



PRESS RELEASE

“From the Sea to the City - A Conference of Cities for a Welcoming Europe” 25-26 June, 2021

From the Sea to the City is the name of the Consortium, created in June 2020 on the occasion of World Refugee Day, a network of organisations, all from civil society, which for years have been working on the front line and fighting for the rights of migrants as persons, as human beings. From the Sea to the City is also the name of the project that the Consortium is bringing to Palermo on 25 and 26 June.

European Alternatives, Mediterranea Saving Humans, Europe Must Act, Sea-Watch, Seebrücke, Emergency, Open Arms, Humboldt-Viadrina Governance Platform, Alarmphone, Tesseract, w2eu.info, Inura, Tesseract, all strongly together for an extraordinary event: a big conference, many Mayors and many cities involved. There is only one watchword: get serious. And so ready to respond to this invitation is the city of Palermo, which together with the city of Potsdam has always demonstrated its willingness to support the rights of migrants and refugees.

Asked why Palermo is hosting the conference, Mayor Leoluca Orlando said: "I could give several reasons for replying to this question. But there is one that sums them all up: Palermo is the capital of human rights in a vision of fraternity, a mosaic of cultures whose framework is respect for the human dimension. A respect that begins with the defence of the value of life, the most important value. Unfortunately, this value is trampled underfoot by the deaths at sea, by the indifference of a Europe that can no longer look the other way. That is why on 9 May, European Union Day, I proposed to the President of the EU Parliament, David Sassoli, and to the President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, the creation of Rescue European Civil Service (RECS), a European Civil Service for the protection and rescue of lives at sea. It also calls for private vessels with EU-funded personnel, with the involvement of volunteers and host cities. This proposal, which has already received a positive response

from President Sassoli, will be relaunched at this international conference together with European municipalities and civil society organisations whose aim is to establish a network of solidarity with those who save lives at sea. Migrants cannot be considered invisible. A process that has been going on in Palermo for years. Palermo, an open and welcoming city, puts people at the centre, their rights, their identity, which is not linked to the law of blood but to the freedom of being able to choose who to be. A vision of present and future put down in black and white in 2015 with the Palermo Charter, which recognises international mobility as an inalienable right and proposes the abolition of the residence permit, which seems to have become the new slavery and the new death penalty of the 21st century. This is why Palermo is hosting this conference: to say “no more” to deaths at sea, to defend the right to life and to build a structural dimension of the future based on mobility that forces us to change our vision of the world. To date, the cities that have joined the process are Valencia, Barcelona, Paris, Munich, Dusseldorf, Flensburg, Bergamo, Bari, Lampedusa and, of course, Potsdam, which together with the city of Palermo is the host of this important meeting.”

Potsdam Mayor Mike Schubert continues: "Where states fail, cities create solutions. Potsdam is a safe haven for people fleeing war and discrimination. For more than two years we have been coordinating the Alliance Städte Sicherer Häfen; already 100 cities have declared themselves a safe haven. We fight for humanitarian values and the human right to seek asylum. Our leadership is moral pragmatism, seeking solutions and finding them in a growing network of cities. That is why we are in Palermo on 25 and 26 June, for a just Europe where human rights are respected". For years Potsdam has been leading the coordination of cities in a human rights-based national and European migration and asylum policy. On 14 June, the 100th member of Städte Sicherer Häfen joined the alliance just in time for its biennial anniversary in 2019 when it initially comprised only 13 cities. Recently the alliance includes 100 cities, communities and counties. As of 2019, memberships are increasing to facilitate a simple and unbureaucratic way of hosting those rescued in the Mediterranean Sea. Based on the Potsdam Declaration, a large number of Städte Sicherer Häfen have come together to set a common example of how to end the humanitarian catastrophe in the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. Last year, the crew of the civilian ship *Iuventa* received the Max Dortu-Award based in Potsdam. In February 2020, Mayor Mike Schubert led a delegation consisting of representatives from the state, the church and the NGO Seebruecke to visit the Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos. This visit refocused the media and the public in Germany on the refugee situation. After the fire in September 2020 that almost completely destroyed the camp, Mike Schubert reinforced his commitment to create a European Alliance, expressed in the joint declaration of the two cities Palermo and Potsdam.

