed me and left me in a room on the ground level.
J., 18 years old, Afghanistan[7]

Establishing underage status: an inadequate and oft-ignored procedure

According to the eyewitness accounts collected by MEDU, the Italian border authorities frequently readmitted migrants who had declared their status as unaccompanied minors to Greece without giving them the opportunity to access the procedures that might have enabled them to prove said status. In the few cases in which the procedures were carried out, these were found to be completely inadequate when compared to the international standards. To this end, it is worth remembering that both Italian and international legislation expressly forbid the repatriation of foreign unaccompanied minors. Additionally, the official stance of the Italian government requires "the benefit of the doubt" be given to those who declare themselves to be minors, meaning they must be considered such, and given reception, until such a moment as their age can be appropriately verified.

During the course of our investigation, MEDU collected the stories of 15 migrants who declared themselves to be unaccompanied minors when faced with readmission. Some of these were refused entry multiple times, bringing the total refusals of entry for unaccompanied minors up to 26, of which 16 took place in the first 9 months of 2013. In over 80% of cases the migrants were immediately sent back to Greece without being granted access to the procedures for the verification of their status as minors, despite having attempted to declare themselves as such (all interviewees being between 15 and 17 years of age). In no case were the migrants offered access to legal assistance, and only in two occasions was an interpreter present.

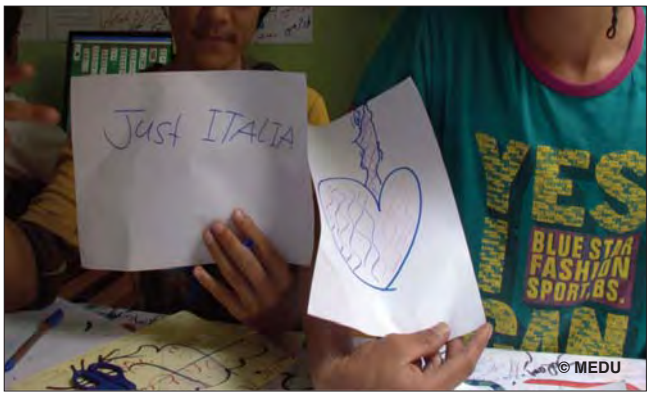
They deported me from Venice twice.
When they found me,
they put me directly aboard an outbound vessel.
The police wrote my name on a piece of paper and sent me back.

7 J.'s statement is part of a larger interview given in Rome on October 10th, 2013.

There was no translator.
I told the police that I was a minor,
but they said nothing.
When I arrived in Greece
I was put into the harbour jail.
They only kept me for one night,
because I'm a minor.
N., 17 years old, Afghanistan[8]

In the four cases in which the Italian authorities undertook to verify the migrants' age, the only methodology applied was that of a radiological examination of the wrist. This is the main, if not the only, method utilized by the Italian authorities in the Adriatic border posts, a method which is subject to very high margins of error, does not conform to international standards and extremely questionable from a medical ethical standpoint since it is applied with no therapeutic aim. Additionally, both rejected migrants and NGO staff operating in Italian ports are in agreement over the fact that in no case is a copy of the certificate stating his presumed age, alongside the methodology used and the relative margin for error, presented to the migrants themselves.

There was no translator.
I talked to the harbour police using hand signals.
I tried to make them understand that
I wanted to stay in Italy.
Using gestures, I tried to explain I was 15.
They used hand signals too, to tell me
"You're 20, you have to go back to Greece".
M., 15 years old, Afghanistan[9]



A written and a drawing made by two underage boys, readmitted in Greece as adult without being subjected to any medical examination (Patras, May 2013)

The consequences of the Dublin Regulation

According to the testimonies provided by the NGO staff operating in the Italian ports, due to the current European legislation on the right to asylum a significant number of migrants detained upon entry, though needful of international protection, seeks to avoid asking for asylum in Italy and prefers instead to be sent back to Greece. This occurs because, according to the Dublin Regulation, appealing for international protection in Italy precludes the migrant from seeking it in the European country which represents his final destination. This entails a sort of ping pong effect between the Italian and Greek coasts of the Adriatic, the migrants preferring to be readmitted to Greece in order to then attempt to travel towards those countries in Northern Europe more likely to offer asylum and social integration, rather than seeking international protection in Italy, which is seen as a transit-only country without any real prospect of integration.

