

Commemorating past border atrocities and struggling against future ones: Transnational solidarity actions on the day of more deaths at sea

Alarm Phone Weekly Report 1-7 February 2016

During the first week of February, our Alarm Phone shift teams were alerted to 15 distress cases in the Aegean Sea and to 3 distress situations in the Western Mediterranean Sea. The smaller number of cases that reached us from the Aegean Sea coincides with the smaller number of boats that left from Turkey in order to reach Greece. Especially between the 5th and 7th of February, mainly due to stormy weather conditions that would have made journeys even more dangerous, sea-crossings decreased. In the first half of the week, several boats still sought to reach the Greek islands and once again a fatal incident occurred: on Tuesday the 2nd of February a vessel capsized off the coast in the Izmir province and nine people, including two children, drowned. During the past week we also received calls of distraught people whose relatives had died or gone missing in shipwrecks that had occurred in January.

Two of the three distress cases that we were alerted to in the Western Mediterranean regions were particularly dramatic. On Monday the 1st of February, a boat with 25 people was eventually discovered and rescued after a lengthy search and rescue (SAR) operation by the Spanish SAR organization Salvamento Marítimo. Unfortunately, in our case from Saturday the 6th of February, rescue came too late and one person died while another one went missing. It was on that day that large transnational protest actions took place in Morocco and Europe to commemorate migrants who had been killed by the Spanish border-police Guardia Civil exactly two years ago in Tarajal on the beach of Ceuta.

Demonstrations took place in Ceuta, Melilla, Madrid, Barcelona, Strasbourg, Berlin, Rom, Genoa and Idomeni. Under the slogan 'Stop the War Against Migrants', about 400 people gathered in front of the Spanish embassy in Rabat to protest the atrocities committed by Spanish authorities and to demand freedom of movement and the opening of borders. Many sub-Saharan migrants, some of whom had survived the 6th of February 2014, were present as well as Moroccans and Europeans in solidarity with them. One participant knew of the vessel in distress in the Western Med to which our shift team had been alerted as his friends were on board.

Many of the protesters voiced the demand for 'Ferries for all!' which is also a slogan of a campaign that the Alarm Phone has now relaunched: 'Ferries not Frontex'. The campaign emerged as a response to the most deadly week in the Mediterranean in April 2015 when more than a 1250 drowned in the Central Mediterranean Sea. Soon our campaign newspaper will be published and circulated.

Please find below summaries and links to the individual cases that the Alarm Phone dealt with in the past week.

Western Mediterranean Sea

On Monday the 1st of February 2016, at 3.04am, the Alarm Phone was alerted to a boat on which about 25 people had left Morocco, seeking to reach Spain. A contact person, whose sister was on the boat, informed us that the boat had left from Nador the day before. Shortly afterwards we were contacted by a man who told us that his wife and child had also left from Nador. As both contact persons provided us with the same contact details of passengers on the boat, we assumed that their relatives were travelling together, on a single boat. It was difficult to establish when exactly the boat had departed from Nador. In the following 24 hours, our shift team was in regular exchange with the Spanish search and rescue agency Salvamento Maritimo (SM) and our contact persons. SM launched a large search operation, including a helicopter, a plane and rescue vessels. Finally, at 2.50am, SM Almeria confirmed that they had found the group 30 minutes earlier. Following their account, everyone was fine health-wise (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/436>).

On Saturday the 6th of February, at 1.30pm, the Alarm Phone was informed about a boat that had left from Tangier/Morocco the day before, carrying 7 people. They were in a situation of distress and had already reached out to SM. At 1.35pm, we reached the travellers but the phone connection was bad and no further information could be gathered. We informed SM about this case at 1.50pm and they confirmed that they had been searching for this vessel the day before with a plane, a helicopter and a vessel. They had also been in direct contact with the travellers but then decided to conclude the search at 9.30pm the day before as they thought that the vessel was still in Moroccan waters. In the following hours we tried but were unable to reconnect to the group on the boat. Shortly after midnight, we learned that two of the travellers may have died. At 00.55am we received the information that the group had been rescued but that 2 people had died. SM told us at 1.05am that they had been told that the Moroccan Navy had rescued that vessel in the afternoon the day before. 5 people were found alive, one person had died and another one had gone missing. We tried to gain more information about the case but so far we were unable to reach the travellers or the contact person (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/437>).

On Sunday the 7th of February, around noon, our Alarm Phone shift team was contacted by someone who told us that his friend was on a vessel that had left from Tangier/Morocco. He didn't know at what time they had departed but assumed that they had left during the night. He also informed us that the engine of the vessel had broken down. We contacted the boat at 12.15pm and despite difficulties to communicate, we gathered that they had left from Tangier, their engine had stopped working and 2 women on board were sick. When we spoke to them at 12.23pm and it seemed as if water had started to enter their vessel, we quickly reached out to SM. The Spanish authorities already knew about this case and had launched a rescue operation. Afterwards we were unable to reconnect to the group of travellers. At 1.33pm SM confirmed that they had rescued the group of 8 men, 3 women and one baby near the Moroccan coast and were in the process of bringing them to Tarifa/Spain. All of them

were fine health-wise. We then informed our contact person about the good news (<http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/438>).

Aegean Sea

On Monday the 1st of February, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 distress cases in the Aegean region. Two groups of travellers had stranded, one on Farmakonisi Island and one on Padas Island. The rescue and transfer of the former group was confirmed. Two vessels seeking to reach Lesvos had entered situations of distress. While we found out that one vessel was rescued, we do not have a confirmation for the second vessel. We were also informed about a boat that was able to reach Chios Island independently (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/415>).

On Tuesday the 2nd of February, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 distress situations in the Aegean region. Four vessels were in distress at sea in total and 2 of them were rescued to Greece and the other 2 to Turkey. One group was stranded on Farmakonisi and later transferred to Leros Island by the Greek coastguards (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/427>).

On Wednesday the 3rd of February, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 4 emergency situations in the Aegean region. Two groups of travellers were able to reach Lesvos Island independently. One group in distress was rescued by the Greek coastguards and another group had stranded on Farmakonisi Island and was later found and transferred to Leros (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/434>).

On Thursday the 4th of February, our Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to 1 distress situation in the Aegean region. At 10.12pm, a contact person informed us about a group of about 13 people, including 5 children, who had stranded on the Greek island of Kastellorizo. We reached out to the group and they confirmed that they were on Kastellorizo and needed support. At 10.31pm we called the Port Police of Kastellorizo and informed them about the situation. The officer asked us to advise the group to move further inland and try to reach a road. One of our Arabic speaking activist friends passed on the information that we had received from the police. However, the group stated that they would not be able to move from their current location as it was dark and children and elderly women were amongst the group. After many further exchanges with the Port Police and our contact person, we were finally informed at 5.45am that they had started to move to the road and were all fine health-wise (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/435>).