In a historical moment where once again there is no common European response, this initiative wants to re-imagine the European position on migration policies by putting universal human rights at the centre and cities as the main actors of a necessary change. While the EU and national governments continue to focus on deterrence at all costs, more and more cities across Europe declare their readiness to receive and host more refugees. With this vision and in collaboration with all European cities willing to take up the invitation and sign a document that will be the subject and protagonist of the days in Palermo, (Voluntary direct reception of municipalities and direct funding from the EU for host municipalities some of the points of the document) the Consortium from the Sea to the City wants to send a strong and clear signal to the European Institutions and the new upcoming European Presidency: to pursue a policy of

reception of refugees and migration based on the principles of solidarity, right of asylum, respect for human rights.

A concrete response that goes beyond words is the goal that we want to achieve with this conference, the creation of a large network for a great Alliance between all the Mayors of those cities that cannot and do not want to turn away. With them also that part of civil society that has always been in the field for a common work where reception, respect for humanitarian obligations and human rights are always and in any case in first place. This Alliance is committed to working together until 2022, when the second edition of the Conference will be held.

We will start from those municipalities that in recent years, despite everything, have continued to be in the front line and alone in taking responsibility for the migration crisis, which due to the climate crisis will see increasing numbers in the coming decades. The Palermo days that host the conference will also see many guests ready to work on the above-mentioned themes, among them the Archbishop of Palermo, Monsignor Corrado Lorefice, the President of the Council of the German Protestant Church, Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, the German politicians Gesine Schwan, SPD, and Erik Marquardt, member of the European Parliament of the Group of the Greens/EFA, the representative of UNHCR in Italy, Chiara Cardoletto.

An important note: the Consortium was born from the voluntary initiative of some of these organisations right in the city of Palermo just before 11 June 2018, the date on which the Italian government closed its ports to the Aquarius boat, which at the time had on board 600 migrants rescued at sea in those very days.

Below are the statements of each civil society organization that is part of from the Sea to the City Consortium

European Alternatives

“Whether in migration or climate policy, progressive cities across the world are leading by example. With this initiative we want to re-launch a process of transnational solidarity in the European Union from the municipal level up. Together with Mayors and civil society, we are taking the first steps to make our cities the breeding ground of a humane and forward looking Europe.”

Lorenzo Marsili, co-director of European Alternatives

Europe Must Act

“The upcoming conference of From the Sea to the City provides a channel in which citizens and civil society can create a dialogue with local authorities while it also attempts to influence national and European policies by echoing the voices of municipalities which declare themselves ready to welcome asylum seekers and refugees. The Conference follows the message of the #CitiesMustAct campaign initiated by Europe Must Act”

Cecilia Sanfelici, #CitiesMustAct Campaign Coordinator at Europe Must Act

EMERGENCY

"With the narrative that goes along with the new European Pact on Asylum and Migration and with the lessons learned from the COVID-19 outbreak, we believe that it is time more than ever to join efforts and shift the migration debate from security to solidarity. Cities and the civil society that are welcoming migrants and asylum seekers must unite and have their voices heard. By sharing their experiences and know-how, they can create the momentum to influence decision makers towards a human rights-based policy that is valuing and protecting the dignity of life of every individual."

Rossella Miccio, President of EMERGENCY

Humboldt-Viadrina Governance Platform

"All over Europe the cities and citizens show that they are willing to welcome migrants and refugees, it's time that the European Union also takes a more welcoming approach. At the HVGP we have concrete proposals how this could be achieved; we want to discuss them with cities at the upcoming conference."

