

Alarm Phone Weekly Report, 21st to 27th of September 2015

The social movement of migration in the Mediterranean Basin towards Europe has never been that strong: more than half a million people have crossed the Mediterranean Sea in the first nine months of this year, more than twice as many as in the entire year of 2014. The vast majority, more than two-thirds, arrived in Greece, which reflects the hundreds of distress calls the Alarm Phone has received from that region. As the summer comes to an end and the weather changes, sea-crossings become even more dangerous. On Sunday, the 27th of September, 17 travellers, including five children, died in a shipwreck off the Turkish coast. Despite strong winds and thunderstorms in the Aegean Sea last week, thousands of travellers undertook the perilous journey because there are no safe and legal ways into Europe. In the past months thousands of lives have been rescued thanks to civil society initiatives such as Sea-Watch, MSF or MOAS. Unfortunately, both Sea-Watch and MOAS ended their rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean last week, which means that in the coming months even fewer boats will be available to watch, search and rescue.

In Turkey, people continue their struggle for the right to safe and free movement. Up to 6000 people walked towards the Turkish-Greek and the Turkish-Bulgarian borders with the slogan #crossingnomore to demand the opening of land borders so that they would not have to risk their lives at sea. This protest movement was met with violence and repression by the Turkish police and on Monday, the 21st of September, five activists of this march of hope were arrested. Two activists with European nationalities were deported to Europe, while the other three activists are still in prison and threatened to be deported to Syria and Palestine. International solidarity is now needed to denounce the actions of the Turkish government and to support the activists in prison. To cover the costs of the activists' lawyers and the court proceedings, please donate to:

borderline-europe e.V.
GLS Bank, Bochum
IBAN: DE11430609674005794100
BIC: GENODEM1GLS (Bochum)
Reference: Turkei Soli

Find further information here:

<http://bordermonitoring.eu/tuerkei/2015/09/busofhope-from-istanbul/>
<http://bordermonitoring.eu/tuerkei/2015/09/edirne-refugees-demand-safe-passage-to-greece/>
<http://gocmendayanisma.org/2015/09/23/edirne/>
<http://gocmendayanisma.org/2015/09/21/edirne-20-eylul/>

In the past week, the Alarm Phone was alerted to various emergency situations, 39 of which in the Aegean Sea, 1 in the Western Mediterranean Sea and 1 in the Central Mediterranean Sea. We were in contact with hundreds of travellers and our shift teams worked 24/7 to assist those in distress at sea. A short summary and links to the individual cases can be found below.

On Monday, the 21st of September 2015, the Alarm Phone team was alerted to 6 distress calls in the Aegean Sea, with at least 200 travellers involved, mostly near the Greek islands

of Samos, Chios and Lesbos. In the first case of a vessel in distress near Samos, Greece, the travellers eventually reached land on their own. In the second case close to Chios the travellers were rescued by a tourist boat. The third case concerned a boat in urgent distress, carrying around 70 travellers, which we located between Özdere, Turkey and Samos, Greece. The Turkish coastguard searched for the boat, but we could get no final confirmation of the rescue. In two cases, the travellers sent their alerts through audio recordings. In one case the travellers eventually made it to Mytilene and in the other case of a boat with 30 passengers going into the direction of Lesbos the boat was saved by the Greek coastguard. The 6th and final alert of the day reached us at 10.22pm. A contact person forwarded us the position of a boat and the request to inform the Greek coastguard. We thus informed the Greek coastguard, who were cooperative and said that they would get in touch with the travellers directly. One hour later, we received a WhatsApp message by the contact person, informing us about the rescue of the boat by the Turkish coastguard. We were astonished that the Turkish coastguard had intervened in Greek territorial waters, but we could not reach the travellers directly to ask them about the rescue operation (see: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/274>).

