

Weekly Alarm Phone Report, 11th – 17th of January 2016

In the past week, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 37 distress cases in the Aegean Sea and to 1 case in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Depending on the changing weather conditions, members of the Alarm Phone experienced both quiet and extremely busy shifts. Whenever the sea seemed to calm, many boats would go out at sea, despite the cold. In the first two and a half weeks or so of January 2016, more than 30.000 people successfully crossed the Aegean Sea to Greece. In comparison to the nearly 1,500 who did so in the whole of January 2015, this is a significant increase and demonstrates that the new year begins how the last one had ended, with unprecedented cross-border movements into Europe.

At the same time, the European border regime's death toll continues to rise. Many travellers died in the past week and also bodies of those who may have passed away in earlier shipwrecks were found along Turkish and Greek beaches. At least two women and one child drowned between Ayvacik and Lesvos on Monday and two men and one boy went missing. On Tuesday the bodies of five men and one woman were found washed up on the beaches of Seferihisar, a coastal province of Izmir. On Friday at least four people, amongst them three children died when their vessel sank on their way to Lesvos. And on Saturday, five bodies were found on the beaches of the Greek island of Samos.

Please find short summaries of the distress calls that reached us in the past week below, as well as links to the full reports:

Aegean Sea

On Monday the 11th of January 2016, our Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to 2 emergency situations, concerning groups of travellers stranded on the Greek islands of Samos and Farmakonisi. We later on received confirmations that both groups had been found and rescued (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/406>).

On Tuesday the 12th of January, we were alerted to 1 emergency case in the Aegean region. We received a WhatsApp message from an activist friend who alerted us to a boat carrying 50 people, including small children and babies, on its way to the Greek island of Nera. The vessel drifted precariously for several hours until it was rescued by Turkish coastguards (<http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/407>).

On Wednesday the 13th of January, our shift team was alerted to a group of refugees in Turkey, seeking to cross the Aegean Sea. A contact person informed our shift team at 6.14am that the group would soon take to the sea. Our contact person stayed in direct contact with the group of about 40 people. We later received updates about the journey of the boat and later his confirmation that the vessel had made it to Lesvos

Island independently and the people were safe (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/408>).

On Thursday the 14th of January, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 14 emergency situations in the Aegean region. 4 vessels in distress were rescued by Turkish coastguards and another 2 were presumably rescued by them. 4 vessels were rescued by Greek coastguards near Lesvos and two vessels reached the island independently. We also received a first-hand testimony of a group of travellers who had been attacked at sea and were later rescued by Turkish coastguards (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/410>).

On Friday the 15th of January, we were alerted to 16 emergency situations in the Aegean region. 3 boats were rescued by the Turkish coastguards, 5 by the Greek coastguards. In one situation it was not clear whether the group had reached Greece independently or whether it had also been rescued by Greek authorities. We were alerted to 4 groups of stranded travellers. In one case their rescue was confirmed, in two cases it was presumed and in one case it was unclear whether they had been rescued or not. Moreover, 3 boats were able to reach Greek islands independently (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/413>).

On Saturday the 16th of January, at 1.20am, a contact person told us via WhatsApp about a vessel carrying 45 people and moving toward the Greek island of Pserimos. They were still in Turkish waters. We could not reach them and our contact person had already alerted the Turkish coastguards as the vessel seemed in urgent distress. At 3am our contact person informed us that the Turkish coastguards had confirmed its rescue (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/411>).

On Sunday the 17th of January, at around 8am, our shift team was alerted to a group of 30 people, including many children and women, who had stranded on the Greek island of Kastellorizo. We reached the group at 9.20am and they informed us that they had already informed the Greek coastguards. We then reached out to the Port Authority on Kastellorizo and were told that a vessel could not go out to rescue them at the moment as the weather conditions were too difficult. They would try and reach the group on land but the group should try and find a road. When we informed the group at 9.35am they said it was impossible for them to climb the rocks up as they had a disabled man amongst them, pregnant women and many children. The Port Authority insisted that they would have to reach the road as they would not be able to rescue them from their current location. A few hours later, 12.20pm we learned that some of the group had tried to find a road while the rest was remaining at the initial location. At 2.32pm they were still waiting. The police informed us at 3.42pm that they had found the group. A few minutes later we received the confirmation from the group that they had been rescued (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/412>).

Western Mediterranean Sea

On Friday the 15th of January, the Alarm Phone was alerted to an emergency situation in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Between 8.29-8.42am our shift team received several calls from a Moroccan number, alerting us to a case of distress. While the quality of the connection was bad, we gathered that about 11 people, including minors were on a vessel in the Western Mediterranean Sea. They told us that they had seen a large red vessel but were unable to reach it. They said that water was entering their vessel and the waves were high but we could get any information on where they were, and where they had left from in Morocco. We contacted Salvamento Maritimo and passed on the details of the case. Our last contact to the vessel was at 9.03am when the travellers re-stated that they could see a large red vessel. Afterwards, they could not be reached again. At 6.36pm Salvamento Maritimo confirmed that the vessel had been found and intercepted by the Moroccan Navy (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/409>).