



## Migration at Europe's External Border — Fortress Europe?

## Sur-Place-Dialogue Italy: Voices from the Border

**Your Contact**

Janna Weßels (Project leader)  
Conrebbersweg 63, 26789 Leer  
Tel. +61 (0)481264360  
jannawessels@hotmail.com  
www.toenissteiner-studentenforum.de

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Dear readers,

the boats in which thousands of refugees reach Italy's borders every year have become an icon of "Fortress Europe". In this context, Italy has repeatedly been the focus of the media and criticism alike in the past years. The recent tragic events in the Mediterranean re-emphasize the contradictions of a Europe that is committed to tolerance and equality, and in many ways has a role model position in these regards, but at the same time hermetically seals off its external borders. The "Sur-Place Dialogue Italy" of the Students' Forum within the Tönissteiner Kreis addresses this salient issue and analyses it on the ground in cooperation with Italian students. The goal is to create public awareness of the situation of migrants and refugees through discussing with those affected at the border, as well as with activists and NGO representatives in Italy.

The Italy Sur-Place Dialogue marks the third phase of the project "Migration at Europe's External Border – Fortress Europe?", which started in 2008 with a project focusing on the EU external border between Spain and Morocco. In 2012, the second part focused on the border between Greece and Turkey. The third phase in 2014 will focus on the EU's external border in Italy. You can find more information and results of the first two phases on our web site at <https://toenissteiner-studentenforum.de/projekte/fortress-europe>.

The tragic death of more than 330 asylum seekers off the Italian coast in early October 2013, when two boats capsized within two weeks, has led to a brief media and political turmoil. More fundamental policy responses and debates with longer term objectives for solutions failed to materialize, however. Italy is an important receiving country for migrants seeking refuge or trying to start a new life in the EU. A majority chooses the dangerous route from North Africa via the Mediterranean Sea. The number of incoming migrants fell drastically from approx. 36,000 in 2008 after Italy established its so-called push-back policy. The push-back policy mainly consists of the Italian coast guard intercepting refugee boats in the open sea and sending them back to North Africa, following an arrangement with Libya. This mostly happened without considering the refugees' need for protection, which violates the principle of "non-refoulement". This principle is part of customary international law and bans the forced extradition or rejection of asylum seekers and recognised refugees to states in which their lives or freedom would be endangered. In early 2012, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) stopped this policy with its decision in *Hirsi Jamaa v. Italy*, after which no more push-backs were observed. The Arab Spring and the political instability it brought in the North African states led to another drastic increase to more than 56,000 migrants from North Africa in 2011 - and disasters such as that at the beginning of October continue to occur regularly.

## Goals

The aim of the project is to make the "voices from the border" heard—to give those affected an opportunity to present their own views of the situation in an unbiased manner. We plan to do this through modern media such as video, voice recordings and photography. The main focus will be on conversations with refugees, border policemen, municipalities, NGOs and others who are affected directly. The project adds to existing research by

comparing and contrasting the perspectives of those affected with those of the Italian and EU officials. The political and legal conditions will be analysed in conversations with representatives of several institutions during prior visits to Brussels and Rome.

The various viewpoints, experiences and perspectives will be presented in a blog, which will contrast the interviews, photographs, videos and sound recordings from the border with the political and legal situation and the official positions in European and domestic politics. By conducting this project together with Italian students, it becomes a joint German-Italian look at the "voices from the border". The blog will either be set up independently or become part of an already existing web site of a foundation or an organisation promoting historical and political education.

We believe that, apart from on the currently ubiquitous debate about the Euro, the creation of a common and pluralistic European polity—and with it, the success of the project to unite the peoples of Europe—crucially depends on how the community treats those who seek asylum and admission at its borders. This not only requires a joint ability to solve problems among the member states, but also innovative perspectives on civil society. Our young, internationally-oriented and interdisciplinary team would like to contribute to the latter.

## Foci

As previous Sur-Place Dialogues, the German-Italian dialogue is to deal with a single central question: How do the experiences and opinions at the border reflect on the "Fortress Europe" policy? The Greek Sur-Place Dialogue showed, amongst other things, that the Greek port of Patras is in fact an intra-European front-line, along which migrants and border policemen face each other in daily confrontations:

„In this sense, Patras represents the clash between a unified Europe and national interests, a clash that is played out 'on the back of 1500 Greek policemen' ... who are required to close ostensibly open borders, and asylum seekers and migrants fleeing persecution and seeking the rule of law: what the EU stands for is denied to them."

*(cited from: Nele Weßels and Janna Weßels: 'Trapped in Greece – A Report about Experiences of Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Border Policemen during the Early Weeks of the Operation Xenios Zeus', 3(1) Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration 2013, 7–16, available at <http://oxmofm.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/OxMo-Vol.-3-No.-1.pdf>)*

The Sur-Place Dialogue 2014 will study whether this front-line also extends into Italy and thus directly builds upon the two previous Sur-Place Dialogues in Spain and Greece.

