

## **Unabated Migration Movements in all three regions of the Mediterranean Sea**

### **Bi-Weekly Alarm Phone Report, 23<sup>rd</sup> of November – 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2015**

In the past two weeks the Alarm Phone worked on 94 emergency cases, 93 of which came from the Aegean region. While the overwhelming majority of distress calls reached us from the Aegean Sea, it is clear that sea migrations via the Central and Western Mediterranean Sea are still ongoing. In the past two weeks hundreds of travellers were rescued in the Central Med and on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December we were involved in a large-scale rescue operation after Father Mussie Zerai had informed us about a vessel in distress off the coast of Libya (find details of the case below).

We witnessed fatalities once again, including the death of a little child during one Alarm Phone shift. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December we were alerted to a group that had stranded on the Greek island of Ro and needed help. The group was eventually found and rescued but it came too late for the girl who had unfortunately passed away in the meantime (see also source 1).

Instead of responding to these tragedies by opening land borders and allowing people to safely reach European territory, the EU is seeking to further harden and externalise its borders. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, the EU and Turkey agreed on a deal to deter refugee movements from Turkey into EU territory. In exchange for 3 billion Euros from the EU and the promise to facilitate visa-free travel for Turkish citizens, the Turkish government agreed to prevent migrants and refugees from leaving the Turkish shores to reach the Greek islands, the most frequented migration route this year. Allowing Turkey to do Europe's dirty work exposes people on the move to great risks: Not only is the Turkish government not prepared or willing to adequately protect the refugee population, but, as always, these deals will not stop migration movements but only lead to a further precarisation of migration routes, making them even more dangerous (see source 2). The repressions that people face as a consequence of this deal became publicly exposed only days later when it was reported in early December that nearly 3000 people seeking to move to Greece had been detained by Turkish police forces in the province of Çanakkale (see source 3). These mass arrests will not prevent people from moving on but will slow down their journeys, make them more expensive and expose travellers to further criminalisation, humiliation and violence.

We reported before about the life-threatening situation of travellers who, after crossing the Aegean Sea, stranded on the many Greek islands for hours or days until getting rescued by Greek authorities. The situation on the island of Farmakonisi is particularly dramatic, as the island is uninhabited except for the military stationed there. Without any reception infrastructure on the island, arriving people are neither fed, nor given water or shelter. The authorities on Leros, who are responsible to transfer travellers off Farmakonisi, often do not respond in a timely manner to

distress calls of stranded groups. Moreover, travellers have reported mistreatment by the military staff on the island. It is obvious that the military is neither prepared nor willing to support persons in need of assistance. We demand that the UNHCR and other civilian solidarity groups are granted access to the military island and that stranded travellers are picked up without delay from Farmakonisi.

Many of those who already succeeded in overcoming the Aegean Sea are currently struggling at another border obstacle, within Europe. In Eidomeini, at the Greek-Macedonian border, those who are not identified as being from Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq face harsh oppression from police and military forces and are prevented from crossing the border, already for about two weeks. Refugees have started to accelerate their struggle by confronting border authorities in diverse ways, including by sewing their lips together (see sources 4, 5 and 6).

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December our Alarm Phone network published a call-out in which we asked for smartphone donations for people seeking to overcome the Western Mediterranean Sea (see source 7). These journeys are very dangerous as people tend to travel on small dinghies, exposed to strong currents and changing weather conditions. We often encounter difficulties to locate boats in distress because most of the people neither carry satellite phones nor smartphones, which they could use to send their GPS coordinates. In many situations people could have been rescued hours earlier or been prevented from drowning or death from hypothermia if they would have been able to locate their own position and to pass it on to rescue services. Between Morocco and Spain most boats are intercepted by the Moroccan Marine Royale, even when the boat is in international or Spanish waters. Establishing a connection to a smartphone on the boat would also enable to document and thus scandalise push-back operations. As the Strait of Gibraltar where people try to cross is only 14 kilometres wide, internet coverage is given and would allow the travellers to call for rescue much more efficiently. The Alarm Phone will collect as many smartphones as possible and distribute them in Morocco.

