

From the Sea to the City!

Alarm Phone 6 Week Report, 11 June - 22 July 2018

About 1,500 counted fatalities this year - highest death count ever in June due to Salvini & Co +++ Open harbours and corridors of solidarity demanded by mayors and civil society +++ More sea-arrivals in Spain than Italy +++ Developments in all three Mediterranean regions +++ Summaries of 187 Alarm Phone distress cases



Introduction

At the time of writing, forty people, including two pregnant women, are still stranded at sea. After a dangerous journey on a small wooden boat, they had reached international waters and the Maltese search and rescue zone. They were rescued but Malta did not allocate a safe harbour to them as they were legally supposed to do and they definitely did not want to allow them to Maltese land. Italy and other EU member states did not want them either. And Tunisia, scared to set a precedent, also refused to let the people to land. Only the crew of the Sarost V supply vessel on which they currently are, showed solidarity, responsibility, and humanity. For more than two weeks now, the forty are literally stuck at sea, with no government allowing them into a harbour – a wholly undignified spectacle.¹

1 Listen to their testimonies here: <https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/videos/2167791276828437/>

<https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/videos/2167801273494104/>

<https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/videos/2167798733494358/>

<https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/videos/2171391076468457/>

<https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/videos/2171323569808541/>

While not even children and infants drowning at sea seem to generate a response from Europe's political elite anymore, others have vocally denounced the measures of closure and deterrence deployed by the EU and its member states. In response to the Italian government's announcement that its harbours would be closed for the rescued, a range of Italian mayors, including those of Palermo, Naples, Messina, Reggio Calabria, and Trapani, publicly declared their cities and harbours open, welcoming disembarkation there.² With Valencia accepting hundreds of rescued to be disembarked from the Aquarius vessel in its harbour, with Barcelona declaring itself a 'safe harbour', and with Berlin and several other German cities calling for the rescued to be transferred to their urban spaces, the level of the city has become the space for a progressive politics in Europe today. City municipalities follow the calls from the street, where thousands of people have protested over the past weeks, demanding both open harbours and a radical shift in Europe's deadly migration policies. On the 7th of July, more than 20,000 people took to the streets in Germany under the joint call for a "Seebrücke", a "Sea-Lift" that would allow the rescued at sea to be transferred to European cities. On the 14th of July, around 7,000 people marched to the French-Italian border close to Ventimiglia, which has become another symbol for the brutality of national and European migration policies.³

From the sea to the city! The Alarm Phone has been part of these protests, and has worked on different levels to make open harbours and solidarity cities a reality. Together with the mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando, and a range of non-governmental rescuers and activists, we organised a meeting end of May in Palermo, first of all to create a 'safe harbour' initiative. For us, a safe harbour is...

1. an open space, where people are welcomed and assisted regardless of their origins, race, gender and class. It is a place that is open to the city, where civil society actors can enter and monitor the situation.
2. a disobedient space, where voices are heard that denounce racist agitation, any attempt to block arrivals, and any policy of deterrence.
3. a space where human rights are respected, where people are not exposed to the risk of torture, persecution, or inhuman and degrading treatments.
4. a space where the right to mobility is enacted, where people are granted the possibility to stay but also to move on.
5. a place where neither migrants nor those who stand in solidarity with them are criminalised - neither for driving the boat on which they travelled, nor for rescuing people in distress at sea, neither for giving migrants independent information, nor for helping them to continue their journey.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/10/italy-shuts-ports-to-rescue-boat-with-629-migrants-on-board>

³ <https://seebruecke.org/en/>

After our initial meeting in Palermo, we took part at a conference in Naples on the 19th of July, following an invitation by its mayor Luigi De Magistris. During this gathering, further steps in generating transnational cooperation and political interventions were taken. Through this new initiative, we want to turn our cities into spaces of inclusion, not exclusion, of refuge and sanctuary, not deterrence. We struggle for communities of welcome and against those of segregation. We want to foster intra-municipal and trans-border solidarity that allows people to move freely from their first place of disembarkation to other destinations within and beyond the country where they first landed, beyond any hotspot and Dublin system, through a form of 'relocation from below'.

Developments in the Central Mediterranean Sea

The conflict over Mediterranean migration has further escalated over the past six weeks. The closure of Italian harbours to the rescued at sea, the criminalisation of non-governmental rescuers, and the support granted to Libyan authorities by European institutions and member states has further deteriorated the situation for those seeking to cross the Mediterranean from Libya. The result has been devastating. In the month of June alone, about 564 people are acknowledged as having died in the Central Mediterranean, although only 3,100 people reached Europe via this route from Libya. Last year, in June 2017, the figure of arrivals stood at 23,500. That the situation has further worsened is not due to fate but due to a calculated letting-die policy enacted by European nation-states and institutions. A significant dimension of such policy is the criminalisation and the pushing out of non-governmental rescuers and witnesses, which in particular the Italian government, but also the ones in Germany and Austria have forcefully pursued. Through the absurd stand-off with the Aquarius vessel carrying more than 600 precarious travellers in mid-June, the Italian government not merely endangered their lives and well-being, but acted on its cynical promise to prevent disembarkations in Italy, no matter the costs. And the costs are great.

