Beat: News

Italy–Albania Migration Deal Investigation Wins the Daphne Caruana Galizia Prize

Investigation Earns EU Journalism Honour

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USPA NEWS - Investigation Earns EU Journalism Honour

An investigation into the migration agreement between Italy and Albania has won the 2026 Daphne Caruana Galizia Prize for Journalism, bringing renewed attention to the treatment of migrants, public spending and accountability at Europe's borders.

Written by Italian journalist Giacomo Zandonini and Dutch journalist Maite Vermeulen, and published by De Correspondent, the investigation examines the agreement under which Italy established migrant detention and asylum processing facilities on Albanian territory.

The award was presented at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Wednesday, 21 October, at a ceremony attended by Parliament President Roberta Metsola and Vice-President Pina Picierno, who is responsible for the prize. An independent jury comprising journalists from across the European Union selected the winning investigation.

The recognition places the work within a wider debate about how European governments manage migration, and how closely the policies introduced in their name can be scrutinised.

Eighteen Months of Investigation

Zandonini and Vermeulen spent 18 months examining the Italy–Albania agreement, following financial records, seeking official documents and speaking to people directly involved in its operation.

Their reporting explored the origins of the arrangement, the development of the Italian-run facilities and the experiences of those detained inside them. It also considered why the agreement has attracted interest as a possible model for migration policies elsewhere in Europe.

The journalists submitted more than 30 Freedom of Information requests across six European countries and to European institutions and agencies. Their research brought together interviews with migrants, lawyers, officials, centre staff and local residents, alongside an examination of the decisions and expenditure behind the scheme.

Working with photo editor Bebe Blanco Agterberg, information designer Sharon Coone and photographer Francesco Bellina, they produced a detailed account combining investigative reporting, photography and visual explanation.

Questions Over Access and Transparency

A central theme of the investigation is the difficulty of obtaining information about an operation funded by public money.

According to the journalists, requests for documents and interviews were frequently rejected or left unanswered. Access to the centres was restricted, staff were required to sign strict non-disclosure agreements, and some contracts were neither publicly tendered nor made available for scrutiny.

The reporting also traces changes in the facilities' purpose. Initially intended to process certain asylum claims outside Italy, the scheme later developed to include transfers from detention centres in Italy to Albania for the purpose of removal.

The authors question both the human consequences of the arrangement and the implications of adopting similar policies more widely. Their findings raise concerns about transparency, access to legal protection and the ability of journalists and the public to examine government decisions.

Recognition for Public Interest Journalism

The winning investigation was selected from 344 submissions received between 4 May and 31 July 2026. Ten entries reached the final shortlist.

The range of shortlisted work reflected the breadth of investigative journalism across Europe, covering subjects including migration, financial interests, disinformation, surveillance and the treatment of journalists.

For the winning team, the award recognises the sustained work required to examine a complex international agreement, particularly when access to institutions, documents and decision-makers is limited.

It also underlines the importance of looking beyond political announcements to establish how a policy operates in practice, who is affected and how public resources are used.

Remembering Daphne Caruana Galizia

The prize honours Daphne Caruana Galizia, the Maltese investigative journalist murdered in a car bomb attack on 16 October 2017.

Her reporting examined corruption, money laundering, organised crime and the connections between political power and financial interests. Despite threats and harassment, she continued to investigate matters of public concern.

Nine years after her murder, the award bearing her name continues to recognise journalists prepared to pursue difficult stories and challenge those in positions of authority.

Speaking at the ceremony, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola reaffirmed Parliament's determination to seek justice for Caruana Galizia and to support journalists facing intimidation. She said attempts to silence the journalist had failed, with her reporting reaching wider audiences and her courage continuing to inspire others.

An Award Defending European Values

Presented annually, the Daphne Caruana Galizia Prize for Journalism recognises outstanding reporting that promotes or defends the European Union's fundamental principles.

These include human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights.

Professional journalists and teams of any nationality may enter work published or broadcast by a media organisation based in one of the EU's 27 member states. The winning entry receives €20,000, alongside recognition of its contribution to journalism in the public interest.

Previous Winners

Previous winning investigations demonstrate the award's international scope and its emphasis on accountability:
- 2025: An investigation coordinated by Follow the Money into the financial networks supporting Russia's sanctions-evading oil trade.
- 2024: Reporting by Lost in Europe on the disappearance of unaccompanied child migrants.
- 2023: A joint investigation into the Pylos migrant boat disaster by Solomon, working with Forensis, StrgF/ARD and The Guardian.
- 2022: A documentary by Clément Di Roma and Carol Valade examining Russian influence in the Central African Republic.
- 2021: The Pegasus Project, coordinated by Forbidden Stories, investigating the use of spyware against journalists and others.

The 2026 winning investigation continues that tradition, examining an agreement whose significance extends beyond Italy and Albania. At its centre are questions about the treatment of people, the exercise of state power and the public's right to know how decisions are made.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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