

## **Bad weather, violence and ongoing movements in the Aegean**

Alarm Phone Weekly Report 7<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Despite stormy weather and attempts of the European leaders to prevent them from coming, refugees continue to cross the Mediterranean and are able to reach Europe, especially from Turkey. According to UNHCR estimates, about 9,942 refugees, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, arrived in Greece from Turkey in the second week of March.<sup>1</sup>

While the EU has pressured Turkey to accept a relocation plan that would make it possible for the EU to return persons that have reached Europe to Turkey - a plan, that clearly violates international human rights conventions - the incidents of violence at various locations along the south-eastern European borders multiply: Several sources have reported that the Turkish coastguard used violence against travellers<sup>2</sup>, trying to hinder people from crossing by attacking their boats and burning their life-vests.<sup>3</sup> Also at the Greek-Macedonian border persons on the move have had to face violence by borderguards, adding to the hardship they face during their precarious journeys.

Especially in Idomeni, where ten thousands of people are stuck due to border closures, the conditions for travellers remain unbearable. The rain has left large parts of the makeshift camps under water. Currently about 12,000 persons have stranded there and still more people keep arriving. The desperate attempt of people to free themselves from the conditions has been met with repression by authorities which has been strongly denounced by some (see footnote).<sup>4</sup> Three refugees drowned while attempting to cross the Suva Reka river to Macedonia. Again we want to emphasize that these senseless human losses could be avoided if there were safe passages for people to reach their desired destination, for example where they have family and friends, who can support them. While the European Union, its border agency FRONTEX and NATO have launched a war against unwanted migrants in the Aegean region<sup>5</sup>, people on the move time and again remind European leaders “we are human beings”, and ask them to open borders, as in a recent protest in a camp in Lesbos.<sup>6</sup>

We are constantly in touch with people on the move as well as their families and friends. Often we receive calls from people who are missing a loved one. On Thursday

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/documents.php?page=2&view=grid&Country%5B%5D=83>

<sup>2</sup> <https://revolution-news.com/video-turkish-coast-guard-attacks-boat-full-of-refugees/> and <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35794563>

<sup>3</sup> <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2016/03/10/eus-new-gatekeeper-turkey-burning-life-vests-of-refugees/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://moving-europe.org/2016/03/16/live-ticker-25/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/03/11/fabrice-leggeri-directeur-de-frontex-la-turquie-ne-doit-plus-etre-l-autoroute-pour-l-europe\\_4881160\\_3214.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/03/11/fabrice-leggeri-directeur-de-frontex-la-turquie-ne-doit-plus-etre-l-autoroute-pour-l-europe_4881160_3214.html)

<sup>6</sup> [https://twitter.com/luigi\\_scuotto/status/709134243121778689](https://twitter.com/luigi_scuotto/status/709134243121778689)

the 10th of March, for example, we received a call from a man who had lost touch with his brother on the 22nd of January at the Bulgarian-Serbian border. On the weekend, several people called us about a woman who went missing after having reached the Greek island of Pasas. While the Alarm Phone is mainly a hotline for people in distress at sea in the Mediterranean, we try to forward cases of missing people and do our utmost to respond to other distress situations. In order to explain to people on the move and the public how the Alarm Phone works, we have recently published two short clips, which you can find here:

<http://alarmphone.org/en/intros/how-does-the-alarmphone-work-3/>

## **Summary of cases**

In the past week, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 28 emergency situations, of which 27 occurred in the Aegean Sea and 1 in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Summaries and links to the individual reports can be found below.

### **Western Mediterranean Sea**

On Wednesday, the 9th of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to a boat in distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea. At 11:40pm we received a call from a contact person with a Moroccan number. The contact person was on a boat and told us that they had left Tanger at 6pm. We kept in touch with the travellers and informed the Spanish search and rescue agency Savamento Maritimo. After 1am on Thursday morning we could not reach the travellers anymore. The Spanish authorities searched the boat with a helicopter, but stopped the mission on Thursday, because they could not find the travellers. It took five days, but on Sunday, the 13th we finally obtained a confirmation that the travellers had all survived. They had drifted back to Morocco, where they had landed on Thursday morning.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/472>)

### **Aegean Sea**

On Monday the 7th of March 2016, we were alerted to three distress cases in the Aegean Sea, near Lesvos. In one case, the travellers were rescued by the Greek Coastguard to Greece, in the second case, the Turkish Coast Guard picked up a boat in distress between Dikili, Turkey and Lesvos. In the last case, we had no direct contact with the travellers, but we were told that they made it to Greece without any assistance.

