

Alarm Phone Weekly Report, 28th of September to 4th of October 2015

The fundamental crisis of the European border regime continues, and we as the Alarm Phone are able to witness first-hand how thousands succeed to overcome Europe's borders day after day, despite their securitisation and fortification. As a reaction to these unprecedented movements, the EU seeks to militarise its borders even further and announced on the 28th of September that its second phase of the naval operation 'Eunavfor Med' would be launched on the 7th of October. In this second phase EU forces go beyond gathering surveillance on 'smuggling networks' and engage actively in boarding, searching, seizing and diverting vessels 'suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking on the high seas'. As many other human rights groups and freedom of movement activists throughout and beyond Europe, we denounce this mission in the strongest possible terms as it will make sea crossings evermore dangerous and will imprison thousands who want to escape Libya and Northern Africa. In addition, the EU began negotiations with the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan over plans to further outsource EU border control to its neighbouring countries and secure its eastern borders in the Aegean region.

The Alarm Phone network calls for the exact opposite: the opening of legal and safe ways into the territories of the EU, ferries not Frontex! Anything short of legal possibilities to cross borders will lead to more suffering and death as this past week has demonstrated once again. The Greek coastguard found the bodies of two children and two adults off the island of Kos, and the bodies of a woman and a child near Lesvos. Following news accounts, about 95 bodies were washed up in Libya over the weekend, 85 of them near the capital city of Tripoli and 10 near Sabratha. These atrocities will continue if Europe continues to follow its politics of deterrence.

In the past seven days we were involved in 51 situations of emergency in the Aegean Sea, 2 in the Western Mediterranean Sea and 1 distress case in the Central Med. Please find summaries of our reports and links to the full reports below.

On Monday the 28th of September, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 7 distress cases in the Aegean Sea. The first situation that reached us around midnight was already very dramatic with 44 travellers, some of whom had presumably gone overboard already, in acute distress near the Greek island of Samos. Our shift team reached out to the Greek coastguards who noted down the coordinates and confirmed that they had already sent out a vessel to that position. We were then also alerted by two other contact persons about the same case. One of them also stated that people were overboard. At 1.15am, the Greek authorities informed us that they had just rescued 48 people, close to the coordinates they had received from us. Through our contact persons we finally received confirmation of their rescue at 1.26am.

We were alerted to the six other cases throughout the day. They took place near Samos, Chios and Lesvos. Two vessels made it to Greek islands independently, 3 were rescued by the Greek coastguards and another one by the Turkish coastguards (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/284>).

On Tuesday the 29th of September, at approximately 4.30am, the Alarm Phone received a direct call from travellers in distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea. They stated that they were about 125 people, including 2 women, one of whom was pregnant. They had left Libya and were on their way to Malta. In English and French and through their satellite phone they told our shift team that they could not steer the vessel anymore and had lost orientation. There were too many people on board, many of whom were sea-sick. Our shift team asked about their GPS position but was only able to receive incomplete coordinates. At 5am we called the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Rome and informed them about the case. Finally, at 5.12am, the travellers told us their position which we quickly passed on to MRCC Rome. They confirmed that they would work on the case. At 7.57am, the people on the boat reached out to us again and this time they were clearly anxious, with many shouting in the background. They told us that they could see a blue vessel with white letters on in the distance. At 9.02am, they told us that they could not reach MRCC Rome and that there were two vessels now nearby, one of which seemed to move away from them. At 9.40am, the travellers informed us about a white ship vicinity, possibly an Italian vessel, and a helicopter hovering above them. We advised them to stay calm. Afterwards, they could not be reached again. At 11.39am, MRCC Rome said that that one of their navy vessel had just rescued a boat with 124 people on board. They assumed that they were the people in question (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/288>).

On Wednesday the 30th, the Alarm Phone was involved in a total of 12 emergency situations near Greek islands. The first case reached us at 1.13am when we received a WhatsApp message from a contact person who told us about a group of 30 people on a vessel in distress (case 1). The father of the contact person's friend was amongst them. With the provided GPS coordinates we could see that they were in Greek waters, near the island of Lesbos. The contact person told us that water was entering the vessel and asked us to alert the Greek coastguards. We also suggested that the travellers should call the international emergency number 112 in any case. We reached the Greek coastguards at 1.25am who were very impatient and told us to ask the travellers to call by themselves. At 2.44am our contact person informed us that they had reached Lesbos independently and were safe.

Of the other 11 groups in distress, 8 made it to Greece and three were returned to Turkey. Three vessels reached Lesbos independently, two were rescued to Lesbos by the Greek coastguards, one vessel presumably reached Samos on its own and another one Chios Island, one group stranded on Farmakonisi Island, two vessels were rescued by the Turkish coastguards and one vessel was washed back to Turkish shores after its engine had broken down (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/285>).

On Thursday the 1st of October, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 distress cases in the Aegean Sea. At 3.59am, we received a phone call from the UK. A woman informed us about an emergency situation near Samos Island (case 1). The vessel in distress carrying between 40-60 people was, however, still located in Turkish waters. We were not able to reach the group and our contact person informed the Turkish coastguards. We then received conflicting information about the same case from several informants. It turned out that the vessel was in fact close to Lesbos Island, not Samos. At 11.40am we were able to reach the vessel and were informed that the vessel was capsizing. We told them to quickly call 112 but

when they tried, they could not get through. We informed the coastguards who were very uncooperative and would not take our information. They just said that the travellers should call them directly. In a phone call with the coastguards at around noon, we were told to call the authorities in the North of Lesvos, Mithimna, who in turn confirmed that they had already sent out a rescue vessel. At 1pm, one of our contact persons confirmed their rescue. RSC Mithimna also confirmed the rescue of 57 people at 1.22pm.

