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Contact: Paolo Gerbaudo

Mobile phone: 0044(0)7940527990

E-mail: paolo.gerbaudo@gmail.com

NEW RESEARCH REVEALS SCALE OF TOXIC DUMPING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Over 70 sunken ships suspected of having carried toxic and radioactive waste

New research shows there have been over 70 suspicious ship sinkings in the Mediterranean sea between 1979 and 2001, which could be linked with toxic waste traffic. Suspicious ship sinkings have been increasing in frequency in the late 90s and around 100.000 tons of cargo has been lost in that area. This information obtained from the Lloyd's register of shipping in London, has been compiled and published on the website www.infondoalmar.info, launched today.

"People think toxic and radioactive sea dumping is an Italian issue, given recent events there" - asserted Paolo Gerbaudo, a freelance journalist and UK correspondent of *il manifesto* daily, who has led the research conducted for the website. "This research shows how many ships suspected of having carried toxic waste have sunk in international waters and off the coasts of other Mediterranean countries like Greece, Lebanon and Turkey. It is about time the Italian government, the European Union, and the International Maritime Organisation intervene on this issue. Inaction could cost thousand of lives".

The newly published research reveals a series of worrying patterns such as the disproportionate presence of marble and cement as declared cargo, both being heavy materials able to screen radioactivity in the case of port controls, as well as of scrap iron, copper and steel, which have been often linked with radioactive contamination.

"We came to realize that the Italian and the international public was struggling to come to grips with this case because of its sheer complexity, the high number of incidents, as well as the uncertainty about them" - said David Boardman, researcher at MIT, who developed the website. "We thought there was no better way to visualize the situation than to create an online map of the sinkings based on official data from Lloyd's".

Infondoalmar.info is intended as a work in progress project, and invites users and experts to submit further information to add to the understanding of different incidents. In the first 3 days after the launch of the Italian version, the website has already received tens of e-mails signalling new cases or providing new details on known incidents.

The website documents how under the Mediterranean Sea lie tens of ecological time bombs, which could release thousands of tons of toxic and radioactive waste into the water with incalculable consequences for the environment and human health. Yet, Italian and international institutions have so far failed to deal with this looming ecological catastrophe. It is hoped that infondoalmar.info will bring more public and political attention to this very important issue.

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If you would like further information about this topic please call Paolo Gerbaudo at 0044(0)7940527990 or e-mail at paolo.gerbaudo@gmail.com