

= Tragedy of Otranto =

The Tragedy of Otranto took place on 28 March 1997 when the Albanian ship Kateri i Radës sank in a collision with the Italian naval vessel Sibilgia in the Strait of Otranto and at least 57 Albanians , aged 3 months to 69 years , lost their lives . The emigrants had been part of a large migration of Albanians to Italy following a popular uprising that began after the collapse of several large @-@ scale pyramid schemes . In order to prevent the unauthorized entry of illegals migrants into Italy , the Italian Navy set up a procedure to board Albanian vessels whenever encountered , implementing a de facto blockade .

In proceeding to carry out a boarding , the Italian vessel Sibilgia collided with Kater i Radës and capsized it , resulting in the Albanian deaths . The captains of both ships were held responsible for " shipwreck and multiple manslaughter " . The event raised questions over the extent of power that a state may exercise to protect itself from unauthorized entry . Arguments were presented that a state must limit coercive actions that are disproportionate to the risk of unauthorized entry . The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees criticized the Italian blockade as illegal since it had been established solely through an intergovernmental agreement with Albania .

= = Background = =

After years of enforced isolation and a ban on international travel , with shoot @-@ to @-@ kill orders on the border , thousands of Albanians began fleeing to Italy and Greece in late 1990 , when communism in Albania started to fall . Two large waves of people came to Italy , first in March and then in August 1991 . The first wave was sparked by a rumor that Italy was giving visas , and thousands of people commandeered boats of all sizes at the port of Durrës . The still @-@ communist Albanian government called the outflow a " national dementia . " By then , about 20 @,@ 000 Albanians had reached Italy , most of them in Brindisi . Much of the Italian media portrayed the situation as " barbarians " invading Italian soil . As a consequence of the Gulf War , Italian opinion @-@ makers voiced concerns regarding the alleged " Islamic danger " of the migration . Others saw a connection between the Ottoman invasion of Otranto (1480 ? 1481) across the 40 miles (64 km) wide Strait of Otranto and contemporary migration .

In 1997 , a crisis erupted in Albania after the collapse of several massive pyramid schemes , which resulted in social deterioration and violence in the country . An imposition of a curfew and a state of emergency on 2 March provoked a popular rebellion , causing concern in Italy , which feared another large @-@ scale migration flow . Albanian migration to Italy reached its peak in the latter half of March , bringing great pressure to Italian accommodation centers and provoking a strong reaction in Italian public opinion . Italy had been operating under a bilateral agreement with Albania to board Albanian vessels whenever encountered starting on 3 April 1997 and Albanian would @-@ be migrants going to Italy would be sent back to Albania , in exchange for Italian financial , police , and humanitarian assistance to the country . A military Operation White Flags was established in the international waters of the Strait and implemented a de facto naval blockade .

= = Sinking = =

The incident happened on 28 March 1997 in the Strait of Otranto when the Italian Navy vessel Sibilgia collided with the Albanian ship Kateri i Radës which had left from the Albanian port city of Vlorë with 142 people on board . The Sibilla sought to stop and inspect the ship suspected of containing irregular migrants . The vessel instead ended up colliding with the ship and sinking it . According to Italian authorities , there was no intention to cause the collision . The Zefiro first approached and identified the Kateri i Radës as a motorboat with approximately 30 civilians on board . The motorboat continued toward Italy even though a stop order issued by the Zefiro . This happened around 4 : 30 PM , near the Albanian island Sazan . Sibilgia then took over the operation and during its maneuvers , the Italian ship caused the Kateri i Radës to turn which resulted in subsequent deaths . After the Albanian ship was capsized , the Sibilgia allegedly left and came back

approximately 20 minutes later . The bodies of at least 52 who lost their lives were recovered . The total number of dead may be as high as 83 . The survivors were taken to the Apulian port of Brindisi , where they arrived at 2 : 45 AM . They were then put on a bus , and taken to an immigration center to be identified . On 29 and 30 March 1997 , news of the disaster made it to the first page of major Italian newspapers , relating the sense of gravity of the incident , which reported it as either a collision or a ramming . March 31 was a day of mourning in Albania .

On March 28 , the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1101 , which established a multinational protection force in Albania to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance . The force , known as Operation Alba , was led by the Italians and included the participation of 6 @, @ 500 soldiers from eight other countries . The unspoken reason for the intervention was to stem the flow of refugees .

= = Legal proceedings = =

The accident raised questions about the extent of power that the state may use to protect itself from unauthorized entry . Although undisputed that the sinking was unintentional , controversy exists over whether it was a result of dangerous maneuvering , which was disproportionate in relation to the stopping of the ship . Authors argue that there is an obligation for the state to limit coercive actions which are disproportionate to the risk of intrusion . The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees criticized the Italian blockade as " illegal " since Italy established it only through a bilateral , intergovernmental agreement with Albania .

The *Xhavara et. al v. Italy and Albania* case was held to be inadmissible because of non @-@ exhaustible national remedies . The European Court of Human Rights , which held the case , assumed jurisdiction relying on the bilateral agreement between Albania and Italy . The ship was recovered 35 miles (56 km) from the Italian coast , no more than 10 miles (16 km) to 15 miles (24 km) from the Albanian coast within Albanian territorial waters . The court held Italy responsible for the incident since it was considered to have exercised jurisdiction . Italy was also held responsible for holding an investigation of the deaths , a requirement which was considered to have been fulfilled by the public manslaughter proceedings held against the captain of the Italian vessel . By the end of eight years of proceedings , the Court of Brindisi convicted the Italian and Albanian captains together of " shipwreck and multiple manslaughter " with the first to three years in prison and the second to four . Responsibility for the " accident " was attributed to both and was relegated to the individual level . The larger chain of command , legal framework , discourses , and established practices which resulted in the sinking have not been judicially investigated .

= = Remembrance = =

The tragedy became part of the Albanian folk song repertoire relating to the migration of Albanians abroad . The leading figures of this practice were local intellectuals called rapsods related the mythistory of kurbet before World War II with the migration . They make use of metaphors and performance devices taken from oral folk poetry and death laments which react on the migrations to fix them in the memory of the community . This became a tool for responding to the loss of life for the tragedy of Otranto and other tragic events .

Parts of Kateri i Radës were transported to a concrete platform in the port of Otranto as a monument to the tragedy . The project cost ? 150 thousand and was entrusted to the Greek sculptor Costas Varotsos . Before the project , what was left of the ship lay in a corner of the port of Brindisi . The project was titled *L'Approdo . Opera all 'Umanità Migrante* (*The Landing . A work dedicated to Migrating Humanity*) . Photographers Arta Ngucaj and Arben Beqiraj published photographs of the ship on the Albanian @-@ Italian newspaper *Shqiptari i Italisë* . The families of the dead requested for the relics of Kateri i Radës to be placed in Albania after Italian media reported that it was to be used as a monument .