

Militarization will make the Mediterranean border zone even more deadly!

Alarm Phone Bi-Weekly Report, 8th - 21st of February 2016

According to the latest EU report on the military operation EUNAVFOR MED/Sophia, published by WikiLeaks on February 17th, the EU seeks to extend its intervention in the central Mediterranean into Libyan territory.¹ At the same time, a German-led NATO fleet has launched an operation in the Aegean Sea, supposedly to prevent further deaths at sea by targeting 'smuggling networks' operating out of Turkey. European leaders continue to ignore the fact that the militarization of borders will not stop migration, as the ongoing cross-border movements clearly show, but only leads to more hazardous journeys. The more dangerous and difficult ways of passage become, the more people on the move have to rely on the services of smugglers. With our campaign 'Ferries not Frontex', we seek to denounce the militarization of European borders, with its deadly consequences and we underline how these policies do not prevent smuggling, but actually create a market for smugglers. Moreover, we also want to offer a prompt and concrete alternative – the dying at sea could be ended tomorrow if states decided to open borders or at least invest in humanitarian ferries instead of military agencies!²

Given that the hope for an end of the war in Syria and the possibilities for resolution of conflicts in other crises areas are slim, and that travellers would find themselves in awful conditions in supposedly 'safe countries', such as Turkey or Morocco, they will continue to attempt cross-border journeys at all costs. In the first three weeks of February, about 41,404 persons, mostly from Syria, have arrived in Greece by sea.³ And again, many of those who attempted the dangerous crossing in the lack of safe and legal ways of passage, lost their lives. According to the *Missing Migrants project*, between the 1st and the 19th of February, about 56 travellers died in the Mediterranean, most of them in the Aegean Sea.

Thousands of travellers are currently stuck in Greece, many camps are overcrowded. Macedonia has followed other Balkan states and Austria in declaring more thorough identity checks, which means that travellers without passports or IDs (or at least the 'correct ones') have greater difficulty in moving onwards. On Sunday, the 21st of February the Macedonian government announced not to let Afghans pass the border anymore, further aggravating the situation in Greece. However, the measures of segregation and repression have been met once again with strong resistance: Travellers continue to leave camps in Greece and to march toward the borders to make clear that they want to move on. Updates on the constantly changing situation in Greece and at the border in Idomeni can be found on the Twitter account of *bordermonitoring.eu*.⁴

During the past two weeks, we have again been in contact with hundreds of travellers, who were in distress at sea or on land. Besides those in need of help after having stranded on Greek islands, we have also heard of many who had problems before even reaching the points of departure in Turkey, as they were arrested and then detained in overcrowded prisons. Also in the Western Mediterranean we have been in touch with travellers in distress. Again, we had to witness how a traveller drowned or went missing on their way to Europe.⁵ One traveller died on the 19th of February, when the Moroccan navy rammed a boat while trying to intercept it. Another boat went missing on the 12th of February on its way to Canary islands, with 28 travellers on board.

¹ <https://wikileaks.org/eu-military-refugees/EEAS/EEAS-2016-126.pdf>

² http://alarmphone.org/en/2016/02/12/newspaper-ferries-for-all/?post_type_release_type=post

³ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/MovingEurope>

⁵ http://www.eldiario.es/canariasahora/sociedad/Suspendida-busqueda-patera-domingo-Mauritania_o_483651949.html

Summary of the Alarm Phone cases

In the past two weeks, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 79 emergency situations, 77 of which occurred in the Aegean Sea and 2 in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Summaries and links to the individual reports can be found below.

Western Mediterranean Sea

On Tuesday the 9th of February 2016 the Alarm Phone was directly called from a Moroccan number at about 8am. We spoke to a woman who informed us that she was on a boat on open waters, with a baby on board. She told us that a big red boat, probably a rescue vessel was nearby and she assumed that her boat had already entered Spanish territorial waters. During the next 2 hours, we not able to reach the travellers again, but at 10.20am, in another phone call with them, we learned that the Moroccan Navy had intercepted the travellers and had brought them back to Morocco. See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/441>.

On Wednesday, the 17th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 1 case of distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea. It was the first distress case in the Western Mediterranean Sea, in which travellers sent their GPS-coordinates to the Alarm Phone. We have emphasised for some time that it could help to save lives, if travellers in the Western Mediterranean had smartphones with them and were thus able to communicate their exact position. Therefore, we are still looking for smartphone donations: <http://alarmphone.org/en/2015/12/03/call-out-smartphones-urgently-needed-in-western-med/>.

At 7.29am, a Facebook alert about 7 travellers in distress between Tanger and Tarifa reached us. We reached out to the travellers. They had a smartphone and could thus send us their coordinates. They wrote that they were in urgent need of help. As the boat was still in Morocco waters, we informed the Moroccan Navy as well as the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo. Our contact person lost touch with the boat, but at 10.12am the Moroccan Navy told us that they had rescued the travellers. We passed on this information to our contact person. She eventually managed to reach the travellers who were all safe. They were brought to a police station in Tanger, but were released after a few hours. See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/447>.

