

Even prior to the EU-Turkey deal, thousands of people are locked into Turkey and Greece

Alarm Phone Weekly Report February 29th 2016 – March 6th 2016

After the violent closure of the Balkan route and still prior to the infamous EU-Turkey summit on March 7th 2016, in the past week, the Alarm Phone witnessed manifold attempts to further deter migration movements across the Aegean Sea and into the Balkans, in the EU's desperate struggle to gain some control over people's unauthorised movements to Europe.

Pressurized by the EU with the aim of reducing the numbers of arrivals on Greek islands below 1000 travellers per day, Turkey has upgraded its capacities to deter people on the move and to prevent them from leaving the country. Besides the NATO military vessels which have arrived in the Aegean Sea but have not yet started to operate, Turkey has deployed additional vessels and also helicopters and airplanes to different sea-border areas to fulfill this task. Turkish media reported that since the beginning of the year, about 25.000 travellers have been prevented from leaving the country.¹ Beyond that, at the beginning of last week, more than three hundred people from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia were deported from Greece to Turkey in an attempt to enforce readmission agreements between both countries, which had for long not been implemented.² These deportations only gave a taste on what can be expected once the "1 in, 1 out" plan of Turkish Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu is implemented.

Despite all these violent practices, the self-assertion and self-determination of travellers has not diminished and the numbers of arrivals on the Greek islands alone remained between 2000 and 2500 persons per day.³ Variations from this average were again rather induced by bad weather conditions, than by statist attempts to block movements. However, these statist attempts have caused yet another fatal shipwreck: On Sunday the 6th of March, at least 25 travellers died off the Turkish coast, after their wooden vessel had capsized.⁴

Meanwhile, at the Greek-Macedonian border crossing point of Idomeni, the violent and racist fight against those who have survived the crossing of the Aegean Sea continued. Several of those who protested against the de facto incarceration of more than 15.000 people at the border were severely injured by Macedonian police forces.⁵

Summary of cases

In the past week, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 32 emergency situations, 27 of which occurred in the Aegean Sea and 5 in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Summaries and links to the individual reports can be found below.

Western Mediterranean Sea

On Tuesday the 1st of March 2016 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 3 boats in distress on their way from Morocco to the Spanish coast. While the Spanish coastguard rescued two boats, in one case the travellers were intercepted by the Moroccan Marine and brought back to Morocco. See: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/462>.

¹ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-stops-24120-irregular-migrants-in-45-days.aspx?pageID=238&nID=95963&NewsCatID=341>

² http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-503_en.htm

³ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=819>

⁴ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/death-toll-in-latest-boat-tragedy-rises-to-25.aspx?pageID=238&nID=96135&NewsCatID=341>

⁵ <http://moving-europe.org/2016/03/06/brutal-revenge-against-protesters/>

On Thursday the 3rd of March 2016 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 2 groups of travellers in distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea. The Spanish coastguard rescued one group. In the other case the travellers were intercepted by the Moroccan Marine and by the Spanish Guardian Civil and pushed-back to Morocco. See: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/465>.

Aegean Sea

On Monday the 29th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was in contact with 7 groups of travellers in distress near the Greek island of Lesbos and on the island of Samos. 4 boats had been in distress at sea east of Lesbos. Three of them were rescued by the Greek coastguard and one by the Turkish coastguard. Beyond that, one group of travellers had stranded on a rocky Turkish island and was rescued by the Turkish coastguard, while two groups had stranded on Samos and were rescued by Médecins Sans Frontières and Greek authorities respectively. See: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/461>.

On Wednesday the 2nd of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 6 groups of travellers in distress near the Greek islands of Lesbos and Pasas. While one group had stranded on Pasas and was transferred to Chios afterwards, 5 boats had been in distress east of the Greek island of Lesbos. In the end, two boats reached Lesbos independently and the Greek coastguard rescued one boat. Beyond that, one boat returned to Turkey independently and the Turkish coastguard rescued another boat. See: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/463>.

On Thursday the 3rd of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 8 groups of travellers in distress near or on the Greek islands of Chios, Lesbos and Pasas. 4 groups who had stranded on Pasas were rescued and transferred to the neighbouring island of Chios. Two boats reached Chios and Lesbos independently, while the Greek coastguard rescued two boats from distress close to Lesbos and Pasas respectively. See: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/464>.

On Saturday the 5th of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to a large group of travellers in distress on the Greek island of Farmakonisi. The stranded people were transferred to the island of Leros by the rescue vessel ILIAS T after we had alerted the port authorities on Leros. See: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/466>.

On Sunday the 6th of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 4 groups of travellers in distress in the Aegean Sea. The Greek coastguard rescued all travellers, 3 boats to the island of Samos and one boat to the island of Lesbos. See: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/467>.