

## **Many deaths in the Aegean Sea and hundreds stuck on Greek Military Island**

Alarm Phone Bi-weekly Report 7-20 December 2015

In the past two weeks, the Alarm Phone witnessed again the deadly consequences of the EU's border regime, which increasingly foster suffering and despair throughout Europe's border zone. While attempts to cross the Aegean Sea are on a constant high despite the seasonal weather conditions, with about 25.000 people arriving in Greece per week,<sup>i</sup> more and more sea crossings turn into fatal accidents. In the last two weeks, we were informed about or directly witnessed at least 7 maritime accidents, with more than one hundred deaths, including many children. Not least due to the EU-enforced presence of Turkish police forces at the coast, travellers are forced to take ever more lengthy and dangerous routes, like for instance in the direction of the Greek island of Farmakonisi, where most of last weeks' shipwrecks occurred.

On Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> of December we were alerted to a capsized boat off Farmakonisi. Only six men who had been on the top of the wooden boat were able to rescue themselves by swimming, while 24 others, who were locked in the cabin, drowned. Those who survive and succeed to arrive on this island faced ill-treatment and suffering. For several days, we were in direct contact with hundreds of travellers stuck on Farmakonisi, a Greek military island, left without any food or water and exposed to the harsh weather conditions. International organisations, NGOs and other voluntary aid providers are deterred from entering the island and we already denounced the human rights violations there in a public statement.<sup>ii</sup> Transfers to larger islands were repeatedly delayed due to insufficient equipment of the responsible authorities or due to their unwillingness. On Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, the situation on Farmakonisi was especially dramatic with about 400 persons stuck on the island in unbearable conditions, some waiting to be picked up for 4 days.

Further north on the travellers' route, the camp at the Greek-Macedonian border in Eidomeni, where thousands were stranded as the effect of Europe's racist and selective segregation practices, was forcefully evicted on Wednesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2015. Several thousand travellers, who were not allowed to enter Macedonia like their Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi fellows, had gathered there under miserable conditions for four weeks. They were protesting for freedom of movement and open borders, but were eventually evicted and brought back to Athens. At the Greek-Turkish land border we documented, but could not prevent a pushback close to Lavara on Monday the 14<sup>th</sup> of December.

Due to the dramatic situation at the eastern external borders of the EU, less (media-) attention is paid to the situation at the Moroccan-Spanish border. Especially West and Central African migrants in the North of Morocco continue to suffer oppression and racist violence on their way to Europe. Collective arrests, detention, deportation and violent, sometimes deadly, raids of the camps and accommodations of travellers in Morocco are

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

<sup>ii</sup> Alarm Phone Statement, 'Human rights violations on the island of Farmakonisi', 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2015, [http://alarmphone.org/en/2015/12/15/human-rights-violations-on-the-island-of-farmakonisi-alarm-phone-demands-immediate-transfer-of-all-refugees-stranded-on-the-greek-military-island-farmakonisi-travellers-stuck-on-the-island/?post\\_type=release\\_type=post](http://alarmphone.org/en/2015/12/15/human-rights-violations-on-the-island-of-farmakonisi-alarm-phone-demands-immediate-transfer-of-all-refugees-stranded-on-the-greek-military-island-farmakonisi-travellers-stuck-on-the-island/?post_type=release_type=post)

everyday practices, as a recent report by the Western Med group of the Alarm Phone and No Border Morocco highlighted.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Summary of cases**

In the past two weeks, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 111 emergency situations in total, 107 of which occurred in the Aegean Sea, 1 in the Central Mediterranean and 3 in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Summaries and links to the individual reports can be found below.

#### **Western Mediterranean Sea**

On Monday the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was informed about a boat that had left from Laâyoune in the Western Sahara at 4am in the morning, with 39 travellers on board. We called the Spanish rescue organization Salvamento Maritimo (S.M.), who confirmed that they were looking for the boat with an aircraft. On the next day, at 1pm we received the information that the Moroccan coastguard had found 11 bodies at a beach near Laâyoune. At 8pm it was reported that 23 travellers had survived the shipwreck of a boat with 39 travellers, thus 16 people are likely to have drowned.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/371>)

On Tuesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone received a call from a Moroccan phone number, informing us about a boat, which has left Nador/Morocco the night before with 52 people on board, including 13 women. We could not reach the travellers directly, but informed the Spanish rescue organization Salvamento Maritimo. At the next day they confirmed that the boat had been rescued and that the travellers on board were fine.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/372>)

On Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 at 6pm, we received a call about a boat carrying 15 passengers in distress between Tétouan, Morocco and Ceuta. The contact person said that he had called the Moroccan coastguard, but that they had refused to help. We reached out to the Moroccan Coast Guard, who said that they were already informed and that they had sent a boat and a helicopter to search for the boat. At 7.11pm the contact person informed us that the travellers had managed to reach the beach and they they were safe. The Moroccan Coast Guard had not provided any assistance.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/381>)

#### **Central Mediterranean Sea**

On Wednesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone received a message from Father Mussie Zerai, alerting us to a boat with 92 travellers in distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea, 90 kilometres northwest off the Libyan coastal city Misrata. We informed the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Rome and regularly tried to call the travellers, checked the satellite phone's credit and charged their Thuraya account. At the next day we learned via Mussie Zerai that the Italian navy vessel Cigala Fulgosi had rescued the travellers.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/374>)

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<sup>iii</sup> Statement by NoBorderMorocco and Western Med Alarm Phone 'Routine of Persecution: The unbearable conditions of Sub-Saharan migrants in the North of Morocco', 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 [http://ffm-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Flyer-Alarm-Phone-Maroc\\_EN.pdf](http://ffm-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Flyer-Alarm-Phone-Maroc_EN.pdf)

