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Friday - Sunday, November 11 - 13, 2016 | A3

WORLD NEWS

Migrant Toll Surges in Mediterranean

Smugglers' tactics are making the sea crossing to Europe much more dangerous

By Pietro Lombardi and Giada Zampano

ROME—The treacherous migrant route across the Mediterranean Sea—already the world's most lethal in 2015—has killed even more people this year, although far fewer are attempting the crossing. The surge in deaths in the Mediterranean shows how challenging it is for authorities to stem smugglers who are becoming more brutal in plying their trade, migration and Italian coast-guard officials said. It has made 2016 the deadliest year on record for migrants trying to reach Europe by sea.

"Shame!" said Pope Francis in an address over the weekend. "The Mediterranean has become a cemetery."

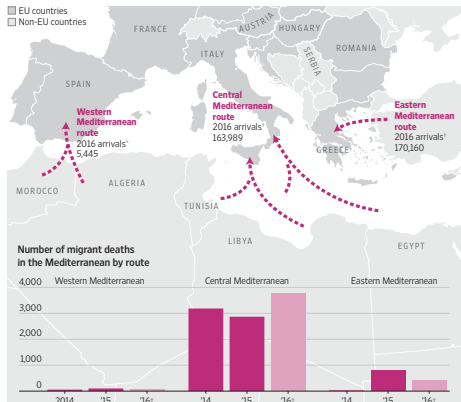
Though an European Union deal with Turkey sealed in March to stem the flow of migrants into Greece has sharply driven down the number of people seeking to cross the Mediterranean on that route, crossings on a far more dangerous one—from Libya to Italy—have continued unabated.

Increasingly brutal tactics by smugglers on this particular path, which is much longer and rougher, is pushing up the death toll this year, the officials said.

When a rescue boat run by Doctors Without Borders answered a distress call last month not far from the Libyan coast from a rubber dinghy headed toward Italy, the crew found 140 African migrants

Deadly Crossing

New factors are driving up the death toll of migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, making it the deadliest year on record for the sea route.



Source: International Organization for Migration. *Through Sept. 30 †Through Nov. 6 ‡Through Nov. 7 THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

stuffed onto a boat meant to hold no more than 40.

The bodies of 29 migrants who had been asphyxiated by a mixture of seawater and fuel were at the bottom of the flimsy boat, according to officials at the organization. The fumes were so potent that it took rescue crews three hours to retrieve 11 of the bodies.

"Making people travel in these conditions is akin to homicide," said Flavio Di Gi-

como, a spokesman in Italy for the International Organization for Migration, or IOM. "Smugglers aren't interested at all in migrants surviving the trip."

About 340,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean so far this year, down from just over one million last year. The number of migrants trying to cross on the specific Libya-to-Italy route has broadly stayed the same, even as that path has become more dangerous.

So far this year, 4,233 people have died in the Mediterranean, including about 500 since mid-October, according to IOM estimates. That compares with 3,777 for all of 2015.

While one in every 266 migrants died in the Mediterranean last year, one in 80 so far has died in 2016. On the Libya-to-Italy route, one of every 44 migrants dies. A new rush on the Libya-to-Italy



Fewer migrants are crossing to Europe, but many more are dying.

route is compounding the problem. An EU effort to train the Libyan coast guard to do more, and better, search-and-rescue missions inadvertently sparked a rush to sea in October, according to Mr. Di Giacomo, though it isn't clear whether that surge will last.

Smugglers told migrants that the Libyan rescue crews would start sending them back to Libya, he said, citing survivors' accounts. Migrants then scrambled to make the journey, in far greater numbers, just as worsening weather makes the crossing even more dangerous. Some 27,400 migrants arrived in Italy by sea in October, triple the figure for October 2015, according to the IOM.

At times migrants refuse to board flimsy vessels in rough conditions, but smugglers threaten violence to force them to embark, coast-guard and migration officials said.

