



Two groups in distress in the Aegean Sea near Lesbos, rescued by Turkey, one boat punctured by Greek coastguard!

In Distress Interception

VERIFIED

28.07.2015 / 16:04 / Aegean Sea, near Lesvos

Watch The Med Alarm Phone Investigations - 26-27th of July 2015

Case name: 2015_07_26-AEG26

Situation: Alarm Phone alerted to two cases of distress in the Aegean Sea

Status of WTM Investigations: Ongoing

Place of Incidents: Aegean Sea, Greece/Turkey

Summary of the Cases: On Sunday the 26th of July 2015, in the evening, the Alarm Phone was contacted by someone who asked for help but needed an Arabic translator. Our shift team reached out to an Arabic speaking Alarm Phone member who contacted the man who was on land but had knowledge of a group of travellers that his brother was part of. He reported that they were 40 people, including 18 children, on board of a vessel near the island of Lesbos/Greece and had lost orientation.

Our shift team alerted both Greek and Turkish coastguards to the situation of distress. Afterwards, the group could not be reached for a while. In a phone conversation it became clear that the Greek coastguards were clearly angered that the Alarm Phone contacted them about a vessel that was presumably still in Turkish waters. They stated that our actions would cause 'diplomatic trouble' between Turkey and Greece. But at least they also confirmed that the Turkish coastguards were searching for the vessel. At approximately 10:30pm, Turkish authorities confirmed the rescue of the group of travellers. A few minutes later, members of the group also confirmed their rescue.

A few hours later, in the early morning of the 27th of July, we were alerted to another distress situation in the Aegean Sea, near Lesbos Island/Greece. A person contacted us and reported that he had knowledge of a vessel that sought to reach Lesbos but was intercepted by the Greek police. He said that the police boarded their vessel and took away their engine. They then punctured the vessel and left them behind at sea. They were now, of course, in a situation of distress.

Shortly afterwards, the contact person passed on a phone number of one of the passengers on the vessel and at about 6am we were able to establish direct contact to them. We first spoke to a woman who said that they were 37 people in total, plus many children. Later on the numbers of travellers was confirmed to be higher: 54 people, amongst them 10-15 children, all of them Afghan refugees. She said that water was entering the vessel and, due to the many screams in the background, it was clear that people were panicking. The contact person contacted us again, saying that he found out that they had left Izmir/Turkey at around 5am (CET) and could now see an island.

We alerted the Greek coastguards and the Hellenic Rescue team who were both not very cooperative and merely suggested that we should tell the travellers to call 112. We also notified the UNHCR in Greece and Turkey about the emergency situation. At about 6.30am, the contact person sent us a message with a rough indication of the position of the vessel, showing that they were in Turkish waters. He then asked us to inform the Turkish coastguards as the situation was becoming increasingly dangerous. The Turkish coastguard, in a phone conversation, promised that they would begin a rescue operation.

At approximately 7.40am, the contact person informed us that the vessel had been found and its passengers rescued. It was reported later also in the Turkish media that an attack by Greek border authorities had occurred in the Aegean Sea, following accounts of survivors who very likely belonged to the group that the Alarm Phone supported (source 1). They said that about 4-5 Greek coastguards or police officers, all masked, entered their vessel and took their petrol and their engine. Water started to leak into their vessel and they had to wait for one and a half hours until the Turkish came to their rescue. This was the second time in merely two days that those in contact

Related Reports

17:06 Apr 15, 2021 / Aegean Sea Kms

14/04: Around 50 travellers pushed violently back to Turkey by Greek authorities North of Lesbos

15:34 Apr 30, 2020 / Aegean Sea Kms

29/04: Greek coastguard pushes 48 protection seekers back to Turkey

16:02 Mar 29, 2021 / Aegean Sea Kms

28/03: 40 travelers in distress north of Lesbos, rescued by Turkish coastguard

13:51 Mar 18, 2014 / Korakas cape, Lesbos Isl. (Gr) Kms

7 people die, and 2 missing near the Greek island of Lesbos

15:26 Jun 06, 2020 / Aegean Sea Kms

05/06: one boat with 10 people heading to North-Lesvos, rescued by North-Lesvos coast guard after being attacked



with the Alarm Phone had reported of these kind of attacks by masked Greek authorities. The Turkish media referred to them as the 'masked fight against refugees in Greece' (see source 2).

During our investigations we found another report by the Infomobile/Welcome to Europe that also spoke of these violent border practices: a boat with 54 Syrian refugees including 7 children on board had been punctured this weekend by the Greek coastguard close to Lesbos. This occurred during an operation in which a Frontex vessel was involved. The vessel immediately started to sink and the travellers fell into the water. After some time, struggling for survival in the sea, they were finally taken on board of the Greek coastguard vessel (see source 3).

Last update: 23:18 Aug 02, 2015

Sources

<http://m.sondakika.com/haber/haber-54-kacak-gocmen-bogulmak-uzereyken-kurtarildi-7548170/>

<http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/182>

<http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/07/27/minors-separated-from-their-family-in-moria-greek-coast-guard-punctures-refugee-boat-under-the-eyes-of-frontex/>

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