



22/06 Pushback of 35 travellers from North of Lesbos

In Distress Push-Back

VERIFIED

23.06.2020 / 15:22 / Aegean Sea

Watch The Med Alarm Phone Investigations – 22th June 2020

Case name: 2020_06_22-AEG681

Situation: 35 people including children, pushed back in the North of Lesbos. Brought back to Turkey.

Status of WTM Investigation: ongoing

Place of Incident: Aegean sea

Summary of the Case:

On the 22nd of June, our nightshift team was alerted by people onboard a boat in distress. The travellers (35 persons, out of whom 15 women, 8 children, and some of them in a bad state) had become victims of violent and repeated pushbacks in the Aegean Sea. As they reported, they were in Greek waters two times, their engine was destroyed by what they assumed to be a Greek boat. They drifted to the border and called the Turkish coastguard (later TCG), who did not provide assistance. The people asked the shiftteam to call TCG. When the shiftteam called TCG at 06:03h CEST, they explained that they were not able to launch a rescue operation because the travellers were close to the border, but told us that they had patrol boats near in case the situation got increasingly dangerous. The travellers told us they could see a Greek Coast Guard (later GCG) patrol boat which was close and said that the Turkish Coast Guard was there, but far away. None of them came to their rescue, and the travellers feared that they were left to die. We called GCG at 06:22h CEST. An officer took coordinates and all informations and told the shiftteam that they were aware of a situation in this area, but that the travellers were allegedly in Turkish waters. GCG had sent an email to TCG to ask for rescue, without result. At 06:30h CEST the travellers sent a new position showing that they were in Greek waters. When the the shiftteam called the GCG, they answered that we should call back in an hour, ignoring the fact that the travellers were not well and that the motor was destroyed. The shiftteam sent an SOS email to all authorities and tweeted the informations about this case.

BREAKING - 29 people, incl. many children in distress in Greek waters off #Lesvos. We informed all authorities at 06:03 CEST. Their last pos. at 07:21 CEST was 39.387947, 26.453352.

We ask the
@hcoastguard
to rescue immediately!
#refugeesGR

The communication with the travellers was interrupted during the next hour, after which the travellers sent a voice message saying that the GCG was dragging them back to 'free water'. When Alarm Phone called GCG, they told us that there would be no boat in that area in the Greek search and rescue zone, only in the Turkish search and rescue zone. We informed them about the new position in Greek waters, and then sent an email with all informations. The travellers informed the shiftteam that they had a hole in the boat and that water was coming in. At 09:51 the shiftteam got a video from the travellers which showed their boat between different ships, not moving at all. The travellers stated that they could see one GCG ship, one TCG ship and one small boat with masked men. When the shiftteam called the GCG again, passing them the position and asking why they dont rescue, the coastguard asked for an email. At 10:15 the email was sent. At 10:23 the travellers sent a voice message. They said that when we called GCG they came and made big waves to make them drift towards Turkey. Their boat was half full of water after this attack. The travellers asked us to call GCG and tell them to stop making waves. A new tweet was then sent by Alarm Phone: The people sent a video showing that the boat is adrift & that water is coming in. Their most recent position is 39.368210, 26.471159 10:03 CEST. 3 other vessels are also visible near them. We communicated the situation to the

@HcoastGuard

In the next hours, the communication back and forth with Greek and Turkish coastguard continued; GCG insisting the boat was in Turkish waters and TCG that they could not intervene as the boat was in Greek waters. The shiftteam repeatedly sent

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10:29 Mar 01, 2018 / Aegean Sea Kms

[28/02: 40 travellers arrived to Pafos](#)

01:12 Dec 14, 2018 / Aegean Sea Kms

[13/12: Alarm Phone alerted to two boats, one arriving on its own to Lesbos, the other rescued by Turkish fishermen.](#)

10:38 Mar 03, 2018 / Aegean Sea Kms

[02/03: 45 travellers rescued to Lesbos](#)

17:51 Feb 24, 2019 / Aegean Sea Kms

[23/2: Two groups of travellers in distress arrived to the north of Lesbos](#)



could not intervene as the boat was in Greek waters. The shiftteam regularly sent updated positions to all authorities, and the travellers were calling 112. The Alarm Phone team continued to alert authorities, calling them, sending emails, tweeting, while relatives of the travellers called the shiftteam to tell they alerted some members of the European parliament and the European commissioner.

The people on the boat sent their most recent position at 11:11 CEST: 39.366913, 26.461554. The

@HCoastGuard

confirms that this position is in Greek SAR. According to the people, there is at least one vessel of the Greek Coast Guard near them. They are asking for immediate help! At 12:21h CEST the shiftteam reached the travellers once again. This time they were screaming, saying that both GCG and TCG were pushing and making waves.

A new tweet was sent out : The people say that water is still entering the boat and that they fear for their lives. They sent us a photo with a vessel near them. They say that it is a vessel of the Greek Coast Guard and that it has been in the area since hours. Why are they not assisting?

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At 14:13h CEST we tweeted one video the travellers sent us and the words: The 29 people in the #Aegean reached out to us 8 hours ago. They are getting tired. Both the Greek and Turkish Coast Guards have confirmed their knowledge of this distress case. We ask the competent authorities to proceed to a rescue operation immediately!

The travellers told the shiftteam that two elderly women were not moving any more, they were sick, everyone was totally wet, the kids really sick, they were hungry and thirsty, one of the women has a heart problem, the two women were 60 and 55 years old.

At 15:00h CEST the TCG confirmed that they were carrying out the rescue operation right now, and that they would inform us by email as soon rescue was completed. One and a half hour later the TCG informed the Alarm Phone about the rescue of the 35 people. They would be transferred to Ayvalik in Turkey.

At 19:25h CEST a last tweet was sent about this case : We have learned that the Turkish Coast Guard returned the people to Turkey, more than 10 hours after we alerted the Greek & Turkish Coast Guards to their distress. We condemn the criminal act of non-assistance exercised by competent authorities in the region. #Refugeesgr

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

Twitter chronology:

07:47h : https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1274941693859692546

10:24h : https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1275021408586924035

12:06h : https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1275007127308943361

13:06h : https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1275021408586924035

14:13h : https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1275038694785929216

19:25h : https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1275117659718397953

Last update: 18:25 Oct 28, 2020

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