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At sea:

- ***Times of Malta***, October 2nd, 2020, AFM allegedly spotted towing distressed vessel in Maltese SAR zone

Exiles aboard a boat in distress have been assisted by a commercial vessel in the Maltese SAR zone. The Ambra spent 12 hours monitoring the situation until an AFM boat was spotted. According to the Ambra's crew, the AFM tried to repair the engine, failed and then began towing the boat northward to an 'unspecified destination'. After the Ambra left the scene, Alarmphone voiced a 'fear of push-backs' to Libya.

- ***Times of Malta***, October 5th, 2020, Armed Forces rescue 38 migrants drifting in Maltese waters

The 38 people assisted by the Ambra commercial vessel have been rescued and disembarked in Malta by the AFM. As most of the people on board are Moroccan, Malta is seeking to process their asylum claims as quickly as possible so that the authorities can start their deportation to their country of origin. This plan to quickly process the asylum applications is in line with the New Pact on Migration and Asylum introduced by the European Commission in September 2020. One of the propositions of this new pact is to accelerate the repatriation of failed asylum seekers by setting a 12-week time limit to process applications of asylum seekers coming from countries with an acceptance rate lower than 20%.

- ***Infomigrants***, October 14th, 2020, La quarantaine de rescapés d'une embarcation autorisés à débarquer à Malte [FR]

Alarmphone reported the situation of 43 people in distress in the central Mediterranean on October 11th to the Maltese RCC and MRCC Rome in view of bad weather conditions, without receiving any response. On October 13th, the ALK (a commercial vessel) reached the craft but was unable to rescue the people on board due to the said weather conditions. The exiles were eventually brought to Malta the day after probably by the AFM, as no humanitarian nor commercial vessels have been allowed to disembark rescued migrants in Malta since the Mission Lifeline was seized by the Maltese authorities in August 2019.

In detention:

- **Malta Today**, October 1st, 2020, Condemnation of insults at Italian journalist by anti-immigration supporters of Gafà

Italian journalist Nello Scavo, working with the Milanese newspaper *Avvenire*, has told an Italian court having been threatened by Neville Gafà on social media. The former Maltese OPM official, called by PM Robert Abela to coordinate the pushback of 51 people from the Maltese SAR zone to Libya last April, tweeted to Scavo ‘*Stop your dirty business. If not we will be stopping you*’. The Italian journalist filed a criminal complaint in August about the message, which ended up being discussed in the Italian Parliament. Scavo has been placed under protection by the Italian police. In a press conference, Maltese NGO *Repubblika* affirmed its sympathy for the journalist and reminded that Neville Gafà was also implied in the harassment, intrusion, intimidation and oppression of Maltese investigation journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, murdered in a car bomb attack.

- **Times of Malta**, October 2nd, 2020, UN slams ‘shocking’ conditions for migrants in Malta

A UN Human Rights team visited Maltese detention centres for a week-long mission in September, speaking to more than 70 exiles mostly about their conditions on arrival from Libya. What emerged from these visits and dialogues are the conditions in detention centres and limited contact with the outside world (including access to lawyers) leading to self-harm and attempted suicide. The name of the detention centre isn’t revealed in the article, but one can assume that the UN team visited Safi detention centre. Even when migrants are released from detention, they suffer from a severe lack of information about their asylum claim, delays and from an important isolation from the rest of the island. The UN has therefore called for an ‘urgent action’ to tackle the ‘shocking conditions’ that migrants face both on land (in Libya and Malta) and at sea. The OHCHR also focused on the AFM alleged attempt to push back a boat to Libya and to push a boat to Lampedusa, calling for an in-depth investigation concerning ‘allegations of failure to assist people in distress at sea’.

- **Times of Malta**, October 2nd, 2020, Five jailed for 30 months after admitting to Safi detention centre riot offenses

Five men, aged between 18 and 25, have been sentenced to 30 months in jail for having been involved in a riot at Safi detention centre. They initially pleaded not guilty but changed when their case came before the courts on Friday. They were charged with voluntarily damaging third party property, causing over €2,500 in damages, taking part in an unlawful assembly of ten or more persons, for the purpose of committing an offense, refusing to obey legitimate orders, breaching the peace as well as acting as accomplices in setting a mattress on fire. No information about the private security officer who fired a gun during the riot is given.