If it is possible for you, please collect smartphones in your neighbourhood and city, spread our call and ask friends and relatives if they have a smartphone to donate! If you don't have old smartphones, and still want to support this campaign, money donations are also very welcome! Collected donations will then be used to buy cheap smartphones that can be sent to Morocco. If you manage to collect phones, please make sure that any content on the phone is deleted before sending it to us. Contact us via email and we will let you know where to send the phones or transfer money to. Our email is: [morocco-phones@riseup.net](mailto:morocco-phones@riseup.net)

Please find short summaries of the distress calls that reached us in the past two weeks below, as well as links to the full reports:

## **Aegean Sea**

On Monday the 23rd of November 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 4 distress cases. In two cases, travellers had stranded on Greek islands (Samos and Agathonisi) and in the other two cases, they had problems with their boats' engine. In the two distress cases at sea, the travellers were picked up by the Greek Coastguard and brought to Lesbos. In the other two cases, we could not obtain a final confirmation about the whereabouts and the wellbeing of the travellers (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/354>).

On Tuesday the 24th of November 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 7 cases in the Aegean Sea near Lesbos, Chios, and Nera, but only became active in 3 of the cases. Of the three, two boats were rescued by the Turkish coastguard and probably brought to Turkey. In the case near Lesbos, the final rescue could not be confirmed. In those cases, in which we did not become active either help arrived without intervention, the travellers made it by themselves or we could not obtain enough intervention to undertake action (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/355>).

On Wednesday the 25th of November 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 5 cases of distress near Farmakonisi, Chios, Nera/Agathonisi, Lesbos, and Samos. On one case, several hundreds of travellers stranded on the island Farmakonisi where they faced military violence and where they had to spend several days without food, water and adequate shelter before being picked up and transferred to Leros. It is not the first time that human rights violations are reported on and near the island of Farmakonisi. Moreover, it has become evident that there are insufficient boats to transfer stranded travellers from islands such as Farmakonisi to other places with a reception infrastructure. The UNHCR wanted to establish a reception centre on Farmakonisi, but was denied access, because the island is a military terrain. In another case, a group of 30 travellers stranded on the island of Nera. Unlike in the Farmakonisi case, they were picked up relatively fast and brought to Agathonisi. The other cases this Wednesday were cases of distress at sea. In two cases the travellers were rescued by the Greek coastguard and in one case the travellers reached Greece without any assistance (see <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/365>).

On Thursday the 26th of November 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 1 case of distress on Strongyli Island, where a group of travellers had stranded the day before. The other cases all concerned distress situations on north of Lesbos. In all cases the rescue of the travellers could be confirmed. The stranded travellers on Strongyli Island were picked up by the Greek coastguard and transferred to another island. In one case, the travellers reached Lesbos without any assistance. 2 boats in distress were rescued by the Turkish coastguard and 1 boat was intercepted by the Turkish coastguard (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/361>).

On Saturday the 28th of November 2015 the Alarm Phone received a distress call from a boat carrying 35 travellers near Canakkale, Turkey. They had left from Canakkale half an hour earlier, but had soon encountered problems with their engine. Moreover, water was entering the boat. We informed the Turkish coastguard, but the travellers made it by themselves back to Turkey. Upon arrival, most of them were arrested by the Turkish police (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/362>).

On Sunday the 29th of November 2015 the Alarm Phone was alerted to 9 distress cases in the Aegean Sea: 8 distress cases near Lesbos and 1 distress case near Chios. In all cases, but one the rescue of the travellers could be confirmed. In six cases the travellers were rescued by the Turkish coastguard and in two cases by the Greek coastguard, thus most travellers were brought back to Turkey (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/363>).

On Monday the 30th of November 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 8 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea. One vessel in distress was rescued by the Greek coastguards and another one by the Turkish coastguards. Another vessel reached Lesbos Island either independently or was also rescued by the Greek coastguards. The fate of one group in distress remains unknown. We also dealt with 4 groups who had stranded on Samos and Farmakonisi, all of whom were found and rescued (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/356>).

On Tuesday the 1st of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 8 emergency situations in the Aegean region. Three groups were able to reach Greek islands independently, while 2 vessels were rescued by the Turkish coastguards and 1 by the Greek coastguards. Two groups had stranded on Greek islands and while their rescue was finally confirmed, it came unfortunately too late for one small girl who passed away (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/357>).

