
EU Commission: record-breaking number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, late rescue operations. “States have an obligation to rescue and save lives at sea”

“We insist that saving lives is a moral duty and a legal obligation for the member states, under international law, and that all players involved in search and rescue operations must act legally and ensure fast, coordinated action”. This was said by a spokesperson of the European Commission at the daily briefing with the press in Brussels, in reply to a question of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) about deaths in the Central Mediterranean Sea in the first quarter of 2023. According to the release posted by IOM yesterday, with 441 deaths the first quarter of this year is the one that has reported the highest number of deaths in the Central Mediterranean Sea since 2017: about one half of them seem to be connected with late rescue operations or non-response. Regarding search and rescue operations at sea, the EU spokesperson explained that “the EU group on Search and Rescue met for the first time on January 31st after two years and then there has been another meeting on 27th and 28th February mainly to discuss greater cooperation among the EU member states and stronger coordination”. The next meeting is expected to take place before summer. The Group “is working on raising awareness of the situation, better cooperation and knowledge of existing laws, and opportunities for joint work with the International Maritime Organisation in the future”, the spokesperson ended.

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