## **Aegean Sea**

On Monday the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 boats in distress in the Aegean Sea and to one group of travellers who had stranded on the Greek island of Ro. While in three cases rescue cannot finally be confirmed, in three cases the travellers on board of the boats in distress had been rescued by the Greek coastguard.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/370>)

On Tuesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 14 boats in distress and to two groups who had stranded on the Greek islands of Pasas and Farmakonisi. The stranded groups were picked up and transferred to larger islands by the Greek coastguard. 4 groups of travellers eventually arrived independently on Greek islands. Beyond that, the Greek coastguard rescued 4 boats, while the Turkish coastguard was involved in rescue operations of 6 boats in distress.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/373>)

On Wednesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 6 groups in distress close to the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Farmakonisi. Two groups arrived in Greece independently while two boats were rescued by the Greek coastguard. The Turkish coastguard also rescued two boats.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/375>)

On Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to a group of travellers whose boat had sunken close to the Greek island of Farmakonisi. While 6 men were rescued, at least 24 people, mostly women and children went missing and are supposed have drowned. Beyond that, the Alarm Phone was alerted to two groups who had stranded on the Greek islands of Farmakonisi and Pserimos. In two further cases the Greek coastguard rescued 50 and 30 travellers near Lesbos and Samos, while one group the Alarm Phone was in contact with reached Lesbos independently.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/376>)

On Friday the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 2 boats in distress east of the Greek island of Lesbos and to one boat close to the Turkish coast near Didim east of the Greek island of Agathonisi. All travellers were saved or reached Greece independently. One group had stranded on Agathonisi and was transferred to Samos afterwards. Another group of Syrian travellers was arrested at the Turkish coast near Dikili.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/377>)

On Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to two boats in distress near the Greek islands of Samos and Rhodes. One boat arrived on Samos independently and one boat was rescued to Rhodes. Two groups stranded on Farmakonisi and Kastellorizo and were picked up after much delay.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/378>)

On Sunday the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 2 boats on their way to the Greek islands of Lesbos. We alerted the Greek coastguard about both cases, but finally both of them reached Lesbos independently.

(See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/379>)

On Monday the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to a total of 14 distress cases in the Aegean Sea: In one case, we could document, but not prevent a pushback at the Greek-Turkish land border close to Lavara. In four cases, we were alerted to travellers stranded on several Greek islands (Kalolimnos, Kastellorizo, Farmakonisi and Strongyli). It was reported to us that the travellers on Kalolimnos had suffered from police violence, but neither their situation, nor their rescue could be confirmed. The group on Farmakonisi was told stayed stuck on the military island, but was told that they would be eventually transferred to Leros. The group on Kastellorizo was picked up by the local police, and the group on Strongyli were picked up by the Greek Coastguard. In the other cases of distress, in which we became active (close to Mytilene, Kos, and Chios), the travellers were rescued - in five cases to Greece and in one case by the Turkish Coastguard.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/380>)

On Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 13 distress cases near or on several Greek islands, namely Farmakonisi, Chios, Samos, Lesvos, and Pasas. We were in contact with three groups who had stranded on Farmakonisi. About 120 persons in total were stuck on the island on Tuesday, without food, water or medical assistance. It is probable that all of them were picked up and transferred to Leros on Tuesday evening, even though we could not obtain a final confirmation regarding all travellers. A group stranded on Chios could not be found or contacted after they had called for help. Another group stranded on Pasas was picked up and brought to Chios by the Port Authorities. Furthermore, we were alerted to five boats in distress near Chios, two of which were rescued by the Greek and three by the Turkish Coast Guard. In one case the travellers reported that masked men had attacked them. In three other distress cases on sea near Lesvos and Samos, the travellers were rescued and brought to Greece.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/368>)

On Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to a total of 13 distress cases in the Aegean. We received various calls about and from travellers stuck on Farmakonisi. About 400 people had stranded on the military island and had to wait - some for more than 4 days - to be picked up and transferred to Leros. On Farmakonisi, stranded travellers were again left without food and water, no medical assistance and no or insufficient shelter from the cold. Even though some travellers were picked up, many more were left behind on the island, while others kept arriving. A group of travellers who had stranded on Ro was picked up by the Kastellorizo Port Authorities. The other alerts concerned boats in distress, mostly near Lesvos (Mytilene) but also near Kos and Kalolimnos. In one case of distress north of Lesvos, contact to the travellers was lost. In all other cases, the boats and all travellers were rescued - in all but two cases to Greece.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/369>)

On Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 3 distress cases in the Aegean, 1 case near Farmakonisi and 2 cases near Samos. In all cases, the travellers' safe arrival on land could be confirmed: The travellers on the way to Farmakonisi had to discontinue their journey, but made it back to Turkey. One boat near Samos was saved by the Greek Coastguard.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/382>)

On Saturday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 distress cases in the Aegean with about 120 travellers involved in total. 4 cases concerned situations of

distress at sea, near Samos, Lesvos and Farmakonisi and one case stranded travellers on Farmakonisi. In all cases of distress at sea, the travellers were rescued by the Greek Coastguard and safely arrived in Greece. The group stranded on Farmakonisi was probably transferred on Sunday morning to Leros.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/384>)

On Sunday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 13 distress cases in the Aegean, near Lesvos, Rhodes, Pasas, Samos, Leros, Pitta, and Oinousses. In 11 cases the safe arrival of the travellers could be confirmed. In one case, we could not confirm the safe arrival, because we lost contact with the boat. In the other case, a boat in urgent distress near the Turkish coast, on the way to Oinousses, was rescued by the Turkish Coastguard, but two children died later in a Turkish hospital.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/385>)