Dr. Malisa Zobel, Humboldt Viadrina Governance-Platform

Sea-Watch

"Trying to fill the institutional void in the Central Mediterranean Sea, since 2015 we have witnessed the direct consequence of externalisation policies through our maritime rescue and aerial monitoring missions. People in danger are continuously abandoned at sea through a practice of systematic violation of human rights perpetrated with the complicity of the EU. As demonstrated by the New Pact on Migration and Asylum presented by the EU Commission in September 2020, Europe shuns its responsibilities promoting instead a securitarian approach based on the defence of the external borders and on the criminalisation of all forms of solidarity. From the sea to the city, with all the municipalities and NGOs involved, represents the voice of the part of Europe that strongly believes in the creation of bridges instead of walls, a concrete alternative of fair and inclusive welcoming that has the protection of the people and their human rights at its core."

Giorgia Linardi, Spokesperson Sea-Watch

Seebrücke

“Cities together with civil society are building a solidarity-based Europe. While national governments are unwilling to find humanitarian solutions, we will present ours at the From the Sea to the City conference in Palermo. Welcoming refugees and migrants means not only fulfilling basic human rights but also building a stronger and more just common future for our communities.”

Welcome to Europe/Italy

“The Conference From the Sea to the City will be an event of great importance in the development of a long-term and incisive networking process between welcoming cities and civil society. Against the policies of "Fortress Europe" imposed from above, we will share ideas and actions “from the sea to the city” that come from local communities and municipalities, from all those groups and people who are committed on a daily basis to a welcoming, solidarity-based, anti-racist society, who are committed to a better society for all human beings”.

Davide Carnemolla, Welcome to Europe/Italy

Tesseræ/ INURA

A city that does not welcome newcomers does not believe in its future. Cities representatives with civil society can build together citizenship without borders: they can guarantee individuals non-discriminatory access to basic services, adequate, safe and dignified living conditions regardless of administrative status. When? Now under the emergency of the pandemic and for the future. “From the Sea to the city” shapes new alliances to call all government levels and individuals in their mandates and roles to deliver.

Laura Colini, co-founder Tesseræ Urban Social Research/ INURA member

Mediterranea Saving Humans

“Rescuing people at sea is only half-fulfilling our role as human beings. “From the Sea to the city” is the political answer of civil society and municipalities to State political blindness and indifference in regard to the needs of people on the move and asylum seekers. A bottom-up movement tired of waiting for Member States to find a solution to their mutual vetoes policy.”

Vanessa Guidi, President of Mediterranea Saving Humans

Watch the Med Alarm Phone

“In May 2018, we as the Alarm Phone network organised a transnational meeting with Leoluca Orlando, in the spirit of the Palermo Charter: for the right to mobility and an open Mediterranean space. Over the

past three years - despite and against the constant and escalating atrocities along the world's deadliest borders - more and more municipalities and human rights organisations have built stronger alliances. The need for safe passages, safe havens, safe transit, and for a dignified life in places of arrival have become more urgent than ever. It was necessary to create corridors of solidarity as a response to oppression and border crimes. This is "from the sea to the city" - a practice and vision at the same time. We are all human beings and want an inclusive open society with equal rights for all".

Muhammad al-Kashef, WatchTheMed Alarm Phone

Open Arms

In 2021 we still find ourselves reaffirming an essential and underlying principle of the functioning of our society, that for which those in danger need to be rescued. Not doing so means facing the crime of wrongful death. Each of us needs the other, both at sea and on land and our work serves to demonstrate the value of reciprocity.

The whole of Europe must invest in this to rediscover its own identity. The idea of "From Sea to the City" goes precisely in this direction. It is a network that bases its strength on the inclusiveness of the different social realities that have built it and the integration of different cultures and belonging. We hope that more and more cities and people from civil society will join this network.

Valentina Brinis, Advocacy Officer Open Arms