

OUR VIEW

The problem with boat refugees is a constant challenge for companies operating in the central Mediterranean.

Merchant ships should not be used for surveillance, and only assist in the case of an emergency, as they are not equipped for this type of rescue operation.

It is important that the authorities quickly inform the vessel about a safe port to disembark the rescued persons.

There is a need to target the fight against traffickers.

Boat refugees

Rescue operations in the Mediterranean should be the responsibility of the authorities and not the merchant vessels.

Since 2014 a large number of persons have tried to cross the central Mediterranean as boat refugees. Danish shipping companies' vessels have in a number of cases been called upon to come to the assistance, either by being standby or resuing boats in distress that have not been able to make the trip to Europe.

Danish ships are very well aware of their moral and legal obligation to come to the rescue of persons in distress. The merchant ships and their crews do, however, neither have the necessary equipment (extra food, blankets and medicines etc.) nor expertise to handle large rescue operations with often hundreds of people in a state of profound distress. Furthermore, a traditional merchant vessel is not constructed to rescue a large number of people.

Therefore, it must be the authorities' task to ensure adequate search and rescue resources in the Mediterranean.

In addition, merchant ships should not be used for monitoring tasks and should only be asked to assist to the extent where the urgency of the situation demands it.

For this very reason, it is also clearly stipulated in the international conventions that the coastal state in question has an obligation to help with the disembarkation of the rescued people.

The captain and the shipping company shall not be held responsible for the place of disembarkation of the refugees or the progress of the rescue operation. The responsible coast guard should always quickly inform the captain of which port the rescued persons safely can be disembarked at and handed over to the authorities. Furthermore, the coast guard should also assist in maintaining security on board and in providing medical care, medicine and supplies in the form of food, water and blankets.



Operation Triton 2018. Operation Triton supports Italy with border control, surveillance and search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean. Photo: Frontex

EU efforts have made a difference

It was positive that the EU in 2015 tripled its resources to Triton and Poseidon operations that were led by the EU border and coast guard agency Frontex. This led to a decrease in the frequency of times, merchant ships were asked to assist in rescue operations. The proportion of rescue operations, where merchant vessels were involved, dropped from 25 % in 2014 to 11 % in 2015 and 8 % in 2016. Operation Triton was in February 2018 replaced by Operation Themis in support of Italy's border surveillance with an increased focus on law enforcement, and at the same time it continues

to have Search and Rescue as a key component of the operation.

Danish Shipping has supported EU's initiative to establish the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. It is important to ensure better coordination and more resources, including increased participation of national coast guards, as well as a doubling of the number of personnel. At the same time, it is important that the EU coast guards are present close to the North African littoral stretch and lead a determined effort against the traffickers, who send people off in unseaworthy boats.

FACTS

- More than 528,600 people have been saved in the Mediterranean since 2015 by several different international operations.
- In 2014, Danish shipping companies took part in 12 rescue operations where 3,253 people were rescued.
- In 2015, Danish shipping companies took part in 13 rescue operations where 2,660 people were rescued.
- In 2016, Danish shipping companies took part in 4 rescue operations where 525 people were rescued.
- In 2017, Danish shipping companies took part in one rescue operation where 287 people were rescued.
- In 2018, Danish shipping companies took part in two rescue operations where 127 people were rescued.

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