On the other hand, while this dynamic is present, it cannot justify the cases of summary readmission proven by this report. To this end it is worth remembering once again that the migrants interviewed by MEDU declared, in 80% of cases, their desire to request international protection or to remain in Italy due to fear of what might happen to them upon their return. In three cases the migrants even resorted to self-harm in an attempt to avoid readmission.

Violence against migrants

Those migrants who are readmitted to Greece from Italy run the risk of being victims of acts of violence and inhumane and degrading treatment, both during the readmission process itself and during the return leg of their journey. Based on eyewitness accounts collected by MEDU operators, one in five migrants were victims of violence, which in 60% of cases took the shape of physical abuse and degrading treatment, carried out by the Italian police. In the remaining 40% of cases, the acts of violence were perpetrated by the security personnel on board on the vessels or by the Greek police once they had reached Greece. In 10 cases documented during the investigation, the return voyage of the migrants took place without ensuring the minimum standards necessary for a dignified voyage.

A friend opened a truck's door and I got in.
It was very hot inside.
After three hours, I began to beat against the
walls because I felt I was suffocating.

8 N.'s testimony, in which he claims to be 17 years of age, is part of a larger interview given on May 20th, 2013 in Patras.

9 M.'s statement, in which he claims to be 15, is part of a larger interview given on October 1st, 2013, in Rome.

The truck driver opened the door,
saw me and told me to keep calm,
that he'd get me some water.
He came back shortly after with two men
wearing Greek police uniform.
They pulled me off the truck and began to hit me
with their fists and boots.
Today I went to the hospital for x-rays.
For now I have bandages on my knee
and left arm and they've given me painkillers.
H., 17 years old, Afghanistan[10]

This investigation has further documented the acts of violence which migrants in Greece are subject to. Of the 185 migrants visited by MEDU's team in the temporary accommodation at Patras, 40% claimed to have been subjected to violence by the police (84% of cases) and xenophobic groups (16% of cases). Eighteen migrants, seven of which were minors of Afghan nationality, still bore the signs of the abuse they had suffered upon their bodies at the time of our visit.

S. in the hospital of Patras with a leg in plaster (July 2013)

I was sleeping in the abandoned factory
where I use to live.
The police woke up us early in the morning and
beat us with some black sticks.
I was trying to run away and I jumped
from the second floor of the factory and
I broke my leg.
S., 25 years old, Sudan[11]

10 H.'s account, in which he claims to be 17, is part of a longer interview given on May 15th, 2013 in Patras.

11 S.'s account was given in the open clinic of Médecins du Monde in Patras on July 4th, 2013.

Conclusions and recommendations

A Sudanese man who lives in an abandoned factory in front of the new port of Patras (June 2013).

Though Italy has the right to regulate access to its territory, the policies employed to combat irregular immigration must nonetheless respect the basic human rights of migrants, asylum seekers and particularly vulnerable subjects such as foreign unaccompanied minors. **When it comes to readmissions from Adriatic ports, the numerous and detailed accounts collected during the course of this investigation prove how Italy systematically violates some of the basic precepts of its own national and international law, such as the ban on direct and indirect refoulement, on exposing migrants to the risk of inhumane and degrading treatment, and on collective expulsion.**

From the accounts of the readmitted migrants – and also from the interviews conducted with NGO staff operating in the Adriatic ports and analysis of the data provided by the Ministry of the Interior – there emerges a **systematic disregard for the right to appeal, to information, to access to interpreters and legal aid, and to the procedures leading to the establishment of underage status.**

Medici per i Diritti Umani therefore asks the Italian government to immediately cease its summary readmissions to Greece and that all migrants who reach the Adriatic ports be given real access to national territory and protection. In particular, the chance to effectively gain access to the process for obtaining international protection, with the aid of information and socio-legal services provided by NGOs capable of meeting with all the aliens detained and operating with full independence and suitable means.

Additionally, the "superior interest of minors" must be guaranteed, all migrants who claim to be unaccompanied migrants being treated as such until the completion of the procedures for the establishing of their

age, which should only take place as a last resort, should severe and founded doubts exist in relation to the age declared by the alleged minor. The procedures for verifying a migrant's age should be carried out in line with the most advanced techniques, with a responsible adult present, following a multidisciplinary methodology conforming to international standards and with the exclusive use of non-invasive medical tests.

