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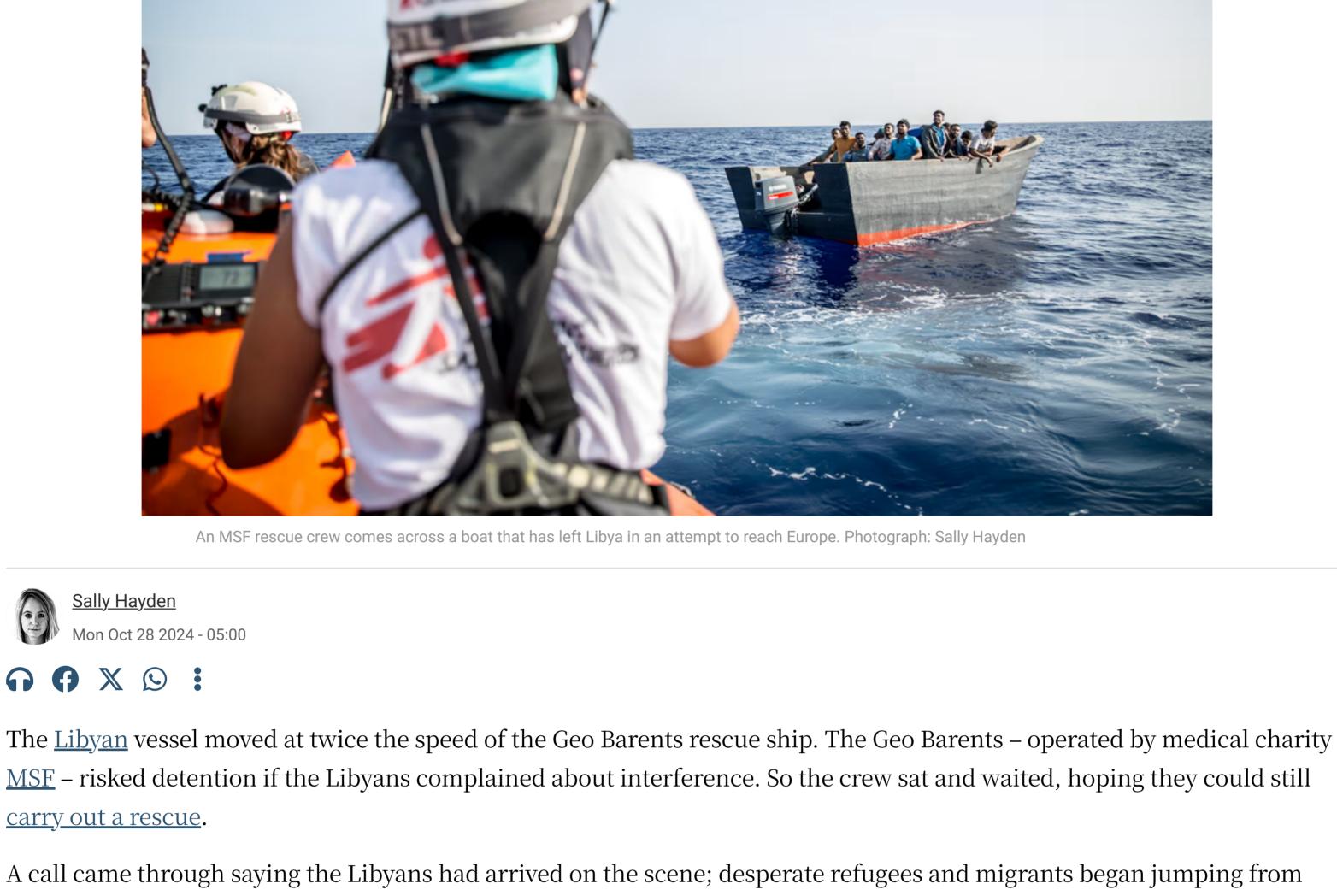
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EU's attempt to stop refugees and

migrants from reaching its territory Drones 'tested over Gaza' have been reappropriated by the EU to monitor migrants in the Mediterranean



their overcrowded boat into the water to escape them – and still the crew waited. Until, eventually, the MSF search and

rescue was called off and the case declared "closed".

