



Sea-Watch hails Italian court's decision to free Carola Rackete

Italian judge rules Carola Rackete acted 'in the performance of a duty', to save lives at sea, German rescue ship says.



Captain Carola Rackete was arrested on Saturday after entering the port of Lampedusa in her vessel [Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters]

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A charity running a rescue ship in the [Mediterranean Sea](#) has hailed an Italian court's decision to free captain Carola Rackete, days after she was [arrested](#) for docking with 40 migrants on board her vessel in defiance of a ban by Italy's government.

“We are relieved our captain is free! There were no grounds to keep her arrested, as her only ‘wrongdoing’ was to enforce human rights on the Mediterranean and to

take responsibility where none of the European governments did,” Sea-Watch, a German non-governmental organisation, wrote on Twitter following the court’s ruling on Tuesday.

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Rackete was arrested on Saturday after hitting a police speedboat while entering the port of the southern island of Lampedusa in her vessel, which had been banned from docking by Italian authorities.

The judge said an Italian security decree was “not applicable in the case of rescues” in the ruling.

Rackete's decision to not comply with the ban and dock the ship ended a [two-week standoff](#) at sea. Earlier, the 31-year-old German captain [had warned](#) of an "incredibly tense" situation that raised worries that those rescued off crisis-hit [Libya](#) might hurt themselves if the standoff continued.

"I was relieved about the judge's decision, which I see as a big win for solidarity with all people on the move including [refugees](#), migrants and asylum seekers, and against the criminalisation of helpers in many countries across [Europe](#)," Rackete said in a statement following the court's ruling.

"I was very touched by the solidarity expressed to me by so many people," she added, before paying tribute to the crew.

"Even though the attention is on me, it was as a team that we rescued the people, took care of them and brought them to safety."

Italy's far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, who has taken a hard line against [migrants](#), reacted negatively.

"This poor woman has only tried to kill five Italian soldiers. I am speechless! What do you have to do to be sent to prison in Italy?" Salvini said in a video on Facebook, promising to expel this "danger to national security" as soon as possible.

'Act of disobedience'

Rackete, 31, has defended her actions, saying she was compelled to avert a human tragedy and bring the migrants ashore after more than two weeks at sea.

"It wasn't an act of violence, but only one of disobedience," Rackete told the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* in an interview published on Sunday.

She had faced charges of abetting irregular immigration and forcing her way past a

police vessel that tried to block the Sea-Watch 3 – the latter crime punishable by up to 10 years in jail.



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Sea-Watch said the judge considered she had acted “in the performance of a duty”, to save lives at sea, and had no choice but to come to Italy as [Libya](#) and [Tunisia](#) could not be considered safe ports.

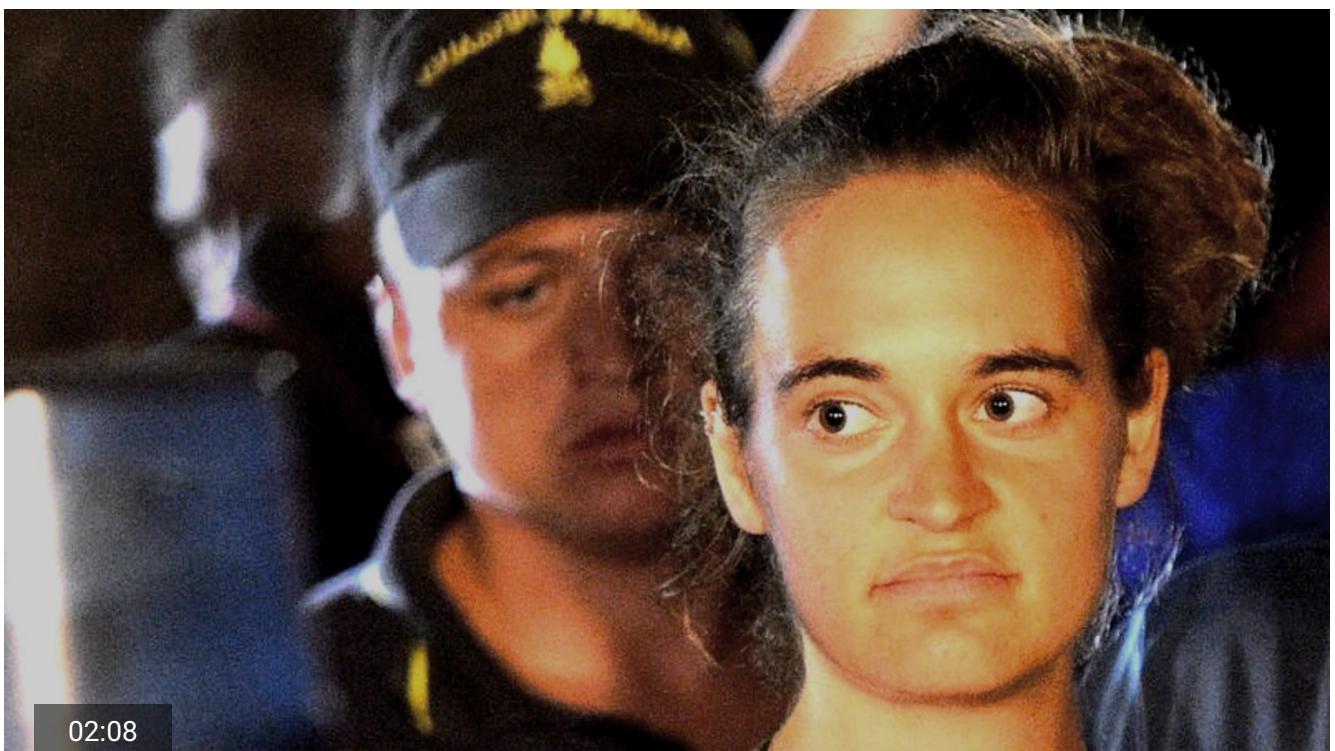
Rackete is also separately being investigated for assisting with irregular immigration, as is often the case when an NGO ship unloads refugees and migrants in [Italy](#).

The case is due to be heard on July 9, and according to her lawyers, she is unlikely to be deported before then.

The case has ignited a diplomatic row between Rome and Berlin amid a continuing failure to coordinate migration policy within the [European Union](#).

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas had on Monday called for Rackete's release following judicial proceedings "based on the rule of law".

Salvini responded that Maas should "invite his fellow citizens not to break Italian laws".



[Sea-Watch enters Lampedusa, captain Carola Rackete arrested \(2:09\)](#)

The migrants were allowed to disembark at Lampedusa and taken to a reception centre as they prepared to travel to either [France](#), where the Interior Ministry said it would take in 10, or to [Germany](#), [Finland](#), [Luxembourg](#) or [Portugal](#).

Two other humanitarian rescue ships, the Open Arms and the Alan Kurdi, remain

at sea.

Salvini said he held another meeting at his ministry on Tuesday to discuss how to prevent them from bringing migrants to Italy.

“We will continue to stop them, one by one. We will find a judge, there will be one in Italy, who will finally have the courage to say ... these people are not rescuers, they are accomplices, potential murderers, criminals, and in a normal country criminals go to jail,” he said.

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