In mid-June, a US Navy vessel conducted a rescue operation, rescued 41 people and recovered 12 corpses. Initially prevented from disembarking in Italy, they threw the 12 bodies back into the sea. Near the scene, the crew of the NGO vessel Sea-Watch 3 discovered a deflated rubber dinghy, without any passengers in sight. What happened to them remains unclear. On the 19th of June, after an Italian vessel seemingly refused to rescue passengers on a boat in distress, five people – three women and two boys – fell into the sea and drowned.⁴ The Italian refusal to let rescuers dock in Italian harbours severely obstructed the vital work of the SAR NGOs. Shortly after the Aquarius was banned from Italian harbours, the Italian government also

⁴ <https://guardian.ng/news/world/five-migrants-die-and-more-than-100-rescued-off-libya/>

denied the NGO vessels Lifeline and Seefuchs entry to its ports.⁵ The Lifeline, after saving 234 people near Libya, was initially refused entry also to Malta, and could dock only days later. Upon landing, the rescue vessel was impounded and its captain, Claus-Peter Reisch, arrested, who later stated: “Our mission was to save 234 people. I am not aware of having committed any crime.”⁶ In the days that followed the 20th of June, the World Refugee Day, during which several NGO vessels were unable to continue with their work, an estimated 220 people died over three days at sea. The denial of responsibility by European coastguards was experienced also directly by the Alarm Phone, when on the 23rd of June a boat with 96 people on board was in severe distress at sea, as the travellers confirmed to us. The Italian authorities informed us that the Maltese authorities would coordinate their rescue, while the coordination centre in Malta seemed unaware about the case. Unwilling to accept this situation, a ‘mail bombing’ action targeting the Italian Coastguards on the 24th of June was launched, in which the Alarm Phone participated, demanding the immediate resumption of rescue operations and their coordination.⁷

A few days later, at the EU summit in late June, European institutions and member states agreed on closed camps for those rescued at sea, containment camps in North Africa, a greater mandate for the EU border agency Frontex, the increased ‘protection’ of EU external borders and more money for authoritarian regimes to deter or contain travellers at Europe’s behest. On the same day, the 29th of June, a shipwreck occurred off Libya, with about 100 fatalities.⁸ In early July, the situation took another turn for the worse, with SAR NGOs being prevented by the Italian authorities from conducting rescue operations, either by being ordered to not interfere with the Libyan ‘coastguards’ abductions of people back to Libya, or by being hindered from leaving European ports in the first place and being dragged in front of courts.⁹ On the 1st of July, another shipwreck occurred off Libya, with about 114 fatalities. That first July weekend, 218 people lost their lives at sea. When the NGOs were still conducting rescues, European military actors and the border agency Frontex kept a low profile. They let the NGOs lift the heavy burden, though routinely portraying transfers of people rescued by the NGOs as ‘their’ rescues. Without the NGOs, these actors are now occasionally

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/16/italy-bars-two-more-refugee-ships-from-ports>

6 <https://www.dw.com/en/german-lifeline-ship-captain-facing-malta-trial-rejects-guilt-over-migrant-rescue-operation/a-44484938>

7

<https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/photos/a.1526182797655958.1073741828.1525906057683632/2137036423237256/?type=3&theater>

8 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-libya/libyan-coastguard-says-100-migrants-may-have-drowned-near-tripoli-idUSKBN1JP1AI>

9 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/29/italy-and-libya-accused-after-migrant-deaths-in-dinghy-sinking>
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-malta-ngo/malta-detains-second-charity-ship-as-death-toll-at-sea-rises-idUSKBN1JS19S>

conscripted by the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre to conduct rescues, as was the case in mid-July, when Frontex was involved in the rescue of 450 people at sea. With some of the rescued on board, Frontex then faced the situation that the NGOs have faced for weeks, they were unable to disembark them in Italy. This bizarre situation only came to an end when five EU member states accepted to take 50 of the rescued migrants each. After disembarkation, survivors reported that they had witnessed four people drown at sea.¹⁰ Also the European military anti-smuggling operation Eunavfor Med faced a predicament a few days later, with Italy declaring their harbours closed also to them, though an agreement has been found since that allows, for the time being, for the continuation of the mission and the disembarkation in Italian harbours.¹¹

This year, thousands of people trying to escape Libya were intercepted by the Libyan 'coastguards' as desired by Europe. These authorities added one more atrocity to their long list of abuse and neglect when the NGO Proactiva Open Arms discovered two dead bodies and one survivor in a completely destroyed rubber boat off the coast of Libya. The Libyan 'coastguards' had "rescued" the people, so they said. Proactiva, however, found a woman clinging to the debris. Following Proactiva's account, the three had refused to return to Libya and were left behind to die. Their refusal to be returned is not surprising when we pay attention to what occurs to those who are abducted back to Libya. The situation there is devastating but many seem to have become used to stories of torture and rape, incarceration and extortion. On the 16th of July, eight migrants, including six children, were found dead after suffocating in a truck container in Zuwarah/Libya. There were about 100 people in total, and those who survived were brought to a hospital for treatment.¹²

Although the Alarm Phone received most distress cases from the other Mediterranean regions over the last six weeks, we were alerted to a boat in distress on Saturday the 14th of July, carrying 40 people from Africa, which had left from Libya. They were rescued by the supply vessel Sarost 5 in international waters and in the Maltese Search and Rescue zone.¹³ Malta, however, refused to find a safe harbour for them, and Italy and Malta both

10 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-italy/migrants-disembark-in-italy-after-eu-offer-ends-standoff-idUSKBN1K619I>

11 <https://www.dw.com/en/italy-to-temporarily-allow-migrant-arrivals-pending-eu-talks/a-44798260>

12 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/migrants-dead-shipping-container-libya-18071611955036.html>

13

https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/88290/migrants_rescued_in_maltese_sar_stranded_on_ship_outside_tunisia#.W1XxwtIzY2w