On Wednesday the 2nd of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 7 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea. Two groups of travellers were rescued by the Greek coastguards. Two other groups reached Greece safely – they were either also rescued by the coastguards or they made it to the islands independently. We worked on 3 distress cases concerning travellers who had stranded on three different Greek islands. The rescue of two of these groups was confirmed to us while one case remains unresolved. (<http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/358>).

On Thursday the 3rd of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 10 distress situations in the Aegean Sea. While 3-4 vessels reached Greek islands independently, 2 vessels were rescued by Greek coastguards and 3 by Turkish coastguards. One large group that stranded on the Greek island of Pasa was successfully transferred off the island by Greek authorities (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/359>).

On Friday the 4th of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 6 emergency situations in the Aegean region. We dealt with 5 distress situations in Greek waters and we received the confirmation that all of these groups were rescued by the Greek coastguards. We also received several distress calls concerning one large group that had stranded on Farmakonisi Island. The Greek authorities as well as several activist networks were informed about this case (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/360>).

On Saturday the 5th of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 9 distress situations in the Aegean region. Two groups had stranded on different Greek islands and were rescued hours later. Four groups of travellers were rescued by Greek authorities while 2 other groups were rescued by the Turkish coastguards. One group either reached Greek territory independently or was also rescued by the Greek coastguards (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/366>).

On Sunday the 6th of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 11 distress situations in the Aegean region. 4 groups were rescued by the Greek coastguards while 1 other group was rescued by the Turkish coastguards. 3 groups reached Greek islands independently and one of 3 groups that had stranded on Greek islands was rescued by Greek authorities while a confirmation for the rescue of the other two groups could not be obtained so far. One of the groups that had stranded on Farmakonisi was not rescued so far and remained stuck on the island with many other travellers (see: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/367>).

## **Central Mediterranean Sea**

On Saturday the 5th of December 2015, the Alarm Phone was contacted by Father Mussie Zerai at approximately 6am who told us about a vessel in distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea and passed on a satellite phone number. We reached the travellers directly at 7.05am and were informed that they were approximately 400 people and water had already entered their vessel. They passed on a GPS position which we passed on to the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Rome at 7.11am. They promised that they would take on the case and send out a rescue vessel. We were also able to check the credit of the satellite phone to ensure that the travellers could continue to make calls and their voices heard. At 7.30am and 7.55am we received a new GPS positions which we in turn passed on to MRCC Rome. We spoke to the group frequently but as they stated that they were afraid to run out of battery we decided to keep communications brief. At 8.06am MRCC Rome confirmed that they were able to localise the satellite phone. At 11.40 we informed MRCC Rome that the group saw a large vessel in vicinity. The Italian authorities told us to inform the travellers that they should stay where they were and not move toward the large vessel since a military vessel was on its way and would reach them

about one hour later, after completing another rescue operation. We passed these information on and advised the group to stay calm and wait for rescue. In the meantime we also charged their satellite phone. At 1.52pm it became more and more apparent that the travellers were getting increasingly anxious. Shortly afterwards, however, they detected the large military vessel. Afterwards, the travellers could not be reached anymore – presumably because they got rid of the satellite phone before rescue. At 3.50pm MRCC Rome refused to provide us with further details about the case apart from stating that ‘the operation was ongoing’. Only during the following day the rescue of the 400 travellers was finally confirmed (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/364>).

Source 1: <http://left.gr/news/fraktis-kai-katastoli-gia-toys-prosfyges-stin-aidomeni-h-ee-hrysonei-tin-agkyra-gia-na-mpei>

Source 2: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/01/dispatches-risks-eu-turkey-migration-deal>

Source 3:

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nlID=92074&NewsCatID=341>

Source 4: <http://balkanroute.bordermonitoring.eu/>

Source 5 : <https://noborderserbia.wordpress.com/2015/11/29/aidomeni-riots/>

Source 6 : <http://moving-europe.org/entlang-der-route/>

Source 7 : [http://alarmphone.org/en/2015/12/03/call-out-smartphones-urgently-needed-in-western-med/?post\\_type=release\\_type=post](http://alarmphone.org/en/2015/12/03/call-out-smartphones-urgently-needed-in-western-med/?post_type=release_type=post)