Sections ≡

In a debrief, search and rescue team leader Riccardo Gatti asked his dejected team if they were okay. "This is part of the

water in front of them, forcing them to abandon rescues.

job," he told them. "This is the environment ... as sad as it is ... unfortunately there are moments where we cannot rescue the people." From the bridge, through binoculars, the Libyan vessel was still visible. Sea Bird – an NGO-operated search and rescue plane – identified it as the Libyan patrol boat P662 Murzuq, one of two "Corrubia class" naval vessels <u>donated</u> by Italy in

READ MORE Three things the Irish election Israeli drones an essential part European asylum policy should be about - but won't continues to shift to the right of EU's attempt to stop

2023. The Libyans aboard those vessels had previously been <u>accused</u> of threatening NGO crews, including by firing into the

refugees and migrants from reaching its territory

TITLE THE

MSF's rescue crew wait to be deployed to help a boat in distress. Photograph: Sally Hayden **Interceptions**

been caught in this manner since 2017, when the EU pledged tens of millions of euro to support the Libyan coastguard to

them in the desert without food or water.

and exploited. They hope to find safety in Europe.

[Israeli arms companies can bid for Irish drones contract]

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rights of migrants and asylum seekers".

borders".

for Migration showed that 18,065 people were intercepted and forced to go back to Libya. More than 147,000 people have carry out interceptions. Those caught are often locked up in Libyan militia-run detention centres with no charge or trial, as

ADVERTISEMENT HYPERSEXUALITY IS NOT INFIDELITY. IT'S AN ADHD RESPONCE. Tunisia has also received EU money to carry out interceptions. According to estimates by <u>Alarm Phone</u>, which receives

distress calls from people at sea, another 30,000 people were estimated to have been returned to the north African country

in the first six months of 2024. Kais Saied, Tunisia's recently re-elected autocratic president, has been <u>courted</u> by European

politicians while inciting a backlash against black Africans. Tunisian security forces have been condemned for abandoning

poverty across Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Many have passed through multiple other countries where they are abused

One aspect of the EU's efforts to stop them is its use of Israeli drones. As far back as 2009, Human Rights Watch described

how drones from the Heron series used by Israel have killed Palestinian civilians in Gaza. In 2020, the Guardian reported

on a <u>€100 million deal</u> between the EU, Airbus and two Israeli companies for the use of drones in the Mediterranean. The

day Gatti consoled his disappointed crew, an unmanned Israeli Heron surveillance drone was on patrol – it flew five out of

Those trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea are fleeing crises including wars, dictatorships, persecution and crushing

part of an abusive system where UN evidence suggests crimes against humanity are taking place.

As record numbers of people globally continue to be forcibly displaced, or seek new opportunities outside their birth

countries, the central Mediterranean remains a point of contention for how to deal with them. While European Union

[Rescue ship tries to save minds as well as bodies on the Mediterranean]

policies attempt to prevent people from reaching European territory, civil society organisations try to bring them to safety.

More than 24,000 people have died or gone <u>missing</u> in the central Mediterranean in the last decade, while more than 51,000

have <u>arrived</u> in Italy by sea so far this year. From January to October 5th, 2024, figures from the International Organisation

seven days that week. "Israeli drones are essentially ones that have been tested over Gaza for many years," said Antony Loewenstein, author of The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World, which describes how this technology was reappropriated by the EU in the Mediterranean. "Israel and the EU are very close partners," he said. "There's huge amounts of defence relationships, huge amounts of weapons being sold."

