

## **A self-Induced Trap**

Dr Gavin Gulia's contribution (Sunday Times 17.09.06) relating to irregular migration rests on a number of false premises; the most blatant one being the mistaken assumption that Libya and Italy struck a deal on sea patrols in Libyan waters! It was a false alarm, reported also, to be fair, in a section of the local press; - but even a cursory look at the Italian Viminale Interior Ministry's press release would have revealed that the contacts between the Libyan and Italian authorities were unrelated to sea-patrols.

In fact the technical delegations from both sides were composed of police officers; since when have the coast guard duties in Libya and Italy been transferred to the Police?! Indeed – as it has already done in the past – Italy is transferring some police officers – stationing them in Libya – to assist the local authorities in investigations relating to immigration .... and not, as stated by Gulia, to board patrol boats and patrol Libyan territorial waters! Dr Gulia hails this measure as a breakthrough, describing it as “very good progress with Libya” and that “this arrangement has sent shivers down the spines of our Interior and Foreign Affairs Ministers”! Indeed, the contrary is true. Malta has no intention of depleting its small Police Force, by sending its men to missions abroad when they are needed here, in Malta, for a myriad number of assignments and activities. The fact that Italy drawing from its abundant human and financial resources will be materially and physically helping Libya does not in any way, instil any feeling of envy in the Maltese Government. Indeed any assistance given by Italy, or the EU for that matter, to strengthen Libya's administrative capacity to combat illegal migration indirectly, alleviates our burden and problems. But to expect Malta, with its limited resources, to assist Libya is indeed, a tall order.

The truth is that Dr Gulia has taken a rather narrow view about his role as Opposition spokesman. He feels that his only role is “to oppose”. So the moment he swallowed, hook, line and sinker, the false news that an Italo-

Libyan deal had been struck on sea-patrols, he must have thought: “what an excellent opportunity to lambast the Government on this point”. Gavin came out from his hole too soon, only to belatedly discover that he had fallen into a self-induced trap!

The same applies to the repatriation in 2004 of immigrants from Lampedusa to Libya; most of these immigrants were from Egypt and the Maghreb countries, that is to say, persons who are usually repatriated from Malta directly to their places of origin.

Indeed this Government will continue to strive to involve Libya in sea-patrols. It is certainly not an easy task. However Malta’s insistence at the Tampere Council on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2006 for the EU to assist Libya in border control has produced some results. The next step should be that of persuading Libya to participate in sea patrols, if need be with Malta and Italy only, rather than involving the EU as a whole.

So the confusion was only in Dr Gulia’s mind: the result of his gullible acceptance of false news.

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