In any case, humane and dignified treatment of the migrants must always be guaranteed at the moment of detainment and, if necessary, readmission, as well as during any return leg of their journey.

In general terms, the Italian government should suspend the transfer of asylum seekers from Italy to Greece on the basis of the Dublin Regulation until Greece is capable of providing an asylum system and temporary stay infrastructure in line with European Union standards.

The European Commission should evaluate whether the readmission agreement between Italy and Greece conforms to EU law, especially with regards to basic human rights.

Medici per I Diritti Umani also believes a further reform of the Dublin Regulation by the European Union is necessary in order to ensure an adequate division of the burdens associated with the examination of requests for international protection among member states, giving preferential treatment to those factors which may connect asylum seekers with specific countries, rather than the current system of letting these fall upon the country of disembarkation. In this regard, the modifications laid out in the Dublin Regulation III, which will come into effect in 2014, do not seem sufficient in preventing the issues highlighted by this report, which have led and continue to lead to dramatic consequences for forced migrants attempting the Adriatic Route.

**A written in Arabic in front of the new port of Patras:
"Greece, a paradise for tourists, hell for migrants" (July 2013)**

DATA SUMMARY TABLE

66 eyewitness accounts were collected during the course of the investigation (60 in Greece and 6 in Italy) of migrants who declared they had been readmitted to Greece from Italy. As some migrants claimed to have been turned away more than once, **a total of 102 readmissions was documented** (95 in Greece, 7 in Italy) of which 49 (42 in Greece and 7 in Italy) took place in 2013.

The **nationality** of the interviewees was listed as follows: Afghanistan (30%), Syria (26%), Sudan (14%), Eritrea (12%), Algeria (4,5%), South Sudan (3%), Iran (3%), Tunisia (3%), Other (4,5%).

The **departure ports from Greece** were Patras (68), Igoumenitsa (32), Corinth (1) and in one case the interviewee could not name their departure port. The **Italian readmission** ports were Ancona (32), Brindisi (27), Venice (23), Bari (16) and, in four cases, the migrants could not say what their destination might have been.

In all but one of the 102 cases of readmission documented, the migrants claimed not to have been aware of any NGO presence, nor did they receive information or legal aid. According to their accounts, **interpreters were present in only six instances.**

In eight out of ten cases, the readmitted migrants claimed to have uselessly attempted to inform the Italian authorities of their desire to seek international protection or to remain in Italy out of fear of what might happen to them if repatriated.

In 85% of cases the readmitted migrants claimed to have been placed aboard the same ship they had arrived on and were sent back to Greece within hours of their disembarking. In 15 cases the migrants were detained in Italy within the same vessels on which they had arrived or in a secure location in port.

No paperwork was provided to the 66 migrants regarding the procedures followed to initiate their readmission, or official notice of the same.

One in five of the readmitted migrants were victims of violence. 60% of said acts of violence were allegedly carried out by the Italian Police, including physical violence, abusive and degrading treatment; the remaining 40% was carried out by the vessels' security personnel or the Greek police upon readmission.

In ten instances, the return leg of the migrants' journey took place in circumstances which failed to adhere to the minimum standards of human dignity.

22 individuals (33%) of the 66 migrants sent back to Greece declared they were minors upon readmission. Of these, **15 (23%) were unaccompanied minors**, with 7 being accompanied by their family. Several of the 15 minors who declared they were unaccompanied minors upon readmission were turned away more than once. **Thus, we have 26 cases of readmission of unaccompanied minors**, of which 16 took place in the first nine months of 2013.

An attempt to verify the age of individuals self-declaring as unaccompanied minors took place in only 4 out of 26 cases. In all instances, the only procedure followed was wrist radiography. In no instance was any certificate provided to the migrants indicating what procedure had been followed and their consequent estimated age.

40% of the 185 migrants visited by MEDU in the temporary accommodation in Patras claimed they had been subjected to violence from the Greek police (84% of cases) and xenophobic groups (16% of cases). In 18 instances, the patients still carried clear evidence of trauma to the upper and lower limbs at the time of our visit, which they claimed was the result of attempting to shield themselves from the police's assaults.

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