- *Times of Malta*, October 16th, 2020, RIU and detention officers outnumbered during migrants' riot, court hears

After a 27 people-riot at Safi detention centre on September 18th, a Rapid Intervention Unit (RIU) officer stated on court having been outnumbered and underarmed during the events. While less than 30 unarmed people were demanding their freedom, the District Police, the RIU, the Special Intervention Unit, the AFM have been called as a back-up, using all their rubber bullets ammunitions. A security official fired a shot with an unlicensed weapon. Darren Bonello was granted bail a few days after the incident, denying having attempted murder. The person he shot at, Abdulrahman Abdullah Hamza, received lead pellets in his arms, legs and abdomen.

- *Times of Malta*, October 27th, 2020, Four men plead not guilty to fleeing migration centres

On Sunday 25th of October, four exiles were tracked down on a male hunt by Valletta, Hamrun district police, Rapid Intervention Unit and Immigration police. They were eventually arrested and charged with fleeing detention facilities. Two of them were also charged with breaching public peace in Valletta. They pleaded not guilty but didn't request bail.

- *Times of Malta*, October 29th, 2020, Court orders release of migrant held illegally for 144 days

An Ivorian asylum seeker, who had been illegally detained since last June, has been released by magistrate Natasha Galea Sciberras on Thursday. The magistrate pointed out that it is the seventh time that the court has had to deal with an Habeas Corpus procedure, challenging an unlawful detention of migrants in Malta. Assistant Commissioner Neville Xuereb declared that the Ivorian man wasn't and had never been detained by immigration authorities. The Superintendent of Public Health confirmed that there were no medical grounds for detention. The detainee's lawyer, Neil Falzon from aditus foundation, pointed out that 'Safi and Lyster Barracks remain packed with men who are in similar situation: detained illegally in terrible conditions'.

National policy:

- *Times of Malta*, October 9th, 2020, First national action plan against racism and xenophobia

On Friday 9 October, a public consultation was launched by the government about the first national action plan against racism and xenophobia (NAPRAX), seeking personal experiences of racism and xenophobia and submissions to fight these behaviors. Several members of the government expressed their support in various ways, as Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship Alex Muscat praised the benefits of cultural diversity on the economic prosperity of the archipelago. No mention of institutional and private violence against migrants has been made by members of the government.

- *Times of Malta*, October 23rd, 2020, PM fueling discourse ‘reminiscent of apartheid-style policies’

Maltese civil society group Repubblika presented a 17-point proposal in response to the public consultation launched by the government about NAPRAX. President Robert Aquilina pointed out the irony of the consultation, in contrast with the ‘apartheid-style policies’ that the government has been implementing in 2020, especially when decided to close national ports, suspended SAR activities, coordinated an illegal pushback of exiles to Libya, sabotaged a dinghy, threatened people in distress to leave them to die at sea (to name a few). Repubblika calls on halting cooperation with Libyan authorities, detention of exiles in ‘appalling conditions’ both offshore and on land, and on increasing integration efforts in schools. As a response to the national survey, NAPRAX points out that 87% of respondents didn’t actually report hate speech in 2016. But Repubblika accuses the government of turning a blind eye to the hate speech reality that exiles face on the island. About Lassana Cisse Souleymane’s racially-motivated murder by AFM members in April 2019, he accuses the government of being totally inactive in the pursuit of justice. He also argues that Abela’s speech in Parliament has rekindled the racist flame, when the PM insisted that Malta was full-up referring to illegal migrants coming from African, and not to their European counterparts. To sum up, if the Maltese government honestly wished to tackle racism and xenophobia on the island, the entire migration policy that has been in place for almost two decades would have to be radically overhauled.

