

## Alarm Phone Weekly Report, 23<sup>rd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2015

We currently witness human movements toward and within Europe of historic dimension. Despite European visa regimes, barbed wire fences and border forces, despite intimidation, violent assaults and fatalities, thousands have successfully surpassed external border barriers this week and are moving toward their desired places of arrival. It is through their mobility and struggle that the European border regime is increasingly losing its ability to deter – and tools of mobility control such as the Dublin III regulation are on the verge of collapsing. These struggles are, however, very costly. 71 dead bodies were discovered in a lorry on an Austrian motorway. At least two shipwrecks occurred in the Central Med, with more than 237 people drowning. For the first time, the civilian rescue vessel Sea Watch had to recover dead bodies in one of their many rescue operations. Several vessels capsized in the Aegean Sea, leaving dozens dead in the short stretch between Turkey and Greek islands. These are the deaths of Europe and its border regime that could have been prevented if legal and safe routes had been available.

Within the past week, the Alarm Phone was alerted to various emergency situations, 16 in the Aegean Sea, 4 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 Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2015, the Alarm Phone was contacted by Nawal Soufi's activist network and told about a vessel in distress in the Aegean Sea. They forwarded the GPS position of the vessel and informed us that the group of 300 people was made up mostly of (pregnant) women and children who had been at sea for days. They had left from Egypt and were now without drinking water. Following their account they had been threatened by the organiser of the journey who wanted to transfer them onto another vessel which they thought was too dangerous. We then located the vessel and it was within Greek territorial waters. We turned to the Greek coastguards and passed on the obtained information. They wanted us to reach out to the travellers and ask them to contact the coastguards directly. However, we informed them that they were unable to make or receive phone calls due to the conflict with the organiser. They understood and we agreed to contact them again two hours later. At approximately 5pm the Greek coastguards reported that they had launched a search and rescue operation but that they had no further information. At about 7.36pm we contacted the Greek coastguards again and they said that they had had visual contact to the vessel. Following their account the vessel was still quickly moving toward Italy and the Italian coastguards had been notified. At approximately 9.43pm the Italian coastguards told us that the vessel was not in distress and that the Greek coastguards were responsible to coordinate the rescue operation. Also in the following hours, the group could not be reached. A day later, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, no further information could be obtained. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of August we were told by the Maltese coastguards at 2.40pm that the vessel had been rescued already and the group was now on a Croatian coastguard vessel headed toward Italy (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/225>).

On Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, shortly after midnight, the Alarm Phone was contacted by a friend who informed us about a vessel in distress in the Aegean Sea. He sent us the GPS

position of the vessel and the phone number of one of the travellers. We reached out to the vessel that was located near Lesvos/Greece but we could not get through to the group. The Greek coastguards said that they had already been informed about this particular case. At 3.20am the coastguards stated that they could not find them in the provided position. They had been able to contact them and had heard a running engine – so they assumed that the vessel might have already arrived on Lesvos. At 9.19am, the coastguards reported that they had had various distress cases in the previous night and could not identify the group in question. The Lesvos Port Authority said that they would look into the case. At 3.55pm, they told us that they had just rescued 8 people and recovered two dead bodies but they could not tell us whether the vessel in question had been rescued or not. Later on it emerged that more, at least 5 people had drowned. Also hours later, no further information on the fate of the people could be obtained (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/232>).

Also on Monday, we were contacted directed from a vessel in distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea. They were a group of 11 people, including one child, and had left the Moroccan coast in the early hours of the day. They told us that they could not see any vessels in vicinity and had lost orientation. We quickly contacted the Spanish search and rescue organisation Salvamento Maritimo in Tarifa and informed them about the case. They said that they would look into it. At about 2.15pm, the travellers called us again and told us that the Moroccan Navy had intercepted them. They also told us about the hardship they suffered in Morocco. Later on they told us that they had been brought back to Morocco (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/229>).

On Wednesday the 26th, at approximately 3.30am, the Alarm Phone was contacted by someone who knew of a vessel between Turkey and Samos, carrying about 50 people. He said that the vessel was still moving but the phone number of one of the travellers could not be reached anymore. We contacted the Greek coastguards and informed them about the case. Already at 5am, the Greek coastguards confirmed that they had rescued the whole group.

A few hours later, at 9.02pm, Nawal's collective informed us about another emergency situation. Details on the situation were limited but it seemed to be an urgent distress situation. The travellers themselves could not be reached. We turned to the Greek coastguards who noted down the phone number of the travellers but were overall very uncooperative. At 9.38pm we informed the coastguards on Lesvos who asked us to tell the group to directly call the international emergency number 112 through which it would be possible to locate the vessel. We passed these information on to the group via text message. At 11.10pm we were informed by the activist collective that the group had reached land independently and were safe.