<http://taz.de/Fluechtlinge-auf-dem-Mittelmeer!/5522623/>

http://www.adnkronos.com/aki-en/security/2018/07/18/migrants-stranded-off-tunisia-amid-new-standoff-says-ngo_5nizq7HbLKXSU91Eap3KxH.html

<http://www.rfi.fr/europe/20180721-sarost-5-zarzis-malte-italie-france-migrants-bloques-tunisie>

denied disembarkation. The supply vessel then took course on Sfax/Tunisia, to disembark the people. The authorities there, however, refused to allow them to land as well. They were told to land in Zarzis/Tunisia. But also there they were blocked from entering the port and so, at the time of writing, they are still stranded on a boat in the Mediterranean, now for over 14 days. We have released several testimonies from the people on board, have condemned this policy of neglect in a press statement and have also instigated a mail bombing campaign to prompt the Maltese authorities to take on their legally mandated responsibility to coordinate a safe harbour for the distressed.¹⁴

Developments in the Western Mediterranean Sea

During the six week period covered in this report, the Alarm Phone was involved in 176 Cases in the Western Mediterranean Sea alone. According to UNHCR data released on 23rd of July, 23,993 people have crossed into Spain in 2018 so far, among them 3.158 travellers who crossed the land borders to the Spanish colonies Ceuta and Melilla.¹⁵ The figure of 20.835 successful sea crossings is very impressive, especially considering that most of the boats crossing the Strait of Gibraltar are rubber boats, carrying only a small number of people, mostly between 4 to 12 travellers per boat who have to paddle as in most cases they do not have an engine. The figure would be even more impressive if the high number of interceptions and crossing attempts was taken into consideration. There are no official statistics on interceptions conducted by the Moroccan Navy, the Marine Royale, or on interceptions conducted by the Moroccan military, the 'Forces Auxiliaires', in the woods where people are (often violently) arrested already in the attempt to reach the water.

Of the 176 Alarm Phone cases in the Western Med during the period covered in this report, 71 boats were rescued by the Spanish rescue authority and 79 boats picked up (mostly intercepted, in some cases rescued out of severe distress) by the Moroccan Marine Royale. Thus, nearly 45 percent of attempts to cross were successful.¹⁶ This means that the level of engagement of the Moroccan authorities is a crucial factor in how many

14 https://alarmphone.org/en/2018/07/18/press-release-migrants-rescued-in-distress-in-maltese-search-and-rescue-zone-illegally-transferred-to-tunisian-territorial-waters/?post_type=release_type=post
https://alarmphone.org/en/2018/07/19/rcc-malta-do-not-deny-your-responsibility-for-40-people-in-distress/?post_type=release_type=post
<https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/videos/2167791276828437/>
http://www.adnkronos.com/aki-en/security/2018/07/18/migrants-stranded-off-tunisia-amid-new-standoff-says-ngo_5nizq7HbLKXSU91Eap3KxH.html?refresh_ce
https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180719/local/migrants-rescue-government-refutes-allegations-malta-broke.684838?utm_source=tom&utm_campaign=top5&utm_medium=widget
<http://taz.de/Fluechtlinge-auf-dem-Mittelmeer!/5522623/>

15 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5226>

attempted crossings end with a *boza*, with the arrival in Spain. Morocco is a key partner for the EU in its externalization of migration control.

As many travellers are trapped in Libya due to the recent EU attempts to block the Central Mediterranean route, numbers of crossings in the Western Mediterranean continue to rise¹⁷. The EU border agency Frontex warns that the next 'migration corridor' would be from Morocco to Spain. Frontex chief Fabrice Leggeri announced that 6.000 travellers had successfully crossed into Spain via Morocco in June 2018 alone, the UNHCR counts even 7.313 crossings. Leggeri called Spain his 'greatest worry'.¹⁸ Obviously, he is not worried about the people who have no safe escape routes anymore and who have to risk their lives at sea.¹⁹ The political consequences in terms of border policing in light of the increased crossings in Western Mediterranean remain to be seen. What is already clear is that routes are shifting further south and become hence even more dangerous. Boats started to cross again from Mauritania to the Canaries,²⁰ with 434 arrivals counted by UNHCR so far this year.²¹ Even further south, boats start to leave from Senegal towards the Spanish islands: On 16th of June, the Mauritanian Coast Guard intercepted boat with 125 Senegalese travellers.²² The Western Mediterranean, as does the whole Mediterranean Sea, remains a lethal border zone²³. As was the case in our previous reports, also in this six week period, the Alarm Phone accompanied people who eventually lost their lives at sea. In these cases, and where possible, we tried to stay in contact with their relatives and friends.

Shift experiences: Perspectives of a shift team member

"As more and more boats have been crossing from Morocco to Spain during the last weeks, Alarm Phone shifts are getting really busy and there is seldom time to digest what has happened, even if there are major incidents. We have been involved in a couple of lethal cases lately in the Western Mediterranean Sea and given the ongoing struggles it was barely possible to take the space and time to process. 49 people went missing in the night of 13th of June. They had left from Nador at 2am in the morning and couldn't be reached anymore. For two days, both Morocco and Spain had been searching unsuccessfully for the boat with aerial and naval assets. We were

16 18 boats have returned to Morocco by own forces, 1 boat was rescued by fishermen and 7 boats remained missing or their status unconfirmed.