The project has three foci: firstly, Italy will be analysed as a first port of entry for so-called "boat people". Unlike Greece, where the majority of migrants and asylum seeker currently makes their way over the Greek-Turkish land border or the border river Evros, Italy as a first port of entry can only be reached by plane or via the dangerous water route over Mediterranean Sea. Central questions that will be discussed in this part are the situation at ground after the end of the push-back policy, how inhabitants of Lampedusa and Sicily think about the current situation of the "boat people" and what role the EU and the Dublin II Regulation play in this regard.

Secondly, the refugee issues in Greece and Italy are tightly interwoven. Most asylum seekers try to escape precarious living conditions in Greece and to reach other European countries via Italy. In order to do so, they usually take the ferry from Patras to one of the Italian ports. The second focus will therefore be on Italy as a target and transit country for migrants and asylum seeker from Greece. Research in Greece has painted a desperate picture of the port of Patras: the daily confrontations between the border police, searching ferries, and migrants, trying to find new ways to escape Greece, forms a grotesque setting that leads to desperation on both sides. Although most member states have stopped returning refugees to Greece due to the abysmal living conditions there, a recent Human Rights Watch report, "Turned Away", showed that Italy returns refugees and

migrants, who have been spotted on ferries, to Greece without any examination of their individual cases. The situation in the ports of Italy will be analysed using Bari as an example.

The third focus will be on the living conditions of refugees in Italy, with particular attention to asylum seekers who are repatriated under the Dublin II Regulation. Unlike Greece, Italy is reported as having a reasonably functional system to deal with asylum seekers. Approximately 50 percent of all applications are accepted and most asylum seekers have access to the asylum procedure. However, after that, those granted protection are left to themselves: studies have shown that refugees in Italy live in absolute poverty and suffer under homelessness, unemployment and lack of access to health care. After arriving in Italy, there are two types of facilities accepting refugees: Reception centres, named CARA (Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo), only offer very short-term accommodation for refugees. They are mostly located in Southern Italy and are responsible for identification and initiating the asylum procedure. Afterwards, and if they are lucky, the refugees receive a place in a SPRAR (Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati), part of a project that supports those granted protection for normally less than six months by providing accommodation in dormitories or Italian language courses. After these six months, the refugees are, in theory, able to make a life for themselves. However, even in 2010 the project only had capacities for about one third of all those granted asylum, and it does not offer sufficient support: the language skills acquired by the refugees during the six months are normally not enough to subsequently take up employment. Finding a job is even further complicated by the economic crisis and the already very high unemployment rate in Italy. Most refugees therefore face unemployment and homelessness after the SPRAR project, with no further support. Their mere subsistence is not ensured, and their situation is not always in accordance with the standards prescribed by EU law. Time and again, demands to suspend the repatriation of refugees according to the Dublin II Regulations are therefore heard, as has already been done in the case of Greece. Denmark, for example, has suspended deportations of those in particular need of protection to Italy since 2012, and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) recently ruled Germany to stop the deportation of a Somali family. Reports about the desperate living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy will be checked and reflected in conversations with affected people as “voices from the border”.

In Greece the tension between solidarity and responsibility between the EU member states in times of economic and financial crisis becomes particularly clear. Our research has shown that in Greece Dublin II is perceived as a burden with which the Greeks feel left to themselves by the EU. Dublin II is tantamount to a transfer of all responsibility to the member states with external EU borders and *de facto* leads to the ‘repatriation’ of numerous refugees to the EU border states. The reform of Dublin II in Greece was the most common and urgent demand. This Sur-Place Dialogue is intended to show to what extent those findings also apply to Italy.

## Organisation

The project is organised group of approx. twelve German participants and an equal number of Italian students. These will be recruited through the international partner organisations of the Students' Forum, the German Academic Exchange Service and the network of the College of Europe. Through a German-Italian exchange and in conversation with various stakeholders, the team will analyse the situation of refugees and migrants coming to Italy.

First, there will be a project day in Brussels, which will be used to analyse the European position on the central questions regarding the harmonisation of asylum laws and the Dublin II Regulation with both an EU and a civil society perspective. Afterwards, two to three project days in Rome are planned, in order to the speak to the responsible authorities and country bureaus of international organisations and to thus receive a picture of Italian politics and the conditions for migrants and asylum seekers in Italy—which will then be reflected with the “voices from the border” in the actual core of the project: two days in the port of Bari, two days on Sicily, and two on Lampedusa are planned. Dialogue with those directly affected—refugees, migrants, policemen, residents—will be at the centre of the Sur-Place Dialogue.