At 11.11pm, the collective informed us about a third distress case. Again information were limited and the group of travellers could not be reached. At 11.30pm we briefly reached them but communications were interrupted. All we could hear was 'help, help'. Shortly afterwards they were able to send us their GPS position and told us that they were twenty adults and six children. They were clearly in Greek territorial waters. The Kos Port Authority noted down the contact details of the travellers. At 00:50am, the activist collective informed us that the group had reached land independently. They also confirmed their arrival to us later on via WhatsApp (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/226>).

Also on Wednesday, the Alarm Phone was contacted by someone who alerted us to a vessel in distress in the Western Mediterranean Sea. At around the same time, the Alarm Phone was contacted directly from a boat in distress between Morocco and Spain. There were also 9 people on board and they had left at around midnight. They told our shift team that the travellers were ill and they were struggling with high waves. We quickly informed Salvamento Maritimo and told them about both cases. Afterwards, the people from vessel 2 could not be reached anymore. At approximately 6.30am, Salvamento Maritimo informed us that both vessels had been intercepted by the Moroccan Navy (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/230>).

Again on Wednesday, the Alarm Phone was called directly from a vessel in the Central Mediterranean Sea. However, communication with the travellers was nearly impossible as only background noises and hardly any voices could be heard. We passed the limited information that we had gathered on to the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Rome. When we spoke to MRCC Rome they confirmed that they had received the satellite phone number and were in the process of conducting a rescue operation. In a conversation with MRCC Rome later on, they did not want to provide an update on the case. While no final confirmation can be obtained, their rescue can be presumed (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/234>).

On Thursday the 27th of August 2015, the Alarm Phone was contacted by the brother of someone on a vessel in the Western Mediterranean Sea. He told us that the vessel had departed from Cap Spartel/Morocco in the early morning and had now entered a situation of distress. He passed on a mobile phone number which could not be reached. We then informed Salvamento Maritimo about the situation. They had already received a direct call from the people on the vessel who asked to be rescued. However, they were intercepted shortly afterwards by the Moroccan Navy. We later spoke to the seven people who were on the vessel that day – they were fine and back in Tangier/Morocco (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/231>).

On Thursday the 27th of August, the Alarm Phone was alerted to five emergency situations in the Aegean Sea. About 30 minute past midnight we received a call from someone in Germany who informed us about a vessel in distress in Turkish waters. He passed on a phone number with which we immediately called the travellers. We reached a woman who said they were 9 people plus two children at sea and in need of urgent help. Unfortunately she could not tell us where they had left in Turkey. She also stated that she had seen a Greek vessel which, however, had not reacted to their distress situation. She passed on another phone number as well as GPS coordinates which, however, turned out to be incorrect as they showed them on land already. At approximately 00:50am, we were able to establish contact again, via WhatsApp. She could not pass on their GPS position and merely stated that they were in the middle of the sea, at risk of capsizing. At about 1:07am, she said that their vessel was already near Lesvos Island. We then reached out to the Greek coastguards who noted down the information and said that they would get in touch with the vessel themselves. Afterwards, the group could not be reached. Finally, in the evening, we were able to speak to them again, via WhatsApp. They said that they had alarmed the Greek coastguards which refused to come to their rescue as they said that they were still in Turkish waters. The Turkish

coastguards reacted only very slowly to their distress so that they had to wait at sea for about 7 hours until Turkish authorities rescued them. They were now back in Turkey.

At 8.58am, we were informed by a contact person about a vessel in distress near the Greek island of Samos. We received the GPS position of the vessel and learned that its engine had broken down. Unable to contact the travellers directly, we reached out to the Greek coastguards who forwarded us to the coastguards on Samos Island. At 12.30pm, our contact person informed us that the group had been rescued by Greek authorities.

At 10.24am we were alerted to a third distress case. A contact person told us about a vessel near Farmakonisi Island, Greece, carrying about 40 people. It appeared to be a very urgent emergency situation as they said that they had been attacked. We quickly informed the Greek coastguards about the case. Our contact person said that the vessel was capsizing after having been attacked by a Greek vessel which had fired shots at the vessel. At 10:48am he informed us that Turkish coastguards were on their way to rescue the people. We agreed that he would follow up on the case and monitor the situation. He later also reported that the person steering the vessel had been beaten up.

At 10pm one Alarm Phone member received a distress message and passed it on to our shift team. Following the account of a contact person there was a vessel in distress near the island of Lesbos, Greece. We were, however, unable to get through to the travellers. We reached out to our contact person who was very worried and had lost touch to the group on the vessel. He said that the engine had broken down and that the waves were high- he was scared that the vessel might be capsizing. We informed the Hellenic Rescue Team who promised to contact the Greek coastguards. At about 00:45am, the Hellenic Rescue Team told us that the coastguards had informed them that several vessels were in distress in the same area but he could not tell us anything about the vessel in question. Despite several attempts, the group could never be reached. On the following day, at about 11am, our contact person informed us that, which there was still no news from the people themselves, he had been informed by the Greek coastguards that rescue vessels were in the area. He promised to give us an update if he hears back from the group but contact to him could not be re-established in the aftermath.