17 Numbers nearly doubled from May (3,937 crossings) to June (7,313 crossings):

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5226>

18 <https://www.dw.com/en/eus-frontex-warns-of-new-migrant-route-to-spain/a-44563058>

19 <https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/posts/2153095871631311>

20 <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/ten-illegal-migrants-arrested-in-mauritania>

21 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5226>

22 http://cridem.org/C_Info.php?article=713467

23 Since 1993, the network *UNITED for Intercultural Action* has recorded the reported names, origins and causes of death for more than 34,000 travellers who have died whilst trying to get into Europe due to the restrictive policies of "Fortress Europe". The List contains an impressive number of 56 pages of names. It can be downloaded [here](#).

communicating with our whole local network, relatives and friends of those on board. Then the news came that 4 people had been rescued out of the plain water by Salvamento Marítimo somewhere near Almería, without any boat in sight. According to press articles²⁴, the 4 survivors reported that they had been on a boat with 49 people...we could only assume that this was our case and had to inform relatives and families, leaving them in limbo, not knowing who survived, who had lost his or her life during the tragedy. We continuously tried to find out the identities of the survivors as the relatives kept on contacting us desperately. We called the hospital where the survivors had been brought to, local police, the rescue authority Salvamento Marítimo...but we didn't get any information.²⁵

At the same time, just in the morning after the search for the 49 had started, on 14th of June, I was talking on the phone to a man who had fallen into the water, shouting that their zodiac (rubber boat) had flipped over and they were trying to hold on to its back. I called both the Spanish and Moroccan authorities immediately. When i called the travellers again, they told me that initially they had been 6 people, but they were only two left, the others had been lost in the waves. I didn't know what to answer them..nothing seemed appropriate, and also their lives were still in danger. Later they told us that in the end three of them were rescued by the Moroccan Marine. Luckily one friend had managed to swim to the shore, but two others most probably lost their lives in the sea.²⁶

And no time to rest - during the following days, more and more boats left for Spain, with 14 during the next day alone. Other tragedies happened. Our friends and Alarm Phone members in Morocco identified people in the morgue, dugged graves, assisted with funerals and informed relatives and friends, whilst at the same time continuously managing ongoing distress cases, no time to rest and mourn, to digest. Every day there were new Alarm Phone cases from the Western Mediterranean, new people's lives in danger. Many were rescued successfully, many intercepted. Circumstances were often chaotic with multiple rescue operations happening at the same time or the Spanish and Moroccan authorities denying responsibility to react. The Marine Royale is simply not a rescue agency - as displayed so clearly once again during an operations on 16th of June, where their big marine boat approached the small rubber boat so rapidly that the latter flipped over. Most of the travellers managed to cling on to their rubber boat, but one man drowned. In the testimony of the people that we received later, they explained how one friend was not able to grab hold of the boat, and how the navy made no effort to help him, but simply watched him drown. Afterwards they allowed the remaining distressed people onto their vessel, and brought

²⁴https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/Salvamento-Maritimo-a47migrantes-desaparecidos-Alboran_0_783221932.html

²⁵See the full case report here: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/916>

²⁶See the full case report here: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/917>

them back to Morocco.²⁷ It is clear that the Moroccan navy is not a rescue organisation, but first and foremost a military unit with border management as their main aim.”

Developments in the Region

While favourable weather conditions play a part in the upsurge in people leaving for Spain, Morocco proves time and again why staying there simply is not an option for many Sub-Saharan migrants. Arrests and removals towards the south of the country continue in the border regions, but we have also witnessed attempts far away from the borders that attempt to make the lives of Sub-Saharan migrants as difficult as possible. In the evening of the 7th of July, the Moroccan authorities began evicting the camp next to the train station in Fes, which was home to more than 1,700 people. For eight years, the self-organised camp has been a place where people could rest and recover after being deported from the border areas. During the eviction, the police burned tents and personal belongings, stole phones and money, and hundreds of people were deported to Marrakech, Beni-Mellal, Agadir and Essaouira in more than ten busses.

The Moroccan authorities have since the end of 2017 made it known that they wished to evict the camp in Fes, but promised to find alternative solutions for the people living there. However, no solution has been proposed to all the people who have been forcefully evicted from their homes.²⁸



Targeted by measures of the Moroccan authorities to reinforce migration control are also minors of Moroccan origin who try to enter mainland Spain via the colonies Ceuta and Melilla. Raids and arrests in the border zones of

²⁷ See full case report here: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/923>

²⁸ https://www.libe.ma/Les-camps-des-migrants-irreguliers-en-feu_a99515.html,
<https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/66852/incendie-lors-l-evacuation-migrants-subsahariens.html>

the colonies are frequent, but lately the number of arrests has peaked with 120 minors being arrested in Beni Ansar in the eastern border of Melilla on July 15th alone. According to the authorities, the minors who are between 13 and 18 years of age, were brought back to their hometowns as Tinghir, Zagora or Errachidia in southeast Morocco - but this account could not be confirmed.²⁹ The idea of creating a new centre for these minors which has recently been proposed by Spain has come a long way since it was on the agenda of the Beni Ansar communal council meeting held on February 1st. The local government of Melilla has announced that it is ready to finance this project with up to 8 million Euro.³⁰ The Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (AMDH) considers this project a maneuver on the part of the Spanish authorities to outsource the responsibility for the minors to Morocco, while discarding their responsibility to guarantee their rights as mandated by international agreements and national legislation.³¹

Political developments

The new Spanish government has promised to improve the situation at Spain's southern borders. Amongst others, the Spanish president Pedro Sanchez announced that he would work toward taking down the barbed wire covering the fences between Morocco and Ceuta and Melilla.³² On 28th of June, the Spanish interior minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska visited his counterpart Abdelouafi Latfit in Rabat in order to discuss - among others - the illegalized migration movements from Morocco to Spain³³. The ministers announced that the concertina barbed wire will only be removed if the 'security' at the common border can be assured alternatively. The idea of detention centers in countries of origin and transit has been widely discussed in the last weeks within the EU, but this idea was rejected by the Moroccan foreign minister Naser Burita, who announced after the meeting with the Grande-Marlaska that Morocco 'rejects and will always reject' those kind of centers as they appear to be an 'easy solution' for the EU, externalizing the 'problem' but not addressing it.³⁴ Further developments regarding facilities on Moroccan soil remain to be seen.

