

Murdering frontiers - right to leave and to be welcomed, duty to save

Dr Bénédicte Halba, president of IRIV (www.iriv.net), September 2023

Bénédicte Halba is president of the research institute (iriv) that has been working on the topic of migration since 2003 and has been offering a club at the Cité des Métiers to promote a migration route (2012 – 2022)

The “Mediterranean Encounters”¹ organized on 22 and 23 September 2023 will welcome Pope Francis, who is not coming to France but to Marseille, at the invitation of the city’s archbishop, Mgr Jean-Marc Aveline². This meeting is not reserved only for Catholics but open to all confessions, believers and non-believers, in the ecumenical spirit of Vatican II Council, which is so important to recall in times of identity withdrawal and turning back, especially within the Catholic Church, that is just a reflection of a divided, fractured, and weary society lost in both national and international conflicts

For Pope Francis, Marseille is a city symbol of a «generous opening». These Encounters will be a moment of reflection and celebration, which will recall the «mosaics of peoples, cultures and religions that make up the Mediterranean and share the same hope». Xavier Manzano, Vicar General of the Diocese of Marseilles and Director of Bishop Aveline’s Cabinet, shares the popular enthusiasm for the Pope’s visit. Pope François will raise the issue of migrants; he has already denounced their criminal exploitation. A structure exists within the Church of France, La Pastorale des migrants, happy with the unexpected support of the Pope whose commitment to the service of exiles began with his election in 2013. His first official trip was to Lampedusa, the Mediterranean island, the closest to the African coast, which has become an emblematic place of passage. The mayor of Marseilles, Benoît Payan, said that as an elected representative of the Republic, he would respect secularism, and the French law of 1905, adding that “the message of fraternity, humanism, sharing and especially of reaching out to the poorest that the pope carries” is universal. The beautiful unity of local decision-makers, different local authorities and State services, convinced the organizing committee of the Rugby World Cup to leave at the disposal of the diocese the famous Stade Vélodrome, setting of the OM, emblematic club, a fraternal and multicultural symbol of the Phocian city that has crossed borders. A Norwegian Cruise ship, chartered to accommodate spectators of rugby matches, will be made available to the Mediterranean Encounters to allow pilgrims to rent rooms.

This spirit of solidarity and sharing, openness to others and humanity, is an exception in the policy for exiles in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Channel. Summer and year-round have been deadly. The Mediterranean is one of the deadliest migration routes³. Sub-Saharan migrants have been mistreated, tortured, abused during their migration journey - in Tunisia, in

¹ Programme available on <https://rencontres-med23.org/programme/>

² Sarah Belouezzane et Gilles Rof « Ferveur et pression à Marseille, avant la visite du pape », Le Monde, dimanche 20 & lundi 21 août 2023

³ Sub-Saharan Migration Route – France info 28 août 2023-

Algeria but also in Saudi Arabia, without the international community really being moved and continues to let it go⁴. A petition was launched by MEP Raphaël Glucksmann⁵ to denounce this unworthy situation and recall the number of deaths “At least 50,000 exiles have suffered the same fate over the past 30 years at the EU’s external borders, mainly by trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.”

In France, the brutal deaths related to the crossings of the Channel are very important. On August 12, 2023, six migrants died and two disappeared at sea after the sinking between Sangatte and the Marck Hemmes⁶. The deadliest shipwreck recorded during an attempted sea crossing to England dates to November 2021 when 27 migrants, mostly Iraqi Kurds, died near Calais. A judicial investigation was opened against the French Forces called for help who had not intervened⁷. Since the lockdown of the Harbour of Calais and the Channel Tunnel in 2018 to prevent road crossings, there have been an average of ten drownings per year between 2021 and 2023 in addition to the sinking of 24 November on «small boats» to cross the Strait of the Pas de Calais without counting the deaths always linked to the attempts to pass by the road⁸..... In the Balkans in 2015, Syrian families fleeing the war were violently driven back to Serbia, or Croatia. No European country wanted to welcome them except Germany, which had courageously opened its doors with the unconditional support of its Chancellor Angela Merkel. His generous invitation to his fellow citizens, “*Wir schaffen das!*” (“We will manage!”)⁹

In Europe, the spirit is increasingly inhospitable, even in Germany. The various countries of the European Union have sent entire delegations to Denmark whose immigration policy is not a model of openness or solidarity¹⁰. It is characterized “by the drastic reduction of migratory flows, a demanding integration program, access to nationality made difficult and, henceforth, the desire to use an extra-European third country for the processing of visa applications.” The justification for such a policy would be to ensure the sustainability of the Welfare State. We know the impasse that is the British migration policy that decided to «subcontract» the issue in Rwanda.

Let us hope that the European Meetings in Marseille will pave the way for a new approach to the issue of migration in Europe – that the Mediterranean, *mare nostrum*, the cradle of cultural and religious diversity, where European civilization was born would be again “a bridge, not a border”¹¹, and the same for all the seas around Europe.

⁴ Mona Ben Hamadi « En Tunisie, des migrants revenus de l’enfer », Le Monde 25 août 2023 ; American Forces were aware of abuses by Saudi soldiers, New York Times, 28 août 2023

⁵ Petition to defend the exiles Place publique- 29 août 2023- <https://devoirdesauver.place-publique.eu/>

⁶ La Voix du Nord, samedi 12 août 2023

⁷ Soren Seelow « Le parquet de Paris s’est saisi de l’enquête sur un nouveau naufrage », Le Monde, 15 & 16 août 2023

⁸ since 2021, 10 deaths caused by falling from trucks or on the highway, three people crushed or hit by a train according to the census conducted by Claire Millot, Salam

⁹ sentence pronounced on 31 August 2015 during the migration crisis in Europe, as a slogan of Germany’s reception policy

¹⁰ Dominique Reynie, « La politique danoise d’immigration : une fermeture consensuelle », Fondapol, janvier 2023- <https://www.fondapol.org/etude/la-politique-danoise-dimmigration-une-fermeture-consensuelle/>

¹¹ Alice Zeniter (2017) « L’art de perdre », Paris : Flammarion/Albin Michel