Aegean Sea

On Monday the 8th of February 2016 the Alarm Phone was informed about 4 boats in distress in the Aegean Sea. One group arrived independently on the Greek island of Lesbos and one group was rescued to Lesbos by the Greek coastguard. Another boat was intercepted by the Turkish coastguard, while to the fourth boat contact could not be established after the initial alert. See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/439>.

On Tuesday the 9th of February 2016 the Alarm Phone was informed about 11 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea. We were alerted to 7 boats in distress close to the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos, which were all rescued by the Greek coastguard afterwards. Beyond that we were in contact to 4 groups of travellers who had stranded on the islands of Pasas, Ro and Kastellorizo. They, too, were picked up by Greek authorities. See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/441>.

On Wednesday the 10th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was informed about 200 travellers who were stuck on the Greek island of Farmakonisi. We stayed in contact with them during the whole day and monitored their transfer to the neighboring island of Leros. Beyond that, we were

alerted to a boat in distress close to Nera and to another group of travellers stranded on Samos. Both groups were rescued by Greek authorities. See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/442>.

On Thursday the 11th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to three boats in distress east of the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios. All three boats had not left Turkish territorial waters and were rescued by the Turkish coastguard. Beyond that, the Alarm Phone was in contact with a group of travellers who had stranded on the Greek island of Kastellorizo. We informed the Greek authorities and they picked up the travellers from the rocky coast. See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/443>.

On Saturday the 13th of February 2016, at 3am, the Alarm Phone was alerted to a group of 90 travellers who had stranded on the Greek island of Samos. After several failed attempts to reach the travellers directly, we called the port authorities on Samos at about 3.30am. Only at 1.15pm, another contact person who had previously been in touch with the group, confirmed to us that the group had been picked up by the local police and had been transferred to a camp on the island. See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/444>.

On Monday, the 15th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 2 distress cases in the Aegean: one case of interception, between Dikili and Lesbos, and one case, in which travellers had stranded on the island of Nera. The group on Nera was found and transferred to another island on Tuesday. See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/450>.

On Tuesday, the 16th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 7 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea - 4 situations of distress at sea and 3 cases, in which travellers had stranded on Greek islands (Papas, Samos, and Farmakonisi). Three of the boats in distress were rescued by the Turkish Coastguard. In one case, we could not get a final confirmation of the rescue. The travellers stranded on Papas were picked up on Wednesday morning by the Chios Port Authorities. The 60 persons stranded on Samos were brought to a shelter by a Transfer Service of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). Among them were many children and one severely disabled child. The people stranded on Farmakonisi - there were about 300 - were picked up on Wednesday morning and brought to Leros. See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/445>.

On Wednesday, the 17th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 11 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea - 6 cases of distress at sea and 5 cases of distress on land. Hundreds of travellers called for help as they were stuck on different Greek islands: About 12 persons stranded on a small island close to Symi, 40 persons stranded on a rocky beach of Ro, two groups of about 300 travellers in total stranded on the military island of Farmakonisi and around 50 travellers were stuck on Papas. We think that all travellers were picked up, but we could not obtain a final confirmation in the case of Farmakonisi. In one case we received an alert from an overcrowded prison in Izmir, Turkey that we forwarded to an NGO in Turkey. The distress cases at sea were near Farmakonisi, Chios, Agathonisi and near the Turkish Coast. In four cases the travellers were rescued by the Greek Coastguard and arrived safely in Greece, in three cases the boats were picked up by the Turkish Coastguard and thus brought back to Turkey. In one rescue operation of the Greek Coastguard, at least three persons died. See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/446>.

On Thursday the 18th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 16 groups of travellers in distress in the Aegean Sea. In 12 cases we alerted the Greek or Turkish coastguards, forwarded the positions and phone numbers of the travellers and urged them to perform rescue operations. Beyond that, we were informed about 4 further boats in distress near the Greek island of Lesbos.

But in all of these cases the travellers had either been rescued without our intervention or we did not receive enough information to get active. See:

<http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/452>.

On Friday the 19th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 7 groups of travellers in distress near the Greek islands of Lesbos and Farmakonisi. One group had stranded on Pasas and was picked up and transferred to Chios afterwards. Of 6 boats in distress 3 were rescued by the Greek coastguard, 2 by the Turkish coastguard and one boat reached Lesbos independently. See: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/453>.

On Saturday, the 20th of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 6 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea, near Lesbos, Samos and Farmakonisi. In all cases the rescue /safe arrival of the travellers could be confirmed. In two cases the Turkish Coastguard and in two cases the Greek Coastguard ensured the rescue. In one case, a boat of *Médecins sans Frontières* and another rescue team were said to have rescued. One boat arrived in Lesbos without any assistance. See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/449>.

On Sunday, the 21st of February 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea: In 4 cases, travellers were in distress at sea, near Chios, Farmakonisi and Lesbos. In all cases, the travellers safely arrived in Greece, in three cases assisted by the Greek Coastguard. In one case, travellers were on a ferry that was supposed to bring them from Lesbos to Athens, but that had halted for several hours in Chios, due to bad weather conditions. The travellers had no access to food and water for hours. Eventually food and water was provided to them and the ferry continued to Athens. See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/448>.