Other regional news

In June, the AP News agency reported that Algeria had deported more than 13,000 migrants into the Sahara within the previous 14 months. According to witnesses, they had been left there without water and food, and, in many

29 https://www.libe.ma/120-mineurs-non-accompagnes-arretes-en-une-journee_a99807.html

30 https://www.libe.ma/Drole-de-transaction-curieuse-et-inopportune-Mellilia-finance-la-construction-d-un-centre-d-accueil-pour-mineurs-non_a94677.html

31 https://www.libe.ma/120-mineurs-non-accompagnes-arretes-en-une-journee_a99807.html

32 <http://www.europe1.fr/international/madrid-veut-oter-les-barbeles-des-clotures-de-ceuta-et-melilla-3681464>
<https://elfarodeceuta.es/fin-concertinas-ceuta-melilla-coordinara-marruecos/>

33 <http://www.mapnews.ma/en/top-news/social/interior-minister-spanish-peer-stress-need-continue-counterterrorism-cooperation>

34 <https://elfarodeceuta.es/fin-concertinas-ceuta-melilla-coordinara-marruecos/>

cases, the authorities had confiscated mobile phones and money. The deported were forced to walk for hours or days at temperatures of up to 48 degrees Celsius to reach the nearest inhabited locations.³⁵ Most of them needed to cross 15 km of plain desert towards the town of Assamaka in Niger. Among the deported are also women and children, some witnesses have reported about pregnant women who lost their babies on the way. Algeria denies any violent and inhumane treatment of the people concerned and does not publish deportation statistics. Radio Canada cites a spokesman for the EU who said that they were aware of Algeria's actions, but that "sovereign countries" can expel migrants provided they comply with international law.³⁶

Alarm Phone activists from Oujda as well as other Algerian and Moroccan activists called for a joint march on 22nd of July towards the common border of the two countries, starting from Oujda (Morocco) and at the same time from Maghnia (Algeria). The activists demand to re-open the border that has been closed since 1994.³⁷ They demand freedom of movement and oppose the border externalisation strategies of the EU. This very border crossing between Maghnia and Oujda is one of the most dangerous entries to Morocco for travellers as it is highly secured and consists of deep trenches and a high fence. An open border in this region would be crucial for the travellers to reach Morocco safely and for the struggle for freedom of movement. Every two weeks activists will march now towards the border from Oujda, Morocco, with the next march scheduled for the 5th of August.



Source: Alarm Phone Oujda

³⁵<http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/algerien-sahara-101.html>

³⁶<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1109152/algerie-abandonne-migrants-sahara>

³⁷<https://www.h24info.ma/maroc/marocains-et-algeriens-ensemble-dans-une-marche-pour-la-reouverture-des-frontieres/>

Developments in the Aegean Sea

While the numbers of sea crossings have dramatically increased in the Western Mediterranean Sea, they remain rather low but consistent in the Aegean Sea. 2,439 people reached the Greek islands in June. Although it is not yet clear where they had departed from, a boat carrying about 150 people capsized between Turkey and Cyprus in mid-July. 19 people have been found dead, 30 people went missing, about 100 survived.

Over the past six weeks, the Alarm Phone was alerted to eight cases of travellers crossing from Turkey to Greece and it is for the first time that we had only alerts by people crossing the land border and none by people crossing the sea. This phenomena highlights, to a certain extent, the general situation currently at the eastern sea border of Europe. While the number of overall sea-crossings in the Aegean remains with 15.563 crossings (up to 22.7.2018) quite low compared to the years before, the crossings at the land border increased starting in April this year. Given the dangers of sea crossing, the patrolling of the Aegean Sea, and especially the inhumane conditions that newcomers await on the Greek islands, many have tried to cross into Greece via the Evros border in northern Greece. Official statistics alone have documented 5802 arrests for “illegal entry” at the land border from Greece to Turkey already for the first 4 months of 2018. In the same period in 2017, there were ‘only’ 667 of such arrests.³⁸

In order to cross this land border, they have to overcome the Evros river, which is a dangerous endeavour, and have to pass unnoticed by Greek and Turkish border police. Unfortunately, many are caught on the Greek side and illegally transferred back to Turkey. These so-called push-back operations are for several years now frequent practices and constitute systematic violations of human rights of the precarious travellers as their right to access safe territory and seek protection is denied. As outlined in the next paragraphs, over the past six weeks, the Alarm Phone has documented and denounced four such push-back operations. A fifth group was pushed-back in the night from 21st to 22nd of July and we are still conducting a follow-up for this group, as some members of them are still detained in Turkey, held in miserable conditions. Allegedly, some were able to escape but at least one person of the arrested was reportedly returned to Syria. Among the group were two children, two women, and two sick persons.