On Tuesday, the 22nd of September 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to three cases in the Aegean Sea, close to Nera/Agathonisi and Lesbos, Greece. During the night shift, we received a 1st alert about a group of 30 persons, who had stranded on the island of Agathonisi. Apparently some of the stranded travellers were injured due to a hard landing. We contacted the Greek coastguard, who explained that due to bad weather it was too difficult to reach the island by boat, but they had informed the local port authorities, who would start the rescue with the first daylight. At 7.17am, we contacted the police in Agathonisi, who informed us that the rescue of the travellers was ongoing. At 10.37 one of the contact persons, who was in direct contact with the travellers confirmed their rescue. At 4am the Alarm Phone was alerted to a 2nd distress case of 35 travellers going into the direction of Lesbos, but still located near Dikili, Turkey, when they sent an SOS. Since we could not reach the travellers directly, we followed the request of the contact person and called the Turkish coastguard. They already had a case in the same area and said that they had sent a boat to rescue. At 8:45am we received a WhatsApp from our contact person saying that all travellers had been rescued by the Turkish coastguard. The 3rd alert of the day reached us at 9.23am and concerned a vessel carrying 41 persons near Lesbos. We reached the travellers, but communication was difficult. The Greek coastguards told us that they were working on 12 cases in the North of Lesbos and had sent many rescue boats. A few minutes later the contact person confirmed the rescue of the boat we had been informed about.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/275>

Also on Tuesday, the Alarm Phone received a direct call from a boat in distress between Morocco and Spain. They were seven travellers on board and had left Morocco at 4am in the morning. We called the Spanish rescue agency Salvamento Maritimo(SM), who told us that they would look for the boat. At 2am we called SM again, who told us that the vessel had been picked up by the Moroccan navy.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/276>

On Wednesday the 23rd of September 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to nine cases

of distress in the Aegean Sea, close to the Greek islands of Oinousses, Chios, Samos and Lesbos. The 1st alert reached the Alarm Phone at 1am. 50 travellers had stranded on Pasa island, a small deserted island next to Oinousses, Greece. We immediately informed the Greek coastguard, but had to wait until 1pm to get a confirmation that all travellers were safe. Two hours after the first alarm, at 2.50am, a contact person informed us via WhatsApp that 40 persons were in distress near Chios island, Greece. We forwarded the information to the Greek coastguard, however the travellers probably reached the coast without their help. Shortly after the second alert, we received information about a 3rd distress case with 39 persons in a vessel off the Turkish coast, near the city of Kusadasi. Unfortunately the contact person gave us an incomplete number, so that we could not contact the travellers and could only pass on the position to the Turkish coastguard. Likewise, at 4am and at 5am we were notified about two other cases, but did not get enough information (contact and/or position of the boat) to become active. For the second case with missing information the contact person informed us that the Greek coastguard had rescued the boat, in the first case we could unfortunately not get the rescue confirmed. In the 6th distress case of the day, with 35 travellers in distress Turkish waters, we informed the Turkish coastguard, but when they arrived, the vessel had already passed into Greek waters, so that eventually the boat was rescued by the Greek coastguard. At 6am the Alarm Phone was alerted to a 7th distress case, in vicinity to the sixth vessel, but closer to Samos, Greece. We informed the Greek coastguard, who had already sent a helicopter and a patrol boat one hour earlier but had not found the boat yet. At 7am our contact person confirmed that the travellers had been rescued.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/277>

On Thursday, the 24th of September 2015, at approximately 7.30am a woman called the Alarm Phone from a boat between Morocco and Spain. She was in tears and asking for help. We tried to calm her down and get precise information about their situation. We understood that they were 8 persons on board and that they had left Cap Spartel, Morocco at 6am. When we called the Spanish rescue agency Salvamento Maritimo at 11am, they told us that the Moroccan coastguard was about to pick up the boat. In the evening, a member of the Alarm Phone in Tanger informed us that the boat had been intercepted by the Moroccan navy, as he had met one of the travellers in Tanger.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/278>

