

DEFEND EUROPE REPORT

1. WHAT IS DEFEND EUROPE?

Defend Europe is an attempt by far-right activists to monitor and disrupt humanitarian rescue ships operating in the Mediterranean Sea. These far-right activists, who come from a pan-European movement known as 'Identitarians', believe that humanitarian NGOs are colluding with people traffickers to transport migrants and refugees into Europe.

2. WHAT IS THE IDENTITARIAN MOVEMENT

The Identitarian movement is a pan-European, far-right movement that started in France in 2012 with the launch of Génération Identitaire,

the youth wing of the far-right Bloc Identitaire. It has since spread across the European continent via affiliated networks, and along with France the most prominent branches are now based in Germany, Italy, and Austria.

The movement sees itself as a 'meta-political project' that aims to protect "European identity". In reality, this means opposition to immigration, Islam and refugees, and the supposed social and political elites that they believe are advancing a multicultural and socially left-wing agenda.

The Identitarian movement is well known for its provocative and controversial stunts, usually directed against Muslims and immigrants, with a view to raising funds, increasing their public profile and shifting public opinion.



The banner displayed by Southern and the Identitarians when they attempted to block a rescue boat



Who Will Likely Be On The Ship?: (left to right) Martin Sellner, Robert Timm, Lorenzo Fiato.

3. WHO WILL LIKELY BE ON THE SHIP?

In addition to possibly armed security staff, a representative of Defend Europe has stated there will be six crew members aboard the ship, though who will be crew and who will be passengers is unclear.

Martin Sellner, co-leader of Identitare Bewegung Österreich, the Austrian branch of the Identitarian movement, is likely to be aboard the ship as well. Sellner has admitted to past flirtations with Nazism, and often acts as a figurehead of the Identitarian movement. Patrik Lenart, the other co-leader of the Austrian branch and former regional leader of Styria, will be aboard the ship.

Regional director of the Berlin Identitarians, Robert Timm, will be aboard the ship as will Clement Galant, a leading activist in the French Generation Identitaire movement. In their “Declaration of War” video, Generation Identitaire stated that they were “the generation of ethnic fracture [...] and forced mixing of the races”.

Italian Identitarian activist Gianmarco Concas, who was present at the original Identitarian boat-blocking mission in Catania two months ago and claims to have been a naval officer, has stated he will be “technical manager” of Defend Europe. Viennese Identitarian Alexander Schleyer is already aboard the ship, navigating it towards the Mediterranean. Schleyer was a parliamentary assistant to the far-right Austrian Freedom Party until images emerged of him posing in front of an imperial German war flag popular with the far-right earlier this year.

Further possible crew members may be Lorenzo Fiato, leader of the Italian Identitarians, Mario Muller, a cameraman for the German Identitarians, or Daniel Fiß, leader of the German Identitarians, who was previously a member of the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany’s (NPD) youth wing. Fiß maintains connections with the right-wing populist party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), and has stated that the party could become the Identitarians’ “extended arm”.

Galant has stated communications professionals would be aboard the ship, likely referring to Simon Kaupert. Kaupert (elsewhere pseudonymously Simon “Wald”) is a German “activist and co-worker” at the right-wing networking organisation Ein Prozent, which strongly supports and advertises Identitarian activity, and is the former leader of the Würzburg branch of the anti-Islam Pegida street movement. Kaupert has stated he will be reporting from the ship, as did Ein Prozent in an inaccurate and highly-biased four-part blog which Defend Europe has cited as evidence for its debunked narrative tarnishing search-and-rescue (SAR) NGOs.

Lauren Southern, an alt-light (very right-wing) ‘citizen journalist’ and activist who helped block the humanitarian SOS Méditerranée ship with Defend Europe in May, has stated she “might very well be on [the] boat recording [Defend Europe’s] mission” to report about it. Southern, who has recently described the action as “protesting”, not blocking, openly stated that her “journalism” blurs with activism.