Foreign affairs:

- *Malta Today*, October 15th, 2020, Malta authorities delighted at arrest of Libyan ‘coast-guard trafficker’ Al Bija

Abdulahman Milad, known as Bija, former commander of the Libyan coast guards in Zawiya and militia leader under the GNA, has been arrested. The UN Security Council accused him of ‘the sinking of migrant boats using firearms’ and of intercepting migrants who were then taken to a detention centre, where they were held in brutal conditions. Apparently, this news has been met positively inside Malta’s foreign office. Nonetheless, 23 powerboats destined to Libya by the Malta Customs have been captured and investigated in connection with the Libya crackdown on smugglers. Has Malta ever been shocked about Bija’s actions towards migrants at sea? This question can raise eyebrows. Let’s remind that early on 2020, the AFM has been accused of sabotaging a migrants’ boat within Malta’s SAR zone, voluntarily damaging the dinghy’s engine before leaving people drifting for days. Furthermore, Malta signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Libya to ease the coordination between the two countries, in order to multiply migrants’ *refoulements* towards Libyan detention centres.

Malta and the EU:

- *Times of Malta*, October 15th, 2020, 'Steady stream' of migrant relocations from Malta welcomed

The IOM Malta welcomed the 'steady stream' of migration relocations from Malta to France and Germany this year. Last Wednesday (14th), 81 asylum seekers have been relocated to Germany (fourth relocation flight organized to Germany this year). In September 2020, 89 people were relocated from Malta to France. According to the IOM, these relocations are in line with the 2019 Malta Declaration. Relocations of groups of single mothers and young children are planned for the coming weeks.

- *Politico*, October 20th, 2020, EU launches legal action against Malta, Cyprus over 'golden passports'
- *Times of Malta*, October 22nd, 2020, European Parliament debates 'golden passports'

A plenary debate in the European Parliament focused on 'golden passports' in Malta and Cyprus, with the majority of speakers asking for the end of EU citizenship traded as a commodity. MEPs stressed the inherent risks of money laundering, tax evasion and corruption linked to this practice. They also stated that this Cypriot and Maltese scheme could have negative consequences upon other EU member states, eroding mutual trust and undermining common values. The European Commission (EC) launched infringement procedures against Malta regarding these scheme. In an official statement, the EC said it 'considers that the granting by Malta and Cyprus of their nationality - and thereby EU citizenship - in exchange for a pre-determined payment or investment and without a genuine link with [these countries] is not compatible with the principle of sincere cooperation enshrined in Article 4 (3) of the Treaty on European Union'.

- *Times of Malta*, October 21st, 2020, Malta won't budge on migration until there is an EU pact - Robert Abela

On Wednesday 21st of October, Prime Minister Robert Abela stated in Parliament that Malta wouldn't budge from its 'hard-line stance on migration' until the EU agrees on a migration pact. Calling for a 'burden-sharing' scheme for years, the Maltese government is openly blackmailing the European Union, claiming that the island is 'full-up' and can't accept any more 'irregular migrants'. Moreover, the country is urging the EU to follow its geopolitical and economic negotiations with war-torn Libya, presented as a 'trusted business partner'.

- *Times of Malta*, October 26th, 2020, Government welcomes EU acknowledgment of increased pressure by NGO vessels

In reaction to the European Commission's Pact on Migration and Asylum introduced last month, the Maltese Home Affairs Ministry has welcomed the 'EU's acknowledgement of the increased pressure brought about by NGO search-and-rescue operations' on coastal States as well as a 'number of positive measures' like a mandatory burden sharing, cooperation with countries of transit and a greater emphasis on returns. Malta has been wanting to deport rejected asylum seekers for many years, without having the necessary diplomatic tools. While the Maltese wish to create a *de facto* European solidarity at disembarkation is understandable, here the government is throwing the stone at the very stakeholders who assume its responsibility on its behalf in the central Mediterranean, instead of throwing it at member states that refuse relocations to their own country. By choosing the wrong target, Malta is expressing a clear political choice. One may then wonder if, more than a European solidarity, Malta is expecting support from Brussels in exempting from its international and European obligations both in its SAR region and on land.