Also on Thursday, the 24th of September 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 9 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea, close to the Greek islands of Kouneli, Farmakonisi, Chios, Samos, Lesbos, and Nera. In two cases, the travellers reported that they had been attacked and left behind without fuel. In one case, a group of 20 persons had stranded on a beach on Kouneli Island. They had to wait in the cold for many hours but were eventually transferred to Agathonisi. Another group that had stranded on the island of Nera was picked up by the police and also brought to Agathonisi. In two cases, the travellers were rescued by the Greek coastguard, without us having to intervene. In two cases the travellers reached the coast by themselves, and in two other cases, the travellers were saved by the Turkish coastguard. The last alert of the day concerned a person trying to swim to Greece. The contact person did not know where the swimmer started, what his destination or his last position was. We sent an email to the Greek and Turkish coastguards, to the Greek police and the UNHCR to inform them about the incident and to ask whether they had any further

information. At 6.30 we received a WhatsApp message with the name of the swimmer (Amar Mhamad Al Sous / Ammar Mohamad Haidar Alsous), his age (born 1996) and photos. The last contact with his family had been on September 14th 2015.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/283>

On Friday the 25th of September 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to five cases of distress in the Aegean Sea, close to the Greek islands of Lesbos, Farmakonisi, and Chios. In the first three cases, carrying 30 to 40 travellers each, the alerts reached us via support groups. One vessel was saved by the Greek coastguard, one made it to Lesbos without assistance, and the third was probably saved by the Turkish coastguard, however, we could not get a final confirmation in this case. The last two cases concerned a group of four travellers on two rowing boats

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/279>

On Friday evening, at 8am, we received a message about a 4th distress situation in the Aegean Sea. A contact person told us about a rowing boat with four passengers that was about to sink near the Greek island of Chios, with some travellers already in the water. We immediately contacted the Greek coastguard, who promised to rescue. A few minutes later the contact person sent us an updated position. We were confused, as it seemed impossible that the boat in question had moved from one position to the next. Ten minutes later the Greek coastguard confirmed the rescue of 2 persons. At 10.40am the contact person explained that there were actually 2 boats with 2 passengers each and that all four travellers had safely arrived in Greece. The passengers who had not been rescued by the Greek coastguard had reached land by themselves.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/279>

On Saturday the 26th of September 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 8 boats in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Lesbos and Agathonisi, but only 3 cases turned out to be cases of distress. In one case, the vessel, carrying approximately 60 travellers, was probably saved by the Greek coastguard near Lesbos, in the second case the travellers confirmed by WhatsApp that they were not (anymore) in a situation of distress and in the third case, eyewitnesses said that the Greek coastguard had saved the travellers in distress, but a final confirmation of the rescue could not be obtained. Another alert concerned 35 travellers, who had stranded on Agathonisi. We checked the position and found that the travellers were actually in the village, where they would be found in the morning. Next to these three cases of distress and the one case of stranded travellers, the Alarm Phone received four calls about travellers, who either made it by themselves, were rescued by the coastguard without our intervention, or were in no distress situation at all. Three of these cases again concerned vessels near Lesbos. One case was about a young Syrian man in a vessel near Farmakonisi, who was frightened, but not in a situation of distress.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/280>

On Sunday the 27th of September 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 4 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Chios with more than 100 travellers involved. In the first distress case, the Turkish coastguard went out to rescue, but the boat had already passed on to the Greek side. The Turkish coastguard said that the boat had most probably been saved to Chios, however, we were not able to get into contact with the people and have not been able to get a final confirmation for their rescue. In the second case, the

travellers had a broken engine, but made it back to Turkey without an intervention of the coastguard. In the third case, rescue was confirmed by the solidarity group, which had contacted us about the case. The fourth vessel that we had been alerted to, was saved by the Turkish coastguard.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/281>

Meanwhile, in the Central Mediterranean Sea, 112 travellers were rescued by Doctors without Borders. At 5.25am, the shift team received an e-mail from father Mussie Zerai about a boat that had left from Libya five hours earlier. We informed the Italian coastguard about the case, kept contact with the travellers and repeatedly forwarded updated coordinates to the coastguard. At 7.30am, the Italian coastguard informed us that the boat Bourbon Argos of Doctors without Borders was close to the vessel in distress and about to conduct a rescue operation. We passed on the good news to father Mussie Zerai. On Sunday evening, at 6.25pm we read in a press release of the Italian coastguard that 795 travellers had been rescued in the course of the day in seven different rescue operations. The ships Bourbon Argos and Ship Dignity I of Doctors without Borders had rescued respectively 112 and 107 migrants, according to the press statement.

<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/282>