### Selection of potential contacts:

#### Brüssel

- European Commission
- Pro Asyl/ Amnesty International/ Human Rights Watch
- UNHCR
- Conférence Olivaint de Belgique

#### Bari

- EU Agency Frontex
- Italian Harbour Police

#### Rom

- Italian Ministry of the Interior
- Aliens Department
- UNHCR Italy
- SPRAR-Projects
- Italian Refugee Council (CIR)
- Palace of Shame
- Detention center

#### Sizilien

- EU Agency Frontex
- Italian Harbour Police
- CARA – Reception Centre for Asylum Applicants

#### Lampedusa

- Europol, bzw. Italian Border Police
- CARA – Reception Centre for Asylum Applicants
- Cemetery of Boats

<b>Phase I</b> Belgium Brussels	<b>Phase II</b> Italy Rome	<b>Phase III</b> Italy Bari/ Sicily	<b>Phase IV</b> Italy Lampedusa	<b>Phase V</b> Germany Wrap-up
<p><b>Level:</b> governmental decision makers, NGOs, students</p> <p><b>potential contacts</b> e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· members of the European Commission</li> <li>· European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)</li> <li>· Pro Asyl</li> <li>· Amnesty International</li> <li>· Humann Rights Watch</li> <li>· UNHCR</li> <li>· Conférence Olivaint de Belgique</li> </ul>	<p><b>Level:</b> governmental decision makers, NGOs</p> <p><b>potential contacts</b> e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Ministry of the Interior</li> <li>· Aliens Department</li> <li>· UNHCR Italy</li> <li>· SPRAR-Projects</li> <li>· Italian Refugee Council (CIR)</li> <li>· Palazzo della Vergogna/ Palace of Shame</li> <li>· Detention center</li> <li>· Fabrizio Gatti/ other journalists</li> <li>· Italian students</li> </ul>	<p><b>Level:</b> governmental &amp; European decision makers, NGOs, diverse parties involved</p> <p><b>potential contacts</b> e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· EU Grenzagentur Frontex</li> <li>· Italian border police</li> <li>· CARA - reception centers for asylum seekers</li> <li>· Staff/head of detention/reception centers</li> <li>· refugees</li> <li>· Italian students</li> </ul>	<p><b>Level:</b> governmental &amp; European decision makers, NGOs, diverse parties involved</p> <p><b>potential contacts</b> e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Europol, Italian border police</li> <li>· CARA-reception centers for asylum seekers</li> <li>· Staff/head of detention/reception centers</li> <li>· refugees</li> <li>· Cemetery of Boats</li> </ul>	<p><b>Evaluation/ Report/ Publications</b></p>
<p>2 days/ specific dates</p>	<p>2 days/ specific dates</p>	<p>3-4 days/ specific dates</p>	<p>2 days/ specific dates</p>	

# Studentenforum

Migration at Europe's External Border - Fortress Europe?

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## Many Thanks!

We would like to thank you very much for your interest in our project and invite you to find out more about the Italy Sur-Place Dialogue and previous projects from the same series: <http://toenissteiner-studentenforum.de/projekte/fortress-europe>.

If we have sparked your interest, we would be delighted if you decided to support the Sur-Place Dialogue financially. We are also grateful for all other kinds of support: ideas, suggestions, criticism or additional contacts are most welcome. We look forward to working with you.

				
<p>Janna Weßels</p> <p>Phd Student (International Refugee Law)</p> <p>University of Technology, Sydney</p>	<p>Klaas Hendrik Eller</p> <p>Phd Student (Sociology of Law)</p> <p>University of Cologne</p>	<p>Lena Kampf</p> <p>Journalist</p> <p>Hamburg</p>	<p>Julia Lemke</p> <p>Trainee in legal work</p> <p>Superior Court of Justice, Berlin</p>	<p>Andrea Thiel</p> <p>Consultant</p> <p>McKinsey&amp; Company, Zürich</p>
				
<p>David Krebs</p> <p>Ass. iur.</p> <p>Humboldt University Berlin</p>	<p>Kay Neumann</p> <p>Project Assistant</p> <p>Berlin</p>	<p>Albert Rühling</p> <p>Consultant</p> <p>Hamburg</p>	<p>Nele Weßels</p> <p>Psychology European Studies</p> <p>Technical University Dresden</p>	<p>Florian F. Woitek</p> <p>Consultant</p> <p>Bucerius Law School Hamburg</p>

## **The Students' Forum**

The project "Migration at Europe's External Borders" is carried out within the framework of the Student's Forum within the Tönissteiner Kreis, an honorary German forum of young high potentials – students and young professionals – united by their multiple international experiences and their will to engage in social matters. Members of the forum organise diverse projects, e.g. conferences and think tanks on a wide range of topics, including politics, economics and education, all with a focus on international relations.

The Students' Forum was founded in 1999 by members of the Tönissteiner Kreis e.V, a network of German professionals in international organizations, multinational corporations and government agencies interested in shaping Germany's role in the international community. The idea was to enable university students to develop a profound understanding of different topics regarding the role of Germany within the international community on the one hand, and the role of international issues within the country on the other and to actively take part in the discussion.