

## **Alarm Phone witnessed armed attacks on 6 boats in the Aegean Sea**

Bi-weekly Alarm Phone Report 5-18 October 2015

In the past two weeks the Alarm Phone witnessed awful and unacceptable forms of violence committed against travellers at sea. In the Western Mediterranean we directly witnessed how several groups of travellers were forcefully intercepted and detained, with one group being even deported to the Moroccan border to Mauretania. In the Aegean Sea, travellers informed us about six attacks on boats in Greek territorial waters. In all of these cases, armed and masked forces supposedly of the Greek coastguard beat travellers, stabbed their rubber boats and disabled or stole their engines. Afterwards, they would push them back and leave them behind in Turkish waters, in serious danger of capsizing. The human rights NGO Human Rights Watch also documented several such attacks on boats in the last couple of weeks.<sup>i</sup>

These attacks were just the tip of the iceberg with respect to the violence reported from other sources. As reported from Morocco, in the camp of Boukhalef, Moroccan police forces attacked the dwellers and destroyed their tents.<sup>ii</sup> In Spain, the Spanish navy again blocked and pushed back a boat in distress until Moroccan authorities intercepted it.<sup>iii</sup> From Bulgaria it is reported that an Afghani man was shot dead by the Bulgarian border police during a control.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite these unacceptable acts of violence, the number of travellers trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea is on a constant high. With the winter season approaching and conditions at sea worsening, thousands of travellers risk their lives in order to arrive in EU territory. In the last week, the numbers of arrivals in Greece even exceeded the numbers of the summer months, with up to 10.000 per day. In one day alone, on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, the Greek coastguard rescued more than 90 boats already by midday. However, last week also saw the death of at least 25 travellers in several shipwrecks in the Aegean Sea, half of it children and infants.<sup>v</sup>

We witness all these dramatic and unnecessary scenes of European border violence as well as the enactment of the freedom to move by the thousands when, at the same time, EU leaders desperately seek to re-stabilise their border regime. Besides the installation of the infamous 'hotspots' in Greece and Italy, the EU is now also drawing the Turkish government more closely into its system of deterrence, urging the Turkish president Erdoğan to prevent travellers from crossing the Aegean Sea on boats. We know, already ever since the EU border regime was created, that these measures will not prevent people from moving but it will make unauthorised human movement even more lengthy, costly, dangerous and deadly. In the light of these developments we call for safe and legal ways to Europe and we also demand independent investigations of the violent attacks and push-backs in the Aegean Sea which deliberately endangered the lives of hundreds of travellers seeking protection and shelter in Europe.

### **Summary of cases**

In the past two weeks, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 96 emergency situations in total, 90 of which occurred in the Aegean Sea, 1 in the Central Mediterranean and 5 in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Summaries and links to the individual reports can be found below.

### **Western Mediterranean Sea**

In the afternoon of Thursday the 08<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 a contact person forwarded the number of a boat in distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea to the Alarm Phone. We talked directly to the travellers at 3pm, 10 people on a rubber boat. In a call to the Spanish maritime rescue organization Salvamento Marítimo we learned that both, the Spanish coastguard and the

Moroccan navy were already searching for the boat in distress. At 3.31pm the travellers confirmed to us, that the Moroccan navy had intercepted them (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/295>).

Also on Thursday the 08th of October 2015 the Alarm Phone was informed about more than 120 persons being deported in three buses from the border fence in Ceuta/Spain to the border between Morocco and Mauretania. The Alarm Phone informed its contact persons in Morocco and reported on Twitter about the ongoing deportation. Later we learned that one part of the group was brought to Tiznit and the other to several camps (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/296>).

On Wednesday, the 14th of October 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to two cases in the Western Mediterranean. Both boats were intercepted by the Moroccan Navy, but in one case the rescue was delayed for hours, when the Spanish Salvamento Maritimo and the Moroccan Navy were unable to agree on their responsibilities to conduct the rescue operation (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/312>).

On Friday, the 16th of October 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to one case in the Western Mediterranean Sea. A man from Morocco called us around 1am and told us that friends of his had left Tangier on Thursday night around 10pm. We alerted Salvamento Maritimo at 2.30am, but at 7am we learned that a Moroccan patrol boat had picked up a boat with 11 persons on board (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/308>).

### **Central Mediterranean Sea**

On Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 Father Mussie Zerai alerted the Alarm Phone to two boats in distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea. We had direct contact to one of them and eventually the rescue of both boats could be confirmed. On that day, according to the Italian coastguard, several rescue vessels had saved a total of 1830 travellers (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/294>).

### **Aegean Sea**

On Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone dealt with five situations of distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Chios and Lesbos. While the Greek coastguard rescued one vessel, in one case the Turkish coastguard conducted a rescue operation and in three cases the travellers were able to move on independently (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/297>).

On Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone witnessed a violent attack on a boat in distress near the Greek island of Lesbos that was subsequently pushed back into Turkish waters. Beyond that, we dealt with two emergency situations, in which one boat was rescued by the Turkish coastguard and one by the Greeks (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/298>).

On Wednesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to three boats in distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios and on Astypalaia. Again, one boat was attacked by the Greek coastguard near Lesbos and subsequently pushed back into Turkish territorial waters. The travellers reported in detail about these violent acts and the Alarm Phone will forward the details of the case to the Greek ministry to ask for further investigations and to human rights NGOs to follow-up (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/299>).

On Thursday the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to five situations of distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek island of Lesbos, Samos and Agathonisi. The Greek coastguard rescued two groups of travellers while three other groups were returned to Turkey. Turkish fishermen had rescued one group and another group was rescued by the Turkish coastguard (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/300>).

On Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone dealt with five emergency situations in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek island of Chios, Lesbos and Samos. While one boat arrived on Lesbos independently, the Turkish coastguard rescued one boat and returned the travellers to Turkey. They told us that their engine had been stolen as well. In one case a group of travellers stranded on the Greek island of Samos and in two cases rescue cannot be confirmed because the Alarm Phone could not re-establish contact to the travellers (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/305>).

On Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone dealt with a total of 9 boats in distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek island of Lesbos, Agathonisi, Kos and Samos. In 5 cases the Greek coastguard rescued the travellers and in one case the Turkish coastguard conducted a large rescue operation. One boat reached Greece on its own but in two cases rescue cannot be confirmed by the Alarm Phone, because we lost contact with the travellers (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/306>).

On Sunday the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone dealt with a total of 11 emergency situations in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek island of Farmakonisi, Agathonisi, Lesbos and Samos. In 5 cases the travellers were finally rescued by the Greek coastguard or arrived at Greek islands on their own. The Turkish coastguard rescued 3 boats and one returned to the Turkish coast independently. In two cases we could not confirm the rescue of the boats, as we were not able to re-establish contact to them (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/311>).

On Monday the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to two distress cases in the Aegean Sea, close to the Greek islands of Kos and Chios. While the boat near Kos was rescued by the Greek coastguard, it was the Turkish coastguard who conducted a rescue operation with respect to the boat near Chios. More than 150 travellers on board were returned to Turkey (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/301>).

On Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to nine distress cases in the Aegean Sea, close to the Greek islands of Samos, Lesbos and Chios. Two of the boats had been attacked near Chios by masked men, who broke the engine and left them behind without fuel, a third group had stranded on a small Turkish island and reported as well to have been attacked the night before. As we learned later on, also this attack happened close to the island of Chios, thus in close proximity to the other attacks (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/302>).

On Wednesday the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to eight distress cases in the Aegean Sea, close to the Greek islands of Lesbos, Farmakonisi and Chios. In all eight cases the travellers eventually arrived in Greece, either on their own or by the help of the Greek coastguard (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/303>).

On Thursday the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to ten distress cases in the Aegean Sea, close to the Greek islands of Kastellorizo, Agathonisi, Levitha, Chios and Samos (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/307>).

On Friday the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to two distress cases in the Aegean Sea, near Lesbos and Agathonisi. In one case the travellers reported to us that they had been attacked and that their engine had been taken away (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/304>).

On Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted 7 cases of boats in distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios and Kastellerizon. Beyond that, one group had stranded on the Greek island of Farmakonisi and was evacuated by Greek authorities. Two boats were able to re-start their engine and to move on independently, while two boats were rescued by the Greek coastguard. In three cases the Turkish coastguard conducted rescue operations and returned the travellers to Turkey (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/309>).

On Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 the Alarm Phone dealt with a total of 10 emergency situations in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Farmakonisi, Agathonisi, Glaros, Chios and Lesbos. The Greek coastguard rescued 4 boats in distress north of Lesbos and 3 east of Chios. In one case close to Farmakonisi rescue was confirmed to us, but it remained unclear by whom. Beyond that, two groups of travellers had stranded on the islands of Agathonisi and Glaros, but were saved afterwards (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/310>).

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/22/greece-attacks-boats-risk-migrant-lives>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://beatingborders.wordpress.com/2015/10/19/destruction-in-boukhalef/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://canariasnoticias.es/canarias/hernandez-bento-cree-sorprendente-la-llegada-de-2-mujeres-sirias-en-patera-canarias-si-se>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://bulgaria.bordermonitoring.eu/2015/10/16/no-tears-for-killed-afghani-migrant/>

<sup>v</sup> <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/en/weekend-greece-arrivals-exceed-peak-summer-day-totals>