4. FAR RIGHT SUPPORT FOR DEFEND EUROPE

Breitbart – The reactionary “news” outlet Breitbart has provided sympathetic coverage for Defend Europe’s dangerous mission. Breitbart London reporter Chris Tomlinson has penned multiple articles over the past year presenting positive portrayals of the Identitarians, who have a track record of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant politics.

Following their first attempt to block NGO ships in May, Tomlinson described the far-right outfit as “members of the hipster-right, anti-mass migration Identitarian youth movement” who “blocked one of the ships of a pro-migrant NGO which was setting sail for Libya to pick up migrants to ferry them to Europe”. In June Tomlinson gave a sympathetic interview to Defend Europe leader Martin Sellner, and provided Sellner with free reign to promote his mission, Tomlinson again went on to criticise supposedly “pro-migrant” NGO rescue ships.

David Duke – former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and white supremacist veteran, Duke urged people to donate to Defend Europe, tweeting to his 40,000 Twitter followers: “Defend Europe Identitarian SAR has a ship, now needs money to get to the Mediterranean. Donate now! #DefendEurope”.

AltRight.com – on the platform run by white nationalist and alt-right figurehead Richard Spencer (who describes himself as an “identitarian”), author Charles Lyons calls Defend Europe’s initiative “heroic” and refers to NGO ships as “invasion vessels”. He goes on to state:

“This is encouraging news. Young Whites are waking up to their disenfranchisement across the White World. The future belongs to us”.

American Renaissance – the racial nationalist, pseudo-academic organisation run by longstanding white supremacist Jared Taylor, advertised Defend Europe’s video in a May blogpost.

The Daily Stormer – the world’s premier Nazi website has published multiple supportive articles filled with antisemitic dog-whistles, gutter racial epithets and even the eager anticipation of deaths. One article states:

“These (((NGO))) scum have smuggled hundreds of thousands of sub-human vermin to Europe in the last couple of years... The only thing that’ll stop the shit-skins from flooding Europe, and remove the ones already here, are more actions like what the Identitarians here have done.”

In another piece titled “Nazi Project to Sink Rapefugee Boats Crowdfunded for \$100k” the author Charles Zeiger, who uses the SS Death’s Head logo as his avatar, wrote:

The image is a screenshot of a Breitbart news article. At the top, the Breitbart logo is visible on the left, and navigation links for 'HOME' and 'SUBSCRIBE' are on the right. Below the logo are several category links: 'BIG GOVERNMENT', 'BIG JOURNALISM', 'BIG HOLLYWOOD', 'NATIONAL SECURITY', 'TECH', and 'VIDEO'. Further down are regional links: 'BREITBART LONDON', 'BREITBART JERUSALEM', 'BREITBART TEXAS', and 'BREITBART CALIFORNIA'. The main headline of the article is 'IDENTITARIANS BLOCK PRO-MIGRANT NGO SHIP IN SICILY'. Below the headline are social media sharing buttons for Facebook (767 shares), Email, Google+ (2 shares), and Twitter. The article features a photograph of a large ship at night in a harbor, with a smaller boat in the foreground. The photo is credited to 'Identitarian Movement'. Below the photo, the author is identified as 'CHRIS TOMLINSON' and the date as '18 May 2017'. The article text begins with: 'Several members of the hipster-right, anti-mass migration Identitarian youth movement blocked one of the ships of a pro-migrant NGO which was setting sail for Libya to pick up migrants and ferry them to Europe.' A small caption below the photo reads: 'The activists blocked the passage of the ship Aquarius from the pro-migrant NGO SOS Mediterranee as it was leaving the port in the Sicilian city of Catania, reports the'.

“This is a great initiative... These parasites need to be inculcated with a deep fear of making the trip across the Mediterranean sea. Right now, the Negroes believe that Europeans will come and pick them up to bring them to our countries... Godspeed, men. Your ancestors are proud.”