The first case occurred on Saturday the 30th of June 2018. In the early morning, we had been informed about a group of people along the Turkish-Greek land border that was in need of support. Five of them were from Syria, five from Sierra Leone, six men, two women, and two children. We contacted the travellers, received their GPS position, and notified the police to their whereabouts, as the travellers had asked us to do. The police confirmed to us

38 http://www.astynomia.gr/images/stories//2018/statistics18/allodapwn/4_statistics_all_2018_methorio.png

that they would search for them. Hours later, in the early afternoon, one of the members of the group told us that she was on her way back to Istanbul. She informed us about what had happened to them: At around 9am local time, they had been found by Greek officers in blue & black uniforms. Their belongings was taken away, and at least 5 of them were forced back to Turkey. They had not taken any pictures as their phones had been taken away. Our contact person had been able to hide her phone. They were kept in confinement for about one hour and treated badly, "like dogs" she said, before being forced onto a boat that returned them illegally to Turkey.

On Thursday the 5th of July, the second push-back operation was observed by the Alarm Phone. We had received a distress call from a group of Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni and Sudanese migrants who had crossed into Greece seeking international protection. The group was found by the Greek police. The police handed the group to Greek officers who did not hesitate to use violence and intimidation. They were beaten, robbed, and forced onto a boat that returned them to Turkish territory.

In the night of 5th-6th of July 2018, a group of 12 people from Syria and Iraq, including two women, one of whom was elderly, two children (six and eleven years old), and eight men, was reportedly apprehended on Greek soil near Mikrochori in Evros region and pushed back to Turkey. It remains unclear what happened to them upon return to Turkey.

In the night of 9th-10th of July 2018, 19 people from Syria and Iraq, including a one-year-old child, a pregnant woman and a man with a broken leg, were reportedly pushed-back from Greece to Turkey at the land border in Evros. They arrived on 9th July and had sent a SOS-call to the Alarm Phone. The first GPS coordinates received showed their position near Filakto. The group said they had sick kids with them and they were very hungry. A second set of GPS coordinates sent showed them at a position near Provatonas. Communications with the group broke down in the afternoon and only in the late morning of the next day, the group answered again - now from Turkey. They reported that 'the police' had found them around 5pm on the 9th of July. They brought them to a place the migrants described as 'a prison'. At 10pm, the officers allegedly wearing blue trousers and camouflage sweaters, told the group that they would be moved to a camp so that they could apply for international protection. However, instead, they brought them back to the river. There, according to one testimony, the men of the group were beaten. Their belongings such as phones, money, passports and the food for the infant were taken away. They were then put onto a boat at the river and were threatened not to come back to Greece again. Reacting to our questions concerning cases 3 and 4, the Greek police stated that they had not found anyone at the positions we had provided them with.

On Saturday, July 21, at 19.28 CET, The Alarm Phone received a message from a contact person indicating that 27 people had been missing for 3 days near the Greek/Turkish land border, having been left there without food and water. The shift team immediately contacted the relevant actors in the region, including the UNHCR, and learned that the Greek Border Police was reportedly already looking for the group. The following day, the shift team received information that some members of the group had been pushed back to Turkey and that their shoes and other belongings had been taken away or destroyed by the Greek authorities. The shift team maintained contact with a contact person as well as relevant NGOs and International Organisations. The contact person alerted our shift team at 16.50 on July 22 that 12 travelers were in a Turkish detention centre, including her brother and sister. On July 23, we were able to speak to one person from the returned and can confirm that they have been pushed back to Turkey. The Alarm Phone was not able to gain information about all travellers in the group, as several have disappeared after the Turkish authorities appeared and started arresting them. Allegedly, some could escape but at least one person of the arrested was reportedly returned to Syria. A follow-up is still ongoing.

The Alarm Phone, when receiving distress calls from groups in the Evros border region especially if they report to have persons among them with special needs, such as pregnant women, people with disabilities, toddlers and infants, elderly or sick, informs the respective authorities (Greek and /or Turkish) upon request of the people in need. In these four cases, GPS positions shared with us showed clearly locations on Greek soil. Despite this fact and despite many requests for assistance made toward the responsible authorities, the people ended up back in Turkey exposed to degrading and inhumane detention conditions, often without access to an asylum procedure and in danger of chain-refoulement to war and conflict zones. Instead of getting access to protection in Greece as requested in their calls for help and their claims to asylum, they were returned to a place where they stated they would be in danger. We are highly concerned about repeated testimonies of illegal push-backs at the Greek-Turkish land border. We demand respect for the people's human rights and dignity, as well as for the international law, which is clearly breached in such push-back operations. We will continue to document these breaches of human rights and demand and immediate stop of these practices.³⁹

Summaries of Alarm Phone distress cases

In the past 6 weeks, the WatchTheMed Alarm Phone was engaged in 187 distress cases, of which 176 took place in the Western Mediterranean, 7 in

³⁹ https://alarmphone.org/en/2018/07/06/four-push-back-operations-at-the-greek-turkish-land-border-witnessed-by-the-alarm-phone/?post_type=release_type=post

the Aegean Sea, and 4 in the Central Mediterranean. You can find links to the individual reports below.

Western Mediterranean

On Wednesday the 11th of July, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to 2 boats in distress in the strait of Gibraltar. Both of them were returned to Morocco by the Moroccan navy (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/949>).

On Thursday the 12th of July, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to five boats on their way towards Spain. Four of the boats were rescued by the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo (SM) and one was intercepted by the Moroccan navy (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/950>).

On Wednesday the 13th of June, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to two boats in distress in the strait of Gibraltar. The first boat was rescued by the Moroccan navy. From the second boat four survivors were rescued to Spain, whilst 44 travellers remain missing (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/916>).