Despite the ongoing assault in Gaza, where more than 41,000 Gazans have been killed, and the more recent escalated Israeli

air strike campaign which has displaced more than one fifth of Lebanon's population, "there's a willing disconnect between

the reality of European arms companies selling weapons to worsen various global conflicts, and how huge amounts of

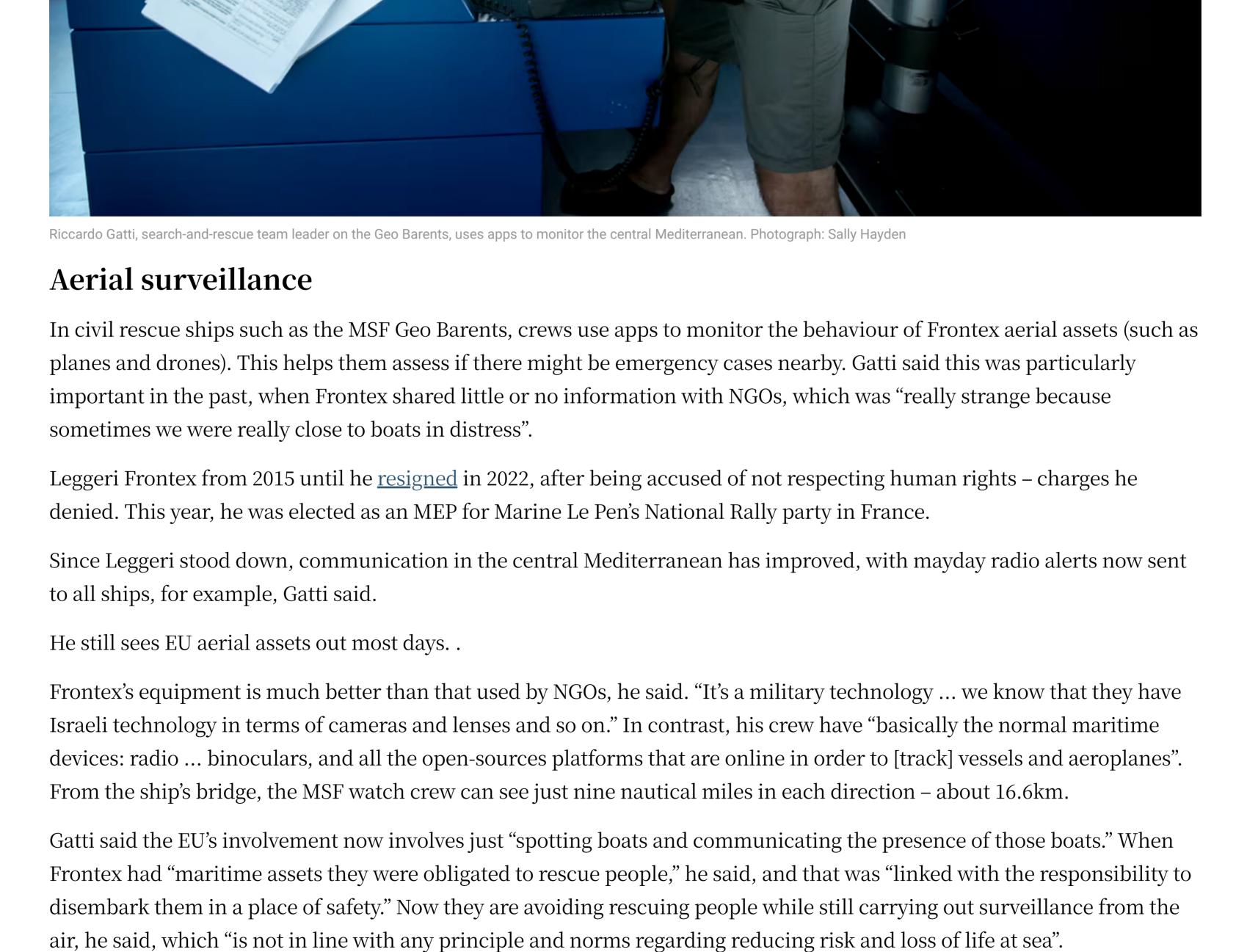
individuals are fleeing those conflicts and trying to get into the EU," Loewenstein said. In 2020, the use of Israeli drones in the Mediterranean was <u>questioned</u> by Spanish MEPs Manu Pineda and Sira Rego – now Spain's minister for youth and children. They asked the European Commission what criteria were used to select drone providers; whether their use is compatible with human rights policy; and whether the commission "intend[ed] to keep supporting violations of the rights of refugees in the Mediterranean and the use of military drones at the EU's foreign

