



Stop Mare Mortum condemns the criminal action of Frontex, impeding rescue operations on the island of Lesbos

Last Wednesday morning a group of activists from Stop Mare Mortum — a united platform in solidarity with refugees, based in Catalonia — returned from the island of Lesbos where could see, among other things, the rescue work carried out there by volunteers. We were also able to talk to many of the associations that give urgent assistance and they explained to us that Frontex, the European border control agency, restricts its role to observing the area and only helps to rescue boats at sea when they sink. In fact, under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, it has the duty to render assistance. They also carry out functions, jointly with the Greek police, of checking people who arrive to decide who has the right to continue their journey and who doesn't, according to their nationality.

We had just got back when we received news — and these reports were confirmed by contacts we had made on the island — that on Wednesday morning, following several days of strong storms, there was a significant arrival of boats. This time, Frontex changed its usual observer role and decided to intervene. They prevented ProActiva Open Arms — an NGO from the Catalan city of Badalona, composed of volunteer lifeguards from across Spain, which carries out rescues on the beach and in the sea — from approaching the boats that were adrift at different points north of Lesbos so as to rescue the people on them. ProActiva cite a specific case: in an emergency concerning a boat off the coast of Skala Sikamineas, they were not given permission to act and “after a long wait and many attempts [to get authorisation], we decided to start the operation. At that moment, the authorities decided to take charge. But too much time

had gone by, and it was very cold.” As a result of this delay, a girl of nearly five died of hypothermia before reaching land, and a woman of 44 with hypothermia died following a heart attack.

To stabilise severe hypothermia, immediate intervention is required. The attitude of Frontex in this case is responsible for these two deaths, as it is for many others that are caused continuously along the borders of Europe. While the states of the European Union argue about what to do with refugees, while they say they are concerned to preserve values that have never really respected, their border control agency helps reduce the refugee problem in the most drastic way: causing them to die at sea. Official Europe has been turning its back on the problem, in effect, until it came knocking on their doors. Now the bartering continues, with the auctioning of human lives and the evasion of responsibilities.

This Europe, so often responsible for tragedies in other countries, with its neo-colonial and warlike foreign policy, does not represent us. For that reason, we will not tire of repeating, “For the dignity of Europe, for respect for human rights, no more deaths in the Mediterranean.”