On Thursday the 14th of June, we were alerted to three boats in distress in the strait of Gibraltar. Two groups were rescued by the Moroccan navy, but from the first boat two people who had fallen into the water remain missing. The third boat was rescued by a Spanish vessel and brought to Spain (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/917>).

On Friday the 15th of June, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to 14 boats in distress in the strait of Gibraltar, of which 11 were rescued by the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo (SM), and three by the Moroccan navy (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/918>).

On Saturday the 16th of June, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to two boats in distress in the Western Mediterranean. Both boats were rescued by the Moroccan navy. However, one traveller drowned during the rescue operation of the second boat (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/923>).

On Monday the 25th of June 2018, our Alarm Phone shift teams worked on a total of 14 distress cases. 10 boats were rescued to Spain, 3 boats were intercepted, and the fate of 1 boat remains unknown (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/924>).

On Tuesday, the 26th of June 2018, the Alarm Phone worked on 10 emergency situations in the Western Mediterranean Sea. 5 boats were

rescued to Spain while the other 5 were returned to Spain (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/925>).

On Wednesday the 27th of June 2018, the Alarm Phone was alerted to two emergency situations in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Both were intercepted by the Moroccan Navy and returned to Morocco (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/926>).

On Thursday, the 28th of June 2018, our Alarm Phone dealt with five emergency situations in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Four boats were intercepted/rescued and returned to Morocco, one was rescued to Spain (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/929>).

On Friday the 29th of June 2018, our Alarm phone shift team was alerted to 4 boats in distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Two were rescued to Spain, two returned to Morocco (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/930>).

On Tuesday, 3rd of July, Alarm Phone was in contact with two boats in distress from Morocco towards Spain. Both returned to Morocco by own forces. In one case, a young man died afterwards in the hospital (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/936>).

On Thursday, 5th of July, we were alerted to a boat in distress in the Strait of Gibraltar, carrying 6 persons. The boat was in distress and in the evening the travellers had reached the Moroccan shore by themselves (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/937>).

On Friday, 6th of July, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 boats in distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea. 4 boats were intercepted the same day, one big convoi of 40 people had been missing for more than 40 hours (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/938>)

On Saturday, 7th of July, we were alerted to a boat in distress that had left from Cap Spartel, carrying 8 people. The boat couldn't be found. The next day at 1:06pm a contact person confirmed that they had managed to return to Morocco safely (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/939>).

On Monday the 9th of July, at 07.30am CEST, we were alerted by a contact person to a group of 9 travellers, including 1 baby, who had left from a beach south of Tangier. We called Salvamento Maritimo (SM) and informed them of the travellers. SM told us that they were aware of the boat, which they said was in Moroccan waters. We offered the GPS position of the boat. At 08:30 am the contact person informed us that the travellers were taken back to Morocco by the Moroccan navy (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/947>).

On Tuesday the 10th of July, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to two boats in distress in the strait of Gibraltar. Both were intercepted by the Moroccan navy (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/948>).

On Wednesday the 11th of July, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to 2 boats in distress in the strait of Gibraltar. Both of them were returned to Morocco by the Moroccan navy (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/949>).

On Thursday the 12th of July, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to five boats on their way towards Spain. Four of the boats were rescued by the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo (SM) and one was intercepted by the Moroccan navy (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/950>).

On Saturday the 14th of July, the Alarm Phone shift team was working on 11 distress cases in the strait of Gibraltar. Three of the boats were rescued to Spain and eight of them were returned to Morocco. Apart from the cases we were actively involved in, we were alerted to another seven cases, of which six were intercepted before we had time to intervene, and one was rescued to Spain (see: www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/951).

On Sunday the 15th of July, the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to four distress cases in the Strait of Gibraltar. One of the boats was rescued by the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo (SM). Two of them were returned to Morocco by the Moroccan navy. In one case we lost contact to the travellers, and the contact person was also not able to provide news about the case, thus it is uncertain whether these travellers were rescued by the Moroccan navy as well (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/952>).

On Sunday, July 16th, we were alerted to 3 boats in distress. Two of the boats returned to Morocco without external aid. One boat returned to Morocco with the help of a fisherman. 3 people are still missing. (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/956>)

On Monday, July 17, The Alarm Phone was alerted to three boats that left the coast of Morocco. 2 of the boats were intercepted by the Marine Royale, and one returned to Morocco on its own. (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/963>)

On Tuesday, July 18, The Alarm Phone was alerted to 6 boats at sea. 5 were rescued by Salvamento Maritimo and 1 returned on its own to Morocco. (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/958>)

On Wednesday, July 19, The Alarm Phone was alerted to 7 boats, including 2 that were rescued by Salvamento Marítimo, 3 intercepted by the Marine Royale and 2 returned to Morocco on their own. (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/959>)

On Thursday, July 20, The Alarm Phone was involved in 11 cases between Morocco and Spain. Four of the boats were rescued by the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Marítimo (SM), three of them were returned by the Moroccan navy, two of them made it back to Morocco on their own, and two boats returned to Morocco, but we were not able to confirm whether they were rescued by the navy or returned by themselves. Apart from the cases we were actively involved in, we were alerted to two more boats, one which was rescued by SM, and one which we were not able to reach or obtain a confirmation from after our initial call. (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/reports/view/960>)

On Friday, July 21, The Alarm Phone was alerted to 8 boats. 7 boats were rescued to Spain and 1 was intercepted and brought back to Morocco. (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/reports/view/961>)

On July 22, 2018, The Alarm Phone was alerted to 14 boats that departed from Morocco. (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/reports/view/962>)

Aegean Sea

On Thursday, the 28th of June 2018, our Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to a group of travellers in distress at the Turkish-Greek land border. There were children and elderly people among the group of 9 people, 5 men, 3 women, and a child. They had been walking for three days and were exhausted. They had also run out of food. A police station informed us finally that the people had been arrested, but refused to relate further information to us (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/933>).