And though European authorities have successfully confiscated the creaky wooden boats many smugglers used, the smugglers instead have

turned to smaller and even more fragile rubber dinghies. Ten-meter dinghies that used to hold 80 to 90 people are now found stuffed with 120 people—sometimes with as many as 180—said Capt. Sergio Liardo, head of the Italian coast guard's rescue coordination center.

Dinghies held together with glue are set to sea, almost immediately taking on water and often collapsing in the middle, coast-guard officials said. Smugglers send off migrants in increasingly desperate conditions, without food, water or satellite phones, raising the risk of people dying of hypothermia or shock. Decrepit motors spew exhaust while gas tanks often leak fuel onboard, creating a toxic mix with seawater.

"People get trampled, suffocated or seriously burned, since they're immersed in this lethal mix of water, urine and fuel that fills the bottom of the boats," said Barbara Molinaro, Italy spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Brazil Lawmakers Impede Graft Probe, Prosecutor Says

By Reed Johnson and Luciana Magalhães

SÃO PAULO—Brazilian politicians are stepping up efforts to impede the country's biggest yet corruption probe, says a prosecutor leading the investigation, as a power struggle intensifies between the legislative and judiciary branches.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, Deltan Dallagnol, one of the federal prosecutors spearheading the so-called Operation Car Wash investigation, said recent congressional maneuverings are aimed at undermining the massive probe and granting broad immunity to lawmakers.

"The greatest risk we see is the risk of legislative reactions, of using the instruments of political power to create

laws, to create mechanisms to obstruct, suppress, hinder the investigation or allow retaliation against the investigations," said Mr. Dallagnol, 36, a Harvard-trained attorney said Wednesday. He didn't specifically mention any individual lawmakers.

Operation Car Wash uncovered a yearslong graft ring centered on state-run Petróleo Brasileiro SA that funneled millions of dollars skimmed from contracts with the oil giant to political campaigns.

Since its launch two years ago, the probe has indicted dozens of Brazil's most prominent politicians and business leaders, including former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and center-right house speaker Eduardo Cunha, both of whom deny wrongdoing.

The powerful Senate leader Renan Calheiros is among those still under investigation. Mr. Calheiros, who declined to be interviewed, has denied wrongdoing.

As the probe has indicted members of his ruling center-right Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, Mr. Calheiros has decried what he characterizes as the overzealousness of Brazil's federal police and the "exhibitionism" of those leading the probe.

Recently, Mr. Calheiros clashed openly with a judge after federal police arrested four members of the Senate's internal police force on allegations that they had removed wiretaps planted in private residences of four senators under investigation.

Mr. Calheiros angrily de-

rid the presiding judge and the federal police, using pejorative terms for both.

In response, the head of the Supreme Court, Cármen Lúcia, said an attack on any judge threatens all Brazilian

Politicians try to obstruct Car Wash investigation, one of its leaders warns.

judges. Another Supreme Court judge, Teori Zavascki, subsequently ordered the investigation of the police transferred to his court's jurisdiction.

Besides Mr. Calheiros, lawyers for some Car Wash defendants have also accused prose-

cutors and judges of grandstanding and legal overreach. Congress is working on legislation that would grant broad immunity for defendants and allow them to sue authorities deemed overzealous.

"This will make the lives of investigators...hell," Mr. Dallagnol said. His warnings are being echoed by a number of political analysts who say many legislators—who under Brazil's constitution can be put on trial only by the Supreme Court—are moving to shield themselves from the probe.

A particular focus of controversy is a plan by federal legislators to extend leniency laws that make it easier for companies whose executives have been indicted to do business again with the federal govern-

ment. The proposal also would give Brazil's Ministry of Transparency the lead role in handling such agreements, reducing prosecutors' roles.

Matthew Taylor, a professor at American University in Washington and an expert on Brazilian politics, said Brazil's congress, particularly Mr. Calheiros, tried to hamper a package of anticorruption measures backed last year by prosecutors, among other efforts to "slow down and water down" laws that would impose more accountability on lawmakers.

"For the first time legislators are seeing their necks on the line," Mr. Taylor said. "It is going to be a fairly ugly fight for a long time, while Brazil tries to figure out how it wants to balance corruption and accountability."

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