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01/03: 4 boats arrived in Greece and 4 boats pushed back to Turkey.

In Distress Interception Push-Back Boza VERIFIED

02.03.2020 / 22:13 / Aegean Sea

Watch The Med Alarm Phone Investigations – 24th of February 2020

Case name: 2020_02_24-AEG656

Situation: 4 boats arrived in Greece and 4 boats pushed back to Turkey.

Status of WTM Investigation: Concluded

Place of Incident: Aegean Sea

Summary of the Case: On Sunday the 01 March 2020, we were alerted to 8 boats in distress in the Aegean Sea. In almost all of these cases we documented severe human rights violations such as attacks on boats in the middle of the sea, the stealing of the boat's fuel and engines, life threatening maneuvers aimed at de-stabilizing boats, push-backs and prolonged non-assistance. In four cases the travellers eventually managed to reach Greece, however in the other four cases, which included 170 people, the boats were pushed-back to Turkey.

Case 1: boat carrying 49 travellers (including 18 children) attacked by masked men near Lesbos.

On Sunday the 1 March 2020, at 2:50h CET the Alarm Phone was alerted to a boat in distress between Skala Mistegnon and Panagiouda, carrying 49 travellers, including 18 children. The travellers stated that they had been attacked two times by mask-wearing men on a speedboat who destroyed the engine of their boat and stole their petrol. They reported that the Turkish Coastguard had observed the incident but failed to intervene. After having obtained their GPS position, at 3:24h we informed the Greek coastguard about the boat in distress. We called and emailed them at least nine times concerning this case but there was still no help in sight. The travellers had no choice but to row toward Lesbos with their bare hands. At 09:03h we published a tweet informing about the distress case and the attacks (https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/...3772535808). At 14:30h we were informed that this boat had finally reached the port of Thermi on Lesbos. There, fascists intimidated and insulted the travellers, preventing them from disembarking (<https://www.facebook.com/stonisi.gr/vid...987415640/>). Eventually, the Greek coastguard pulled the boat toward a different location. The authorities have failed until today to confirm the rescue of the 49 people to us.

Case 2: 55 travellers (including 10 children) in distress near Samos for hours unhelped

The Alarm Phone was alerted to a boat in distress in Greek waters. The travellers spent 8 ½ hours at sea before being able to reach land. They never received any help although there were many waves and water was entering the boat.

Case 3: 9 travellers (including 3 children) in distress near Chios, for hours unhelped

On the same day, at 10:34h, 9 travellers, including three children, reached out to us when in distress near Chios. They told us that water was entering the boat and sent a picture of a ship near them that was reportedly "just watching but not rescuing". We identified the ship as the "Hellenic Coastguard SAR-518 Chios". At 10:40h we alerted the Greek coastguard concerning the boat in distress. During the rest of the day we contacted both Greek and Turkish coastguards several times, stressing that the lives of the travellers were in danger, however neither took action. Further, after 11:06h we lost connection with the travelers. At 22:13h we published a tweet informing about the situation (https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/123407002059194776?s=20). The following day, Monday the 2nd of March, we tried to contact the travelers numerous times but with no success. Eventually at 18:43h we received a reply to our emails from the Chios Port Authority, they informed us that this boat has been rescued and the people on board were being processed. The following day, the 3rd of March, we received confirmation from the travelers themselves that they had been rescued to Chios Island and detained in the port area.

Case 4: Push-back of 87 travellers from the sea near Lesbos

Related Reports

22:56 Mar 04, 2016 / Aegean Sea Kms

[03/03: 4 boats in distress near Greek islands of Chios, Lesbos and Pasas. 4 groups stranded on Pasas](#)

11:32 Aug 31, 2015 / Aegean Sea Kms

[Five Distress Situations in the Aegean Sea, all rescued](#)

21:54 Sep 06, 2015 / Aegean Sea Kms

[Alarm Phone alerted to 8 distress cases near several islands in the Aegean Sea](#)

11:45 Sep 05, 2020 / Aegean Sea Kms

[04/09: 54 travelers with 7 children pushed back to Turkey](#)

18:01 Aug 06, 2020 / Aegean Sea Kms

[05/08: 40 travellers pushed back to Turkey south of Lesbos](#)



Case 4: Push-back of 35 travellers from the sea near Lesbos

Also on the 1st of March, our shift team was alerted at 12:45h to a boat in distress with 35 travellers on board. We were informed that the boat was returned to Turkey. According to information received from a relative, their engine and petrol were stolen during an attack in Greek waters, carried out by unidentified forces. Although the boat had come close to Petra beach on Lesbos, the travellers were pushed-back to Turkey.

