



28/05: 59 travelers reportedly pushed back to Turkey from Greece waters

In Distress Push-Back

VERIFIED

29.05.2020 / 14:47 / Aegean Sea

Watch The Med Alarm Phone Investigations – 28th of May 2020

Case name: 2020_05_25-AEG672

Situation: 59 travelers (one pregnant woman) reportedly pushed back to Turkey from Greek waters

Status of WTM Investigation: Concluded

Place of Incident: Aegean Sea

Summary of the Case:

On 28 May 2020 at 08:14h CEST we were alerted by the relative of a person travelling from Ayvalik, Turkey towards Greece. The last known GPS location of the 59 travelers, among them a pregnant woman, was close to the Turkish coast. The relative reported that the travelers had been arrested by the Greek coastguard and brought to Lesvos. We were sent a photo reportedly showing this. At 08:34h we called the Greek coastguard who refused to speak to us and referred us to the port authority of Mytilene, Lesvos. At 08:40h the relative reported that the travelers had arrived at the port of Mytilene. At 08:41h we called the port authority to get a confirmation that the people were safe. The person we were talking to stated that there had not been any incidents during the day. In several calls we received the same information. At 09:05h we called the Turkish coastguard asking if they had picked up any boat during the last hours or if they had information about rescue operations. They stated that there had not been any Search and Rescue operation in the morning. We should call back in 30 minutes. We did so and it was confirmed that there had not been any rescues. Calling the port authorities in Mytilene again, they repeated that no migrant boat had been brought to the port. When we said that we had the coordinates and a picture showing the travelers in the port, they said we should call back in 30 minutes. Doing so, we were told that they did not have any information on the 59 travelers. At 10:55h the Alarm Phone tweeted about the incident, asking publicly where the people were and what happened to them. At 12:50h we called the Greek port authority again. When we explained our concern, we were told to hold the line and then nobody came back to us. At 13:55h we could talk to the port authority and they spoke about a group of around 60 people that was picked up by the Turkish authorities south of Mytilene, but said that they did not have official information about this. At 14:15h we called the Turkish coastguard but could not get any information about a rescue. They said they would inform us if they had news. At 14:27h we received an e-mail from the Turkish authorities stating that they had not spotted any migrant boat patrolling the coast of Ayvalik. Furthermore, they stated that there had been several push backs from Greece to Turkey in front of Izmir / Dikili and that they had returned the people to Turkey. During the afternoon we could not find out more. At 19:05h we called the Turkish authorities again and they confirmed the rescue of a group of 59 travelers. So, we concluded this was the group we had been investigating about.

We nevertheless stay with several open questions: Why did they send GPS and picture from inside Mytilene port, if they were returned to Turkey? Can it be possible that they were pushed back from inside the port to Turkish waters?

We are still investigating the detailed developments and will include potential updates into this report.

Last update: 13:41 Oct 23, 2020

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