(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/468>)

On Tuesday the 7th of March 2016, we were alerted to one boat in distress in the Aegean Sea. At 7:31pm, we received an urgent distress call from people on a boat. They were screaming and crying for help. With the assistance of a translator, we understood that they were about 50 persons, mostly women, and that water was entering the boat. We could not find out where exactly they had started or where

they were going, but it seems like they had decided to paddle to reach the land. At 8:17pm we called them again and by then, the travellers had made it to Kastellorizo. They had arrived on a beach, which was far away from the next village. We tried to call the local police, but without success. We then tried with the Port Police. They said that they would look for the people, but only if they had an exact position. Otherwise the travellers would have to walk. We sent a WhatsApp message to the travellers, asking them for a GPS position, but the message was not delivered. We could not reach them anymore and hope that they encountered people on the island. (See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/469>)

On Wednesday the 9th of March 2016, we were alerted to 12 distress cases in the Aegean Sea near Lesvos, Pasas, Chios, Agathonisi and Samos. We were active in 8 of the cases. Out of these four were distress cases at land and four at sea. Three groups stranded on the Greek island of Pasas and one group on Samos. They were all picked up, and in the Pasas cases transferred to Chios. One boat in distress with about 85 travellers headed to Lemnos, but still close to the Turkish Coast was picked up, but we could not find out by whom and where they were brought. Another boat in distress on the way to Chios was rescued by the Greek Coastguard and safely arrived in Greece. In one case, in which the engine had stopped working, travellers on another boat came to assist by pulling the boat with the broken engine. In the 4 cases, in which we did not become active, the safe arrival of all travellers was confirmed to us. (See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/470>)

On Thursday, the 10th of March 2016, we were alerted to 2 distress cases near Lesvos, in the Aegean Sea. The waves were high and the small boats of the travellers were in danger of capsizing. In both cases, the travellers were eventually picked up and brought to Greece. Another group of travellers, we were informed about decided not to leave Turkey, because of the bad weather conditions. <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/471>

On Friday, the 11th of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 1 distress case in the Aegean Sea, near Samos. At 10.45pm we were alerted to a boat heading to Greece and given their contact number. We managed to reach the travellers. They told us that they could see Samos, but they had not internet connection to send us their exact position. At 11.05pm we called the Greek Coastguard and informed them about the case. They promised to search for the boat. At 11.35pm we reached the travellers and they told us that they had been rescued. At 11.45pm we also talked to the Greek Coastguard who confirmed that all travellers were on a Greek patrol boat. (See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/473>)

On Saturday, the 12th of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 4 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea. In one case a man had reached the Greece by swimming. He stranded without dry clothes, water or food on a rock formation near Kastellorizo, where he was picked up by the Port Police. A group of 48 travellers stranded on

Pasas, from where the Chios Port Authorities picked them up. In the two other cases travellers were in distress at sea, because their engine was not working. Both groups were rescued by the Greek Coastguard.  
<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/474>

On Sunday, the 13th of March 2016, the Alarm Phone was alerted to 4 cases of distress in the Aegean Sea. 2 cases of distress near Lesbos reached us in the early morning hours: one involved 60 travellers. They eventually made it to the Greek island on their own. In the second case, 55 travellers were in distress as they were facing high waves in an inflatable boat. The Greek Coastguard rescued them. Alerts about the other two distress cases reached us on Sunday evening. In one case two women stranded on a rocky part of Samos. Doctors without borders picked them up. The fourth case was a distress case at sea near Chios. Again the travellers were in panic because of high waves. However, they reached land by themselves.  
(See: <http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/475>)