Daily Stormer founder Andrew Anglin wrote in yet another article that the efforts of Defend Europe would “have a massive impact” on the “media narrative”, which would be forced to acknowledge that “NGOs are engaged in a criminal human trafficking racket that is being funded by the state and private Jews”.

Nick Griffin—the former BNP leader shared an article covering the Defend Europe mission, which includes French Identitarians, with the comment: “A touch of class from the French!”

Brittany Pettibone – Pettibone co-hosts the *Virtue of the West* vlog (video blog) alongside Tara McCarthy, which is dedicated to “love of one’s own culture, race and country”, and has perpetuated the “white genocide” conspiracy (that white populations in majority white countries are being turned into racial minorities through immigration and other means).

Pettibone has been ‘reporting’ favourably from Catania about the Defend Europe mission, including advertising the link to their crowdfunding site in an interview with Sellner.

5. POSSIBLE MAINSTREAM SUPPORT

Mail Online (online sister site of Daily Mail newspaper) – The site’s columnist, Katie Hopkins, has travelled to Sicily to cheerlead for the Defend Europe mission in a week of reporting.

Hopkins, who two years ago said: “Show me pictures of coffins, show me bodies floating in water, play violins and show me skinny people looking sad. I still don’t care”, deleted a picture taken in Sicily with a holocaust denying independent “journalist”, Peter Sweden, who was also there reporting on the situation. Hopkins also appeared in pictures with Sellner, Pettibone and Southern, and tweeted that it was: “Good to meet Team C-Star @DefendEuropeID in Sicily. Young people, 8 nations, crowd-funded, shining a light on NGO people traffickers in Med”.

This goes well beyond merely disagreeing with the opinions of Hopkins and is actually about the Mail Online, and any other media outlet that offers a positive take on Defend Europe, possibly playing a role in the normalisation and mainstreaming of explicitly far right and extremist people, organisations and narratives.

There is no doubt that the current situation in the Mediterranean is extremely difficult, as are the wider issue around refugees in Europe, but surely, we can all agree that a ship of far-right activists possibly disrupting the lifesaving work of NGOs is not helpful and should not be supported or condoned.

6. ABOUT THE SHIP

Specs

The C-Star (‘MV C Star’ on owner’s site), previously ‘Suunta’, is Finnish-made research vessel flagged to Mongolia and previously anchored off the coast of Djibouti. Its IMO is 7392854, has a gross tonnage of 422, it is 39.8m long, has a crane for rigid-hulled inflatable boats and a range of 3000 nautical miles. It has space for 8 crew, 12 passengers, two mess rooms, a gym, sauna, office space for six persons, a treatment room/sick bay with a defibrillator and has maritime radio equipment and satellite tracking.

Owner

Sven Tomas Egerstrom, director of Marine Global Services LTD (also known as C Vessels) owns the C-Star and is based in Cardiff. Ergstrom has confirmed to HOPE not hate that the vessel was chartered via an individual to Defend Europe, and that he has provided the onboard crew for the mission. He also confirmed that he was aware of Defend Europe’s intentions when he allowed the ship to be chartered. When asked what he thought of his boat being used by far-right activists, he said: “We don’t take political places or stance in a commercial business for any grounds. [...] I don’t see any problem with the vessel being in the area conducting legal research”.

Egerstrom was convicted of fraud in 2002 and sentenced to prison for two-and-a-half years in jail. It is also reported that a Seychelles court in 2015 ordered the seizure of \$2 million of automatic weapons found on one of Egerstrom’s ships. The case was brought by the crew of the vessel, Ocean Bounty, who accused him of abandoning them.

According to Companies House, Egerstrom was a director and consultant for a company called Seamarshals Risk Management Ltd from December 2011 before resigning in March 2014. Aside from its remaining director, Stephen Mark Collins, the only other person with significant control of the company is Marshals Group Plc, which own 75% or more of the shares of Seamarshals Risk Management Ltd. However, not only has Egerstrom been a director of Marshals Group Plc since January 31st 2017 (the same day Stephen Mark Collins resigned from this additional director role), he also owns 75% or more of its shares.

