

Stranded in the Aegean – The Alarm Phone received various distress calls from those who reached Greek Islands and needed immediate support

Alarm Phone Weekly Report 2nd - 8th of November 2015

Between the 2nd and the 8th of November, we witnessed another dramatic, sometimes deadly, week in the Aegean Sea. Once again, fishermen and others found bodies floating in the sea or washed up at the shores of Greek islands¹. The arrivals on the Greek islands continue to be very high for the month of November. On most days of the week more than 3,000 and on two days more than 6,000 travellers arrived on the Greek islands.² As those fleeing have no prospect for legal entry and with the winter months looming, they seize their last chance to cross to Europe, risking their lives on the dangerous crossing.

Those who survive the hazardous sea-crossings often strand on difficult-to-access shores of Greek or Turkish islands, some of which are uninhabited. The stranded travellers sometimes have to wait for hours or days until they are rescued, which can turn into a life-threatening situation as they are often wet and weak after their journey and without much or any food and water. The responsibility for rescuing stranded travellers is in most cases not clear. At times, the coastguards claim that they only carry responsibility for persons in distress at sea. But also in cases of distress at sea, rescue operations are sometimes not carried out or stopped, because of overlapping and unclear search and rescue obligations. Most importantly, both the distress situations at sea and those on land can be avoided. Once again, the Alarm Phone wants to call for a radical change in European border politics: Only the possibility to enter Europe through safe ways will end the deaths in the Mediterranean.

Summary of Cases

In the past week the Alarm Phone was alerted to 60 emergency situations, 59 of which occurred in the Aegean Sea and 1 in the Western Mediterranean Sea. On some days, the Alarm Phone was alerted to more cases of distress on land than on sea. Summaries of the cases and links to the more detailed reports on <http://watchthemed.net> can be found below.

Aegean Sea

On Monday the 2nd of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 6 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea - 3 cases at sea near the Greek islands Farmakonisi and Lesbos and 3 cases on land, as travellers had stranded on the Greek islands of Kouneli and Farmakonisi and near Siğacik, Turkey. In all cases the rescue or safe

¹ <http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/pente-nekroi-prosfyges-se-lesvo-kai-agathonisi>

² <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=502>

arrival of the travellers was confirmed: in four cases the travellers arrived safely in Greece; in two cases the travellers were picked up by the Turkish Coastguard.

(see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/330>)

On Tuesday the 3rd of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 9 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea and became active in 6 cases of distress at sea and on land. In one case the travellers who had been in distress at sea still made it to Greece, in three cases the travellers were rescued by the Greek, and in two cases by the Turkish Coastguard. (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/329>)

On Wednesday the 4th of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 11 cases and intervened in 8 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Samos, Kos, Lesbos, and Ro and off the Turkish coast close to Izmir. In all cases, the rescue of the travellers was confirmed: In five cases they were saved by the Greek coastguard and in two cases by the Turkish Coastguard, in one case the travellers went back to Turkey, in one case they never left Turkey, because the waves were too high, and in one case they reached Greece by themselves.

(see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/328>)

On Friday the 6th of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 11 cases in the Aegean, that is, to 9 boats in distress near Agathonisi, Samos, and Lesbos, and to two groups, stranded on Glaros and Ro. In one case, the travellers reported that a person had died on board, but we could not verify this information. The two stranded groups were picked up and brought to Greece. Four of the boats in distress were rescued by the coastguard (one by the Turkish coastguard), in the other cases we could unfortunately not get a final confirmation of their rescue.

(see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/333>)

On Saturday the 7th of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 cases of travellers stranded on the Greek islands Kastellerizo, Agathonisi, Ro, and Pserimos. In three cases, the travellers had to withstand the cold and persevere without food and water for many hours, but eventually they were picked up. In one case, the travellers were not in a situation of distress and in another the Greek coastguard picked them up, without us having to intervene.

(see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/334>)

On Sunday the 8th of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 8 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea, in five cases travellers had stranded on different Greek islands and had to wait for hours in the cold, without food or water to be rescued. The coastguard was reluctant to assist in these cases, as they were busy and said that it was not in their duty to assist persons on land. However, in many cases there were no other authorities to turn to, as neither the UNHCR nor the Hellenic Rescue Team could be reached. In three cases, in which people were stranded, we did not get their rescue confirmed, in one case the travellers were saved by the local police

and in another case by the Greek coastguard, the 3 boats in distress were also rescued by the Greek coastguard.

(see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/335>)

Western Mediterranean Sea

On Thursday, the 5th of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to one case in the Western Mediterranean. At shortly before 11.30pm we received two calls from different Moroccan contact person, who informed us about a case of approximately 50 persons with at least 3 children among them on a 9meter long pirogue that had left from Morocco two days earlier at approximately 5am from El Ayoun/ Cabo Boujdour to Canary Islands/Las Palmas. The contact persons were worried, because the travellers had called them around 7pm, saying that they were lost. We could not reach the travellers. We checked on different social networks and saw that the case was already known within solidarity groups and that a rescue operation had started already. The Spanish Rescue agency Salvamento Maritimo on Las Palmas told us that they had been involved in the rescue operation, but had stopped, as the boat had passed into Moroccan waters and was now being dealt with by the Moroccan authorities. We tried several times to get in touch with the travellers, but without success. We had to wait until Friday afternoon at 2.30pm until we got a final confirmation that the travellers were safely back in Morocco.

(see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/331>)