The commission responded by saying it "attaches the utmost importance to ensuring the respects of the fundamental

Fabrice Leggeri, then executive director of Frontex – the European border agency – said in 2020 that it initially tested the

Heron drones' "capacity to detect and support the operational response to boats in distress, and therefore contribute to

saving lives at sea". The subsequent tender procedures were "open on equal terms to natural or legal persons wishing to bid for the assignment".



The EU withdrew its maritime assets from the central Mediterranean in 2019. Aerial assets do not have the same capacity

While some NGOs fly planes, an Italian government draft law suggests imposing fines of up to €10,000 on the pilots of civil

society aircraft that search for refugee and migrant boats in distress, Reuters news agency recently <u>reported</u>. In May, Italy's

civil aviation authority barred the same search-and-rescue planes from using airports in Sicily, Pantelleria and Lampedusa.

A spokesperson for Sea Watch <u>suggested</u> the new rules are designed to "keep secret what is happening each day in the

Felix Weiss, a former spokesperson for German NGO Sea Watch, which flies two search-and-rescue planes in the central

Mediterranean, said the Heron drone has been a "game changer" for Frontex because it can stay so long in the air – 30

hours, he believed – and cover very large areas. This compares to Sea Watch's aircraft, which can stay in the air for a

Without Frontex's aerial surveillance the Libyan coastguard would be "practically, completely blindfolded," he said.

or legal requirement to rescue people in distress at sea when they are discovered.

Open distress cases are marked on a whiteboard in the bridge of the MSF Geo Barents rescue ship. Photograph: Sally Hayden

and also, in fairness, they cannot cover search and rescue for the whole Mediterranean."

Mediterranean".

maximum of eight hours.

[Kidnap, extortion and murder in the Mediterranean: 'He's giving us one option. If you don't go, he'll kill you']

With migration becoming a hot-button political topic across Europe, Frontex's budget has ballooned to €922 million for

headquarters, he said the EU's use of aerial surveillance in the central Mediterranean to support Libyan coastguard

interceptions is a "complicated question, complicated situation, [there are] tragic events ... Every few hours there's

He has a staff of about 70 people, and said his fundamental rights team can go into the "control room" – where drone

He perceives the situation as a "dilemma" – should they not alert the Libyans about new boats, because they want the

people on board to make it to European waters? "That would be probably better for the migrants, for sure, better for

fundamental rights, but highly problematic if they drown. If I had to take that decision I would for sure say the first

not to be used. "But again, we have enough problems to work on ... and I'm not saying that this is a luxury problem. But ...

footage is visible – to monitor what Frontex is doing at any time. However, "we have the dilemma with Frontex having very

limited powers. Yes, we do the air surveillance but the member states have more or less all the search-and-rescue capacity,

Jonas Grimheden joined the agency as its fundamental rights officer in 2021. Speaking on Microsoft Teams from its Warsaw

available [people] who can rescue them [should]. If the boat looks fragile enough, I would say, you go for it. If that's the Libyans, well then in this case, so be it." Regarding the EU's use of Israeli drones, Grimheden said: "I don't know who has produced what." He said where technology or equipment is procured is "not the biggest issue" unless the country is on an EU blacklist, when his team could push for it

of course it is less acute ..."

Fundamental rights

someone drowning, dying."

2024.

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