

Death, Destruction and Poverty are the Legacy of Believing in Western Promises

News:

“We don’t have all information yet on what has happened, but it seems like this is the worst ever tragedy we’ve seen in the Mediterranean,” said the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs on the 16th of June after a boat carrying migrants from Libya to Italy capsized off the coast of Greece. Seventy-eight bodies have been found and hundreds including most of the women and children are missing presumed dead. The President of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Francesco Rocca, said “it is shocking and unacceptable that people are still dying in front of EU borders, seeking a safe place.”

Comment:

This can be described as the ‘worst tragedy’, but is tragedy the correct word to use when the circumstances that led to it have been government policy for years? However, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs put the blame on the “smugglers” who are putting people on the boats: “They are not sending them to Europe, they are sending them to death. This is what they’re doing and it’s absolutely necessary to prevent it,” and “when it comes to fighting the smugglers, we can’t rely on only one way to do that. We have to use intelligence – we have to use common police investigations together with countries of origin, with countries of transit, with countries of departure,” she said.

There are conflicting accounts from survivors and Greek authorities about whether the boat was sunk as a result of failed attempts by the Greek coastguard or another vessel to tow the struggling boat. One survivor was reported anonymously to have said: “The coastal guard boat drove away for 3 kilometers after the drowning happened and those who were able to swim that distance made it,” which would mean that the coastal guard boat deliberately left the majority of migrants from the stricken boat drown. The only survivors were men. Related to this is the question of why the coastguard did not take action when they had been in contact with the boat for about 12 hours before it sank?

The Greek coastguard said, “The trawler didn’t ask for any help from the coastguard or from Greece.” The coastguard also said that “Between 3:30pm [12:00 GMT] and 9pm [18:00 GMT], the Merchant Marine Ministry’s operations centre was repeatedly in contact with the trawler via satellite phone. In all these communications, they repeated constantly that they wish to sail to Italy and didn’t want any help from Greece.” A different story emerges from an NGO called Alarm Phone, which monitors refugee boats in the Mediterranean. According to them, refugees were begging for help saying that they “cannot survive the night, that they are in heavy distress.” The NGO has a convincing explanation for the discrepancy between what they heard from the refugees and what the Greek coastguard reported. The reason the refugees did not ask the Greek coastguard for help is that: “people on the move know that

thousands have been shot at, beaten, and abandoned at sea by these Greek forces”. Furthermore, “they know that encountering the Hellenic Coastguard, the Hellenic Police or the Hellenic Border Guards often means violence and suffering. It is due to systematic pushbacks that boats are trying to avoid Greece, navigating much longer routes, and risking lives at sea.”

What are these ‘systematic pushbacks’ that refugees fear so much? An investigation by the Guardian in 2021 concluded that EU member states pushed back “at least 40,000 asylum seekers from Europe’s borders during the pandemic, methods being linked to the death of more than 2,000 people.” Pushbacks at sea are especially perilous, and also very common. Many refugees that have landed on Greek islands were actually carried back out to sea and put on small rafts to float away. One example was reported by the Guardian Newspaper: “On 15 September 2021, Sidy Keita from Ivory Coast and Didier Martial Kouamou Nana from Cameroon, boarded a dinghy from Turkey to Greece. Despite making it to the Greek island of Samos, their bodies were found days later, washed ashore in Aydin province, on the Aegean coast. Those who survived said that “the police beat us with the greatest violence” before throwing them into life rafts and pushing them out to sea.

A lawsuit filed against the Greek state at the European Court of Human Rights accuses Athens of a shocking level of violence in sophisticated inter-agency operations that form part of an illegal pushback strategy to stop the arrival of refugees and migrants. This violence is in order to deter people from coming, but still they come. One refugee from Damascus said: “I didn’t even want to go to Greece. We knew that they were harming refugees when they arrive, but it was shocking to experience the reality, which is that Europe doesn’t care at all about human rights and dignity.” Nevertheless, she said, “Despite all of that, I will still try again. I can’t build a life in Syria or Turkey.” Why are so many people so desperate to get to Europe that they risk so much?

Europeans were once jealous of Islamic civilization and power in the Mediterranean, and they struggled for centuries to destroy the Ottoman Caliphate’s authority there until finally the Caliphate itself was destroyed. They called it backwards, and promised Muslims democracy, freedom and a great new life without the Caliphate. Instead, Muslims got colonial exploitation, corrupt governments that serve Western interests and a strangle-hold on increasingly more areas of their life. Even the efforts of sincere Muslims to revolt against these rulers were deviated by the West. A great many of the victims of the latest ‘tragedy’ came from Syria where their revolution against the brutal Assad regime was thwarted as the EU placed an arms embargo on the sale of all weapons to Syrians, while the US threw its dirty money into the formation of militias that would serve US interests rather than the interests of the people of Syria. Death, destruction and poverty are the legacy of believing in Western promises and values.

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