Armed security

Sea Marshals Risk Management Ltd provides “armed security teams” at sea equipped with semi-automatic rifles. It recently told the Wales Online media outlet that its crews included





Ukrainians. Indeed, its site indicates that it is currently planning a recruitment day in Odessa, Ukraine. In addition, the company operates in Djibouti and the Red Sea/Suez Canal which is where the C-Star has been for the last few months.

SeaMarshals Risk Management Ltd has had its ISO 28007 certification suspended by the industry certification body MSS Global. The ISO 28007 certification is an international standard for private maritime security companies that provide privately contracted armed security personnel on board ships. It is designed to ensure they act lawfully and operate with best practice. When contacted for comment MSS Global confirmed that: “SeaMarshals’ certification is currently suspended” but stated that it could not specify why, due to client confidentiality, adding that conjecture about these reasons would be unfounded as “there are hundreds of requirements in those standards”. However, having spoken to other experts in the field it would be reasonable to assume that basis for suspension would have been ‘significant’.

On 12 July the C-Star met with the ‘Jupiter’, a ship carrying armed personnel. The two ships met in the Red Sea on route to the Suez Canal. The Jupiter had previously been anchored in Port Khalid in Sharjah, in the UAE, which is just a 40 minute drive from Egerstrom’s second Maritime Global Services LTD office in Dubai. While we do not have confirmation that armed personnel from the Jupiter boarded the C-Star there are clear questions as to why the two ships met

in the Red Sea. It is also worth noting that the C-Star was recorded as a “floating armoury” in 2014, according to the Oxford Research Group’s Remote Control Project, signifying a ship used by private maritime security companies to store and hold weapons.

WHAT THEY SAY THEY WILL DO

Block ships returning to Europe

Defend Europe has been unclear on whether and how it intends to use its ship to block NGO SAR vessels, though its current line is that it intends to block them from returning to Europe with those they have rescued.

After its initial publicity stunt blocking the SOS Mediteranée NGO SAR ship in the port of Catania, Sicily in May, subsequent statements about the mission also suggested that it intended to block ships reaching those in need of rescue. This included frequent mention of “intervening” in the activities of NGO ships when they were judged to be doing something illegal.

Martin Sellner stated in a video that his group would “block those NGO ships from going to the Libyan coast”, while the FAQ of Defend Europe’s site stated that it “would never get in the way of any rescue-operation or block ships near the Libyan coast”. While Defend Europe has indicated that it won’t stop NGOs rescuing refugees, it may attempt to stop NGO ships returning to Europe, and a graphic shared on their social media depicts this.

Monitor SAR NGO activity

Defend Europe intends to monitor or “overwatch” SAR NGO activity at sea so as to intervene when it judges them to have done something illegal. It has stated it will document what these ships are doing and record their radio signals, with a view to exposing possible communication with the human traffickers.

Return migrants and refugees to North Africa

Defend Europe claims that it intends to return any refugees it comes into contact with to the Libyan coast. Both Sellner and the Defend Europe site’s FAQ suggests they will do this by working with the Libyan coastguard as a “recon” ship: alerting them to migrants and refugees they have found.

Sink trafficking boats

In accordance with a European Parliament statement¹ regarding trafficking ships, Defend Europe claims it will sink abandoned migrant and people trafficking boats so that they cannot be reused.

LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS

Block ships returning to Europe

Should the C-Star reach the Mediterranean and carry this out it could break a number of laws. Dangerous manoeuvring resulting in vessel collisions is illegal and should be avoided at all times as a matter of international law and customary actions supporting vessel safety at sea.