When dealing with the 4th emergency situation of the day, a 5th distress call reached our shift team at 11.22pm. Nawal's activist collective informed us about a vessel in distress and passed on a phone number as well as its GPS position. The group could not be reached. We contacted the Port Authority on Samos Island and they informed us that they were currently working on five cases and could not exactly verify whether the vessel in question was amongst them. They advised us to tell the travellers to call the emergency number 112. At 1.53am, they told us that rescue vessels were at the location of the vessel in distress but they could not confirm whether the rescue operation had been successful already. At 8.14am the Samos Port Authority confirmed that all vessels in that area had been rescued during the night (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/235>).

On Friday the 28th of August 2015, the Alarm Phone received an SOS call via Nawal Soufi's activist network. With the provided mobile phone number our shift team contacted the travellers immediately, at approximately 8.50pm. They told us that they were 15 people from Syria and children were amongst them. They were in panic as water was entering their vessel. We informed the Greek coastguards on Lesbos Island about the situation. However, when we were able to reach the group again, they had made it to Lesbos independently. We

informed the Greek coastguards and advised the group to call 112 in order to get further assistance on the island (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/227>).

On Sunday the 30th of August, the Alarm Phone was alerted to five distress situations in the Aegean Sea. The first emergency call reached us in the middle of the night, at approximately 3.06am. Via text message we were told to reach out to a group of about 43 people, including pregnant women and children, who were in serious danger at sea. We reached out to the Greek coastguards who said that they knew of the vessel and had informed the Turkish coastguards as the vessel was still located in Turkish waters. Shortly afterwards the Turkish coastguards confirmed that they had been informed about the emergency situation. At 10.06am, we reached the group who reported that they were back on Turkish mainland but were lost and very tired. They were 42 people in total, including 2 pregnant women, 5 children and 2 babies.

Shortly after having received the first SOS call, our shift team received a second one, at about 3.36am. We were informed, presumably by the father of one of the people, about a group of 13 travellers, including 5 children, who were in distress near the Greek island of Samos. We contacted the Greek coastguards who confirmed that they had also received a distress call from the same location. They told us that they had already sent a vessel in their direction. In the morning we reached out to our contact person again who had lost contact to the group and did not know more about it. At 11.33am, the Greek coastguards informed us that they had concluded all rescue cases. However, they did not want to confirm the rescue of the group in question and were rather uncooperative overall. We were then finally able to reach one of the travellers directly. He said that they were all fine and had been rescued by the Turkish coastguards. We told him to contact us directly when trying to cross the sea again.

At 5.45am we were alerted to a third emergency situation via text message. We were informed about one man who seemed to be on his own, floating on some device in the Aegean Sea, for several hours already. He agreed to our suggestion to contact the Turkish coastguards as he was still very close to Cesme/Turkey. The Turkish coastguards knew about the case and asked us to provide them with the person's most recent GPS position which we did. They said that they would take care of the situation. At 10.55am we spoke to the man who confirmed that he had been rescued by the Turkish coastguards.

At 3.45pm, we were informed about a group of about 60 people who were on a vessel in distress north of the Greek island of Lesbos. We were able to reach the contact person who knew of the vessel. He said that water was entering their vessel and asked for an urgent rescue mission. We contacted the Greek coastguards who noted down the information and promised to search for the vessel. At 4.05pm our contact person was able to pass on the phone number of one of the travellers who we called at 4.08pm. People were shouting for help in the background and the connection was too bad to fully understand what they were saying. Then, for more than one hour, the group could not be directly reached again. At 5.44pm, our contact person told us that the Greek coastguards rescued the travellers who had already been disembarked on Lesbos Island.

The fifth case reached us at 4.33pm. A British sailing boat contacted us after its crew had spotted a vessel adrift north of Lesbos Island. The sailor said that he would want to talk to Greek coastguards. He also said that he could see a vessel approaching which might rescue the travellers. However, due to strong winds, communication with him was difficult and GPS coordinates could not be passed on. We then informed the Greek coastguards about the

distress call. At 5.30pm we were able to communicate with the sailor again and he told us that he could see several vessels floating in the sea. They did not seem to be in urgent distress but he said that it would be impossible to cross over to Greece on these small vessels due to strong winds and waves. He called us again to report that he could see two larger Turkish vessels pulling the refugee vessels back to shore. Following his account, everyone was safely brought back to land (see: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/228>).