Another group of travellers had stranded on the small island of Stroggili and was then rescued/transferred by the Greek coastguards from the island later on. We were also alerted to a vessel that was subsequently rescued by the Turkish coastguards as well as to two emergency situations near and on the island of Farmakonisi. One group was still on a vessel in distress in Turkish waters and was rescued by the Turkish coastguards. Two groups had stranded on the Greek island of Farmakonisi. On the next day we were informed that they had been transferred to Leros Island and were safe. At the same time we learned about scandalous conditions on Leros Island, with hundreds of travellers stuck there and not cared for appropriately. Food and water are lacking and we also hear about serious ill-treatments of refugee women. The authorities tried to force them to remove their scarves/hijabs for 'photographic evidence' which they refused.

Besides these five cases, our shift teams were also informed about several other boats from various contact persons who saw posts about distress situations on Facebook and contacted us. While we appreciate that everyone is trying to raise awareness about emergency situations, there were several cases in which we could not get involved, either as the cases had already been resolved and the posts were outdated or as not sufficient information was provided (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/286>).

On Thursday the 1st of October, the Alarm Phone received a call from a person in Morocco at approximately 7pm and was informed about a vessel that had left Morocco during the night, carrying about 50 persons. He had lost contact to the travellers and was very worried about their well-being. We then informed one of our Alarm Phone members in Morocco. At 8.18pm, the contact person called us again, becoming increasingly worried. Our member in Morocco contacted the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo who passed on the good news: The boat had made it to Almeria/Spain. All 58 travellers were safe. He informed our contact person who was, of course, very relieved (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/289>).

On Friday the 2nd of October, the Alarm Phone was alerted to a total of 14 distress cases in one day. Four emergencies occurred near the Greek island of Samos and we received the confirmation that groups 1, 2 and 4 were rescued by the Greek coastguards while the third group reached the island independently (cases 1, 2, 3, 4). We were informed about a distress case between Bodrum/Turkey and Kos/Greece and we informed the Turkish coastguards (case 5). However, no information about their rescue could be obtained. We were also involved in five cases that took place near Lesvos Island (cases 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Four vessels were rescued by the Greek coastguards and one vessel made it to the island independently. Case 11 concerned a vessel in distress near Chios Island which was rescued by the Greek authorities and cases 12-13 concerned groups that had stranded on Farmakonisi Island/Greece. Their rescue was not confirmed but can be assumed. In one case (14), we received only limited information but learned that the 40 travellers were rescued (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/287>).

On Saturday the 3rd of October, our shift team was called from someone in Morocco who informed us about a vessel that had left from Nador/Morocco the evening before, at about 10pm. There were 28 people on the boat, including 3 women, one of whom was pregnant. We informed the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo about the situation at 4.17pm. The Spanish authorities told us at 4.47pm that they had detected a rubber vessel that fit our description and would launch a rescue operation shortly. We agreed to speak to them again 4 hours later to confirm the rescue. Afterwards we informed our contact person about the situation. At 5.33pm we reached the group of travellers directly and spoke to a woman who was clearly in panic. We told them to stay calm and wait for the rescue vessel. We spoke to Salvamento again at 7.26pm who were worried about the case as they had, in fact, not located the vessel and it had turned dark in the meantime. The contact person called us repeatedly, expressing how worried he was. He also told us at 7.45pm that he had even informed the Moroccan Navy which refused to search for the vessel as they said that it would probably be in Spanish waters already. At 8pm we received an email from Salvamento in which they told us that the vessel had been sighted by a rescue aircraft approximately 11 miles off the Moroccan Coast. They would send a vessel to that location. We then informed our contact person who in turn informed that travellers. They said that they could see a vessel in vicinity as well as an airplane above them. Afterwards we were unable to contact the travellers directly but received confirmation of their rescue through Salvamento at 10.30pm. We then also informed the contact person about the good news. During the day, 188 people were rescued by the Spanish authorities (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/291>).

On Saturday the 3rd of October, the Alarm Phone was involved in 8 emergency situations in the Aegean Sea. At 2.35am we were called by a contact person who alerted us to a vessel in distress, still in Turkish waters (case 1). The travellers had run out of fuel and could not move any further. Our contact person had already informed the Greek coastguard and when we called the people on the boat they seemed fine and awaiting rescue by the Turkish coastguard. Our contact person also told us about a second vessel which was very close to the first one. At 2.50am we called the people on board of the first vessel and they confirmed that the Turkey authorities were in the process of rescuing them.

3 other vessels were rescued by the Greek coastguard near Lesvos, another 2 near Kos and 2 groups of travellers were rescued by Turkish authorities (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/290>).

On Sunday the 4th of October, the Alarm Phone dealt with 5 distress cases in the Aegean region. The first emergency case reached us a few minutes after midnight when an activist collective informed us about a group of people who had stranded on Glaros Island/Greece (case 1). The collective had lost contact to them and unfortunately we could not reach them either. We then heard that a second vessel had also arrived on Glaros. We informed the Greek coastguards about the two cases at 2am and they confirmed that they had already sent out a rescue vessel to search for the people. In the meantime we were informed by someone else about a third group on the island. Later on we received the confirmation that the first group had been rescued and we assumed that the other two groups would also be transferred from the small island.

Another group of travellers was in distress but then succeeded to reach Samos independently. One vessel was in distress near Lesvos and while we have no confirmation we expect it to have been rescued by the Greek coastguards who were rescuing several vessels in the area. One vessel was rescued by the Turkish coastguard and the Greek coastguard promised to rescue/transfer a group stranded on Farmakonisi Island (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/292>).