(‘COLREGS’: International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea – Articles of the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972. (as amended by IMO Resolutions A464(XII), A626(15), A678(16), A736(18) and A.910(22))

Details:

COLREGS are specific in their requirements for their application. “These Rules shall apply to all vessels upon the high seas and in all waters connected therewith navigable by seagoing vessels.” [Rule 1(a)]. The rules equally apply to SAR NGO vessels, as they do to the C-Star.

SAR NGO vessels that are towing, or are physically linked to migrant vessels during off-loading of persons rescued at sea will be termed as a “vessel restricted in her ability to manoeuvre” under Rule 3 ‘General definitions’ and are therefore also protected by COLREGS. C-Star and associated craft (RHIBs) must not

interfere to cause any form of collision.

COLREGS state that “Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.” [Rule 5 ‘Look out’]. This means that the C-Star must avoid a risk of collision at all times.

COLREGS state: “Every vessel shall use all available means appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions to determine if risk of collision exists. If there is any doubt such risk shall be deemed to exist.” [Rule 7(a) ‘Risk of Collision’]. This means that C-Star and associated craft are on notice not to create any conditions leading to a collision, or be the cause of any collision.

COLREGS further state that the rules shall be followed to avoid collision [Rule 8]. This is a positive legal requirement and not a voluntary requirement by the masters of vessels.

Return migrants and refugees to North Africa

Defend Europe has continually stated that this is what it will do should it rescue any refugees.

Libya cannot currently be considered a place of safety under the SAR Convention and returning legitimate refugees could possibly contravene the non-refoulement obligation under Article 33 of the 1951 Convention. In that case Defend Europe would, at worst, be directly supporting migrant push-backs supporting non-refoulement principle against the 1951 Refugee Convention (which Libya is not signed up to), and directly facilitating the onward transfer of those migrants / refugees to detention locations where their human rights will most likely be abused.

The principle of non-refoulement (refugees), and the spirit of not returning individuals (i.e. economic migrants en-route to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea) to States where their fundamental human rights will be abused, must be upheld and defended. The use of a vessel by Defend Europe to effectively help LCG to return those migrants seeking protection and a better life back to Libya where their fundamental rights may well be abused should be prevented as a breach of this general principle, noting that Libya is not one of the 145 State parties to the 1951 Convention and that UNHCR was expelled from Libya in June 2010.

Furthermore, Defend Europe activists / crew are unlikely to treat any persons rescued from distress at sea with humanitarian values, balanced consideration or sympathy. They are unlikely to have the skill or will to try to differentiate genuine refugees from economic migrants. Further abuses such as racial

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2015-010845&language=EN>

intimidation, physical violence and lack of medical support or immediate treatment either on board their vessel or while being towed may well be perpetuated and encouraged by the crew.

We are especially alarmed by a comment Martin Sellner made when asked if their ship would have adequate medical resources. As inews.co.uk reports, when asked whether their vessel would carry a doctor or medical personnel, Martin Sellner “could give no firm undertaking” adding only that: “We will try to have a doctor”.

SAR Convention details:

A place of safety (1979 SAR Convention, as amended 2004) is a location where rescue operations are considered to terminate, where the master of the ship providing assistance is released from their obligations, and where States should co- operate “to make the necessary arrangements in co-operation with other RCCS to identify the most appropriate place(s) for disembarking persons found in distress at sea.”

It is a place where for the survivors, safety of life is no longer threatened and where their basic human needs (such as food, shelter and medical needs) can be met. Further, it is a place from which transportation arrangements can be made for the survivors for their next or final destination. The need to avoid disembarkation in territories where the lives and freedoms of those alleging a well-founded fear of persecution would be threatened is a key consideration in the case of asylum-seekers and refugees recovered at sea.

Non-refoulement

The principle of non-refoulement as provided for in Article 33(1) of the 1951 Convention does not, as such, entail a right of the individual to be granted asylum in a particular State.