On Monday, 2nd of July, we were alerted to a group of travellers in Evros river border zone, asking for assistance. They were 14 people, among them women and babies. The police in Alexandropolis confirmed the assistance of the 14 travellers finally (see full report here: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/940>).

On Tuesday, 3rd of July, the Alarm Phone was alerted to two cases at the Turkish-Greek landborder: First a group of 10 travellers asked for assistance. They were stuck close to the Greek village of Peplos. They sent their GPS position. We called several authorities but couldn't get any new information on the status of a police operation. Finally as we had lost the contact to the group, we decided to close the case. At around 9pm CEST we were alerted to

a second group consisting of 11 people that were close to Praggi on the Greek side of Evros river. In the morning we reached them directly. They were in need of medical assistance, food and water. We called the police in Didimoteicho, the closest town. At 8:18pm the contact person informed us that the group had decided not to wait for assistance. We decided to close the case (see full report here: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/941>).

On Thursday, 5th of July, The Alarm Phone assisted two groups of travellers in the Turkish-Greek border zone. One group of 14 travellers, among them 3 women and 2 children, was pushed back to Turkey. At 4pm CEST we were alerted to a second group of 12 people stuck in Evros river border zone near Mikrochori, Greece. We couldn't establish anymore a connection to the travellers and couldn't find out anything contacting the local authorities and UNHCR. It remained unconfirmed what happened to the group (see full report here: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/942>).

On Sunday, 8th of July, at 11:14pm CEST, we were alerted to a group of travellers stuck near Tichero, Greece. After alerting the local police, the next day we were informed by a contact person that the group had been found and that they had been allegedly violently pushed-back to Turkey (see full report here: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/943>).

On Saturday, July 21, at 19.28 CET, The Alarm Phone received a message from a contact person indicating that 27 people had been missing for 3 days near the Greek/Turkish landborder being left without food and water. After contacting the relevant actors in the region, including UNHCR, our shiftteam learned the following day, that parts of the group had been pushed back to Turkey. Allegedly, at least one person of the arrested got reportedly returned to Syria. Among the group were two kids, two women and two sick persons. (see full report here: <http://www.watchthemed.net/reports/view/955>).

Central Mediterranean

On Friday the 15th of June at 11.46am CEST, the Alarm Phone shift team was informed by a contact person about a group of 100-160 travellers who had left on a rubber boat at around 6pm local time from Zuwarah, Libya. The contact person forwarded us a position of the travellers along with the number of their satellite phone. At 2.05pm we called the Italian coast guard, who was already alerted to the distress of the travellers. When we spoke to the travellers at 4.42pm, they were panicking, and told us that their boat was losing air. At 6.35pm the travellers informed us that their phone was almost out of battery, and that they therefore could not call anymore. At 6.37pm The Italian coast guard confirmed that they would send two boats to intercept the travellers. At 9.35pm the Italian coast guard informed us that the travellers had been brought back to Libya. This case demonstrates a

close cooperation between the Italian and Libyan coast guard in intercepting travellers, and thus preventing them from reaching safety in Europe (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/954>).

On June 23, 2018, The Alarm Phone was alerted to a boat carrying an unknown number of people. The shift team was only able to maintain short initial contact, which broke down before getting useful information. The shift team was able to check and see that the Thuraya number had credit, and that it was unchanging. The Alarm Phone alerted MRCC Rome, which indicated they would not look into the case any further without more information. The number for the phone became unreachable. The boat was very likely intercepted by Libyan forces (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/964>).

At 7.45am CET, The Alarm Phone received a call from a boat at sea asking to be rescued quickly. The boat had 20 women and 15 children on board. The shift team was in touch with MRCC Rome and asked for immediate assistance as the people were in distress. At 8.10, MRCC Rome confirmed they had informed the Libyan Coast Guard of the boat. The shift team maintained contact with the boat for several hours and attempted to support them through their stress, including by recharging their Thuraya phones. MRCC Rome and Malta refused to take responsibility, although GPS positions were provided. Rescue NGOs in the area were unable to find the boat in the area of the given GPS position, however, given that over 1000 people were intercepted by Libyan forces in that period, it is likely that this boat was also intercepted. MRCC Rome cooperated with Tripoli on many cases to intercept travelers (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/965>).

On Saturday the 14th of July at 6.35pm, the Alarm Phone shift team was informed by a contact person about a group of 40 travellers who had left on a wooden boat from Libya. Eight women, including two pregnant women were part of the group. The travellers were in international waters and had reached the Maltese search and rescue zone. They had already been rescued the previous day by the supply vessel Sarost 5. MRCC Tunis as well as the crew of the supply vessel confirmed the position of the migrant boat in the Maltese SAR zone. Both Malta and Italy denied the supply vessel their permission to disembark the migrants in Maltese and Italian harbours. After rescue, they were provided with some food and brought to the oil platform. Later, the supply vessel took course on Sfax/Tunisia to disembark the people there. The authorities of Sfax, however, refused to allow them to disembark. They were then told to disembark in Zarzis/Tunisia. But since Monday the 16th of July, at 1am, they are also blocked from entering the port there. The travellers are still in limbo, stuck at sea, not allowed to disembark. The Alarm Phone is still following the case closely, demanding that the people are

transferred and allowed to disembark in a safe port in Europe (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/reports/view/953>).