

**„The eyes of the ships“ – Interview with José Benavente, founder and chairman of L'association Pilotes Volontaires**  
**May 13th, 2024**



The Colibri 2, Pilotes Volontaires aircraft, in action over the central Mediterranean. (Image: RESQSHIP/Leon Salner, 2024)

RESQSHIP is back on rotation with the NADIR. To rescue as many people in distress at sea in the central Med as possible, we are working closely with other organizations again this year. One of these is **Pilotes Volontaires** - a French NGO that supports our work from the air and makes an indispensable contribution to our search for boats in distress.

We had the opportunity to interview **José Benavente, founder and chairman of L'association Pilotes Volontaires**, to find out more about this valuable work and how it can be supported. As an expression of our appreciation and solidarity, for the next two months (until July 15<sup>th</sup> 2024) you can donate to Pilotes Volontaires also via our Website [here](#).



José Benavente (3rd from left), founder and chairman of Pilotes Volontaires, shows RESQSHIP crew members the Colibri 2. (Image: RESQSHIP/Friedrich Reich, 2022)

### **Who is Pilotes Volontaires and how do you support people on the move across the Mediterranean Sea? /**

“The action of Pilotes Volontaires involves providing an air observation support to search and rescue operations at sea (between Tunisian coast, Libyan coast and Lampedusa) which enables spotting boats in distress.

The work tool is the Colibri 2, a twin-engined plane, with 4 seats. On board, 1 pilot, 1 specialist observer and 2 observers take action. On the ground, a liaison officer acts as an intermediary between the aircraft, the NGOs and the Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centers.

On top of the spotting task, the organisation gathers information about what is observed during the flights (rescue cases, interceptions by the Libyan coast guards, ...) and archives them. Finally, the members of Pilotes Volontaires share their experience to college students, organisations and communities.”

### **How do you work together with the ships of civilian sea rescue organizations such as RESQSHIP? /**

“We are in permanent contact with the ships of civilian sea rescue organisations flying by their side. Ships usually call us « their eyes ». In fact, from the sky, the widened field of vision combined with the flight speed enable covering a vast search area. This combination of maritime and air means considerably increases the chances to find people in distress. We also offer a logistical support on land to the crews who make a stopover in Lampedusa : place to rest, shower, laundry, storage etc.”

**What costs are associated with your operations this year and how can people support you? /**

“Our annual budget is about 450 000 euros. We perform between 100 and 110 flights. The main operating costs are : fuel, aircraft maintenance, crew housing. Only 10% of our members are paid with this budget, the others work as volunteers for us.

1 day’s flying costs 3.000 euros, 1 maintenance (every 100 flight hours) costs around 10.000 euros and 1 rotation (100 flight hours) costs 35.000 euros.

The best way to support Pilotes Volontaires is a financial support. We are always looking for funds and grants to keep going with operations. Therefore, we are really happy that RESQSHIP is launching a solidarity appeal to donate for us – thank you very much!”



Joint operation of Pilotes Volontaires and RESQSHIP in a rescue case in the central Mediterranean.

(Photo: Pilotes Volontaires, 2024)