Case 5: Boat carrying 35 travelers (including 11 children) attacked near Lesbos and left without help for 12 hours

At around 11:40h of the same day we were alerted to another boat in distress carrying 35 travellers, including 12 women and 11 children. At 11:57h we informed the Greek Coastguard about this distress case and shared the GPS position and phone number of the travellers. Soon after, the travelers reported that they had been attacked and their engine and petrol had been stolen. At 13:45h the travelers told us that two patrol vessels were nearby, however the vessels were not trying to rescue but instead circling around them making waves. The travelers were really afraid. They sent us a video depicting this scene. One of the boats seemed to be of the Greek Coastguard and the other an Italian Frontex vessel. At 14:18h we published a first tweet, followed by a second tweet, informing about this case (https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1234104577647050753). At 14:52h we spoke to the travelers again, they told us the situation was getting worse and water was entering the boat. They were scared that they were going to die. At 15:15h, 15:45h and 17:53h we published other tweets scandalizing the non-assistance at sea. During the rest of the afternoon we called and emailed the Greek Coastguard several times, updating them with the most recent GPS coordinates that we were receiving, however they were not cooperative. The travelers started rowing towards land with their bare hands. By 20:06h the situation got even worse as they informed us that there was a hole in the boat and that they were in immediate danger of drowning. Again, we informed about this desperate situation with a tweet. At 20:38h we called again the Greek Coastguard in Mytilene who finally told us that a rescue operation was ongoing. One hour later they informed us that the people were safe and that they would disembark on Lesbos soon. The following day we received confirmation from the travelers themselves that they had been rescued and were fine. The people in distress waited for over 12 hours before being rescued. Letting them wait so long at risk of drowning was torturous.

Case 6: Push-back of 45-50 travellers (including 30 children) from near Nera

Still on the 1st of March, at 22:34h our shift team was alerted to a boat in distress carrying 45-50 travellers, including 30 children, one pregnant woman, a severely sick person and a disabled person. The boat was heading originally towards Samos but then changed direction towards Nera. The travellers later reported that as they had almost reached Nera island in Greek waters, a white boat with a Greek flag and three officers on-board approached them. There were many waves and the travellers were asking for help as water was entering the boat and the children were afraid. The officers pointed guns to travellers and ordered them to throw the petrol in the sea. The travellers told us that when they didn't immediately obey the orders, the officers shot 11 times in the water around them, then they beat two of the travellers with a long metal stick. Afterwards, they told the travellers they would bring them to Samos and threw a rope at them, which the travellers tied to their boat. The travellers were then pulled back to Turkish waters. For 4 ½ hours they stayed in the sea fearing they would drown until the Turkish coast guard came. The last GPS position showed that they were in a small harbor near the Turkish village Alacati. At 01:57h in the night we informed via email both the Red Cross and UNHCR about what had happened. The travellers later informed the Alarm Phone that 2 of them had to be hospitalized upon reaching Turkish coast and the others had been detained for 16 days and threatened with deportation. Finally, all the travellers were released.

Case 7: Four push backs in one night of 40 ppl (including 10 kids) from the sea near Chios

At 22:48h, always on the night of the 1st of March, we received information about another attack on a boat carrying 40 travellers, that had departed from Turkey in direction of Chios. The travellers reported that a white and blue boat of medium size attacked them in Greek waters. They told us that they could see 3 officers on board. With a long metal stick the officers took the petrol off the boat and they tried braking their engine. They also used the metal stick to beat two persons sitting near the driver. Water was entering the boat. The officers then threw a rope to the travellers and told them to tie it to their boat. They pulled them for 45 minutes until they reached the middle of the sea and there they left them without paddles and fuel. The travellers further reported that where they were left the Turkish coast guard was waiting. The travellers asked them to help, but the Turkish coast guard officers reportedly beat them and said they should go again to Greece and gave them new fuel. The travellers therefore started heading towards Chios but the same Greek coastguard boat stopped them. They got pulled back again and for a third time the same thing happened. The fourth time, the Turkish coastguard said they'd not only give them again fuel but also bring them to a better position where the border was less controlled. When the travelers tried from the new position another boat reached them from the Greek side. It was very big, grey and had the Greek flag. They made circles around the small rubber boat creating waves. Water entered the boat that by that time had spent many hours at sea. The Greek boat pulled them back to Turkish waters, driving 30 minutes. For 1 ½ hours the boat was left adrift, as more and more water was entering. Finally, the Turkish Coastguard rescued them. The travellers were arrested and detained 5 days. In the

Coastguard rescued them. The travellers were arrested and detained 9 days. In the removal centre they were threatened with deportation, but they had claimed asylum in Turkey and were finally released.

Case 8: Push-back of 46 travellers from near Chios

At 23:58 of the same night, the Alarm Phone was alerted to a boat carrying 46 travellers a that had been pushed-back to Turkey while on their way to Chios. A white boat with the Greek flag and masked officers had stopped them, the officers broke their engine, cut the connection to the fuel and tied the boat to theirs to push them back. Where the travellers' boat was left and the rope was untied, a smaller orange high-speed boat, also with a Greek flag and masked men, reached them. This high-speed boat circled around them and half of the travellers fell into the sea. The orange high-speed boat then left. The travellers still on the boat managed to pull back in those that had fallen into the sea. The travellers called the Turkish coast guard for rescue. 15 minutes later the Turkish coast guard arrived and rescued them to the land. At 04:17h on March 2nd, our shift team spoke with a very exhausted person who had been on the boat, and who told us that the Turkish coastguard brought them to land and left them there. We then contacted Turkish authorities and the UNHCR and requested immediate help, we passed on their latest GPS position and their phone numbers.

Last update: 13:06 Jul 03, 2020

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