It does mean, however, that where States are not prepared to grant asylum to persons who are seeking international protection on their territory, they must adopt a course that does not result in their removal, directly or indirectly, to a place where their lives or freedom would be in danger on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

As a general rule, in order to give effect to their obligations under the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol, States will be required to grant individuals seeking international protection access to the territory and to fair and efficient asylum procedures. The *non-refoulement* obligation under Article 33 of the 1951 Convention is binding on all organs of a State party to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol, as well as any other person or entity acting on its behalf.

‘Lack of medical care’

We do not know the extent of Defend Europe’s medical facilities or trained crew to deal with varying levels of medical conditions – but this is much the same as some of the smaller NGOs who simply act as a first point of rescue to immediately save life, or a co-ordination node, and who carry limited stores which are sufficient for crew only.

It should be noted that under paragraph 2.6.1 of the 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (applicable to State signatories), it is mandated that ‘Each search and rescue unit shall be provided with equipment appropriate to its task’. Defend Europe does not appear to be a sanctioned SAR organisation while the C-Star does not appear to be carrying sufficient supplies, qualified and/or trained medical personnel to undertake an effective medical role in terms of ‘appropriate equipment’.

Further, Defend Europe is not recognised by, or a member of the International Maritime Rescue Federation and is unlikely to be sanctioned by the Djiboutian flag to undertake official SAR tasks under national direction, though this argument is effectively negated by the master’s responsibility under UNCLOS Art.98 and the ‘Duty to render assistance’ at sea. In short, Defend Europe cannot be forced to have extensive medical supplies on board.

In extremis, failure to render medical support could violate the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Articles. 2 (Right to Life) and 17 (Prohibition of abuse of rights).

In addition, abuse through active neglect for provision of medical treatment to those in need could constitute a breach under Art. 3 ECHR and Art. 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR) where: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Breach of such rights may specifically occur in terms of their immediate care and subsequent care when landed back in Libya. There may also be potential breaches under Art. 25 UDHR with respect to the provision of ‘medical care’.

CONCLUSION

We have very real concerns about the ship, its owner, the crew and its possibly illegal mission should it reach the Mediterranean. We have little confidence in Defend Europe's interest in the welfare of those at risk of drowning, with statements such as that following the May boat-blocking on the Italian Identitarian Facebook page, in which it explained that the NGO ship aided "ethnic substitution", and Defend Europe wanted to stop the "silent genocide against Europeans".

Also worrying is the potential for a lack of oversight of Defend Europe's activities. While there is an increasing trend of the scope for the obligation to investigate human rights abuses at sea, the current reality in the western Mediterranean off-shore Libya is that any criminal activities and/or abuses perpetrated by Defend Europe are unlikely to be immediately investigated. This is would be most likely due to the compounding of a lack of evidence to the requisite evidential standard, exacerbated by the challenges of the maritime environment, a lack of European constabulary assets and will to investigate, flag State impunity, and a lack of political will to support as set against the current European migration crisis, the new EU Action Plan, and generally-held EU political view that SAR NGOs are a hindrance despite statistics demonstrating the opposite.

Finally, we are concerned at the potential increase in inaccurate coverage of Defend Europe's activities, intentions and basis in a far-right political movement with a history of anti-migrant and anti-Islam actions. Press coverage of the mission has frequently presented Defend Europe in a manner that downplays or overlooks the extremes of their political ideology and provided their spokespersons with a platform to disseminate and normalise this ideology. The Mail Online's decision to send renowned anti-migrant journalist Katie Hopkins to cover their mission reflects this exact issue.

Furthermore, Defend Europe and the wider Identitarian movement have engaged in an extensive social media campaign to present their mission as a humane and reasonable response to the situation in the Mediterranean. This follows their movement's explicitly stated goal of influencing wider culture and manipulate media so as to be able to make their far-right views more palatable to mainstream audiences. Given that sympathetic independent journalists with large social media followings are covering the mission also, namely Lauren Southern, Brittany Pettibone, Peter Sweden and Simon Kaupert, there is a clear awareness by Defend Europe that they can meld coverage to fit their narrative.