



Most deadly day in the Aegean Sea with more than 50 travellers drowned

In Distress + Dead ? Missing

VERIFIED

30.10.2015 / 11:19 / Aegean Sea

Watch The Med Alarm Phone Investigations – 28th of October 2015

Case name: 2015_10_28-AEG112

Situation: Many deaths in the Aegean Sea, Alarm Phone alerted to 14 boats in distress near the Greek islands of Lesvos, Farmakonisi, Chios and Samos

Status of WTM Investigation: Concluded

Place of Incident: Aegean Sea

Summary of the Cases: On Wednesday the 28th of October 2015 the Alarm Phone witnessed the most deadly day in the Aegean Sea this year. At least more than 50 travellers had drowned in several shipwrecks near Lesvos, Samos and Agathonisi (source 1). The Alarm Phone was alerted to at least 14 boats in distress in the Aegean Sea, near the Greek islands of Lesvos, Farmakonisi, Chios and Samos. North of Lesvos we witnessed the dramatic rescue of 242 travellers whose boat has capsized, with at least 75 people drowned. From Agathonisi we learned about a missing boy, who was washed up dead at the coast at the next day. In 4 cases the Greek coastguard conducted rescue operations following our calls. Beyond that, three groups had stranded on Greek and Turkish island, two groups were rescued by the Turkish coastguard and another two groups managed to arrive in Greece on their own. In some further cases the whereabouts of travellers in distress could not be verified after we had alerted the Greek or Turkish coastguards.

At 7.10pm we were informed about a boat that has capsized north of Lesvos, with more than 300 travellers on board (case 10). We received two phone numbers – both were not reachable – and later also coordinates of the vessel. In a call to the Greek rescue coordination centre in Piraeus at 8pm we learned that the Greek coastguard was conducting a large rescue operation in this area since 5pm. Apparently, this was the capsized wooden boat from which 242 travellers were rescued, first and foremost thanks to the self-sacrificing efforts of Greek and Turkish fishermen and other volunteers (source 2). However, more than 50 travellers were feared to have drowned, representing the most deadly incident in the Aegean Sea (sources 3 + 4). Volunteering lifesavers from the Spanish organization 'Proactiva Open Arms' reported to us afterwards that particularly the border guards of a Norwegian vessel under Frontex mandate had been very passive during the large-scale rescue operation, only throwing ropes to the travellers, while lifesavers entered the boat in distress and desperately tried to grasp drowning men, women and children by jumping into the sea (source 5).

At the same day we directly witnessed another deadly incident. At 8pm a contact person called us and informed us about the fate of a 5-year-old boy who had died on the island of Nera (case 14). The contact person was attended by the boy's father, who was in deep sorrow. Apparently the child's mother had arrived by boat on the Greek island of Nera, together with her two children. While the mother and one child were transferred to a hospital on Samos by the Greek authorities, the 5-year-old boy have had to stay on the island together with the rest of the group. The mother was only once able to inform the father and the contact person via phone. After obtaining this information we called the port police on Samos but they refused to give us any information or advise. On the following day we talked to the contact person again. He told us that the little boy had died. His body was found in the sea at about 3am. We asked the contact person to write a short report about everything he knows. Later on media also reported about this deadly incident.

At 2am a contact person informed us about a boat with 38 travellers east of Lesvos and forwarded their coordinates and phone number to us (case 1). As they were still in Turkish waters, we asked them what we should do. They were convinced to be in Greek waters already and asked us to alert the Greek coastguard. At 2.20am the sent us updated coordinates, which indeed showed them in Greek waters and we alerted the Greek coastguard in Piraeus via phone and e-mail. One hour later we talked again to the contact person and our contact person, but both did not have any news. Finally, at 3am, our

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[14/04: 35 travellers in distress in the Aegean, returned to Turkey](#)

23:03 Feb 03, 2016 / Aegean Sea, Chios, Lesvos and Farmakonisi Kms

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coastguard and our contact person, but both did not have any news. Finally, at 5am, our contact person confirmed to us that the travellers had been rescued by the Greek coastguard.

At 3.20am we were informed about a group of travellers who had stranded on a Turkish island 6 hours earlier (case 2). Apparently, the Turkish police had already seen them but did not interfere. Half an hour later we were provided with the coordinates and a phone number of the travellers and alerted the Turkish coastguard again via e-mail. Afterwards, our contact person was not reachable anymore, thus we cannot confirm if or how the travellers were rescued.

At 5.45am we received the coordinates of a boat in distress east of Lesbos, but still in Turkish waters (case 3). After establishing direct contact to the travellers via WhatsApp, we learned that they had moved further west and they estimated to be 4 kilometres off the coast of Lesbos at 6.30am. In the meantime, another contact person had informed us about the same boat and had forwarded two other phone numbers of the travellers. However, we were not able to talk to them directly and thus did not have updated coordinates. At 7.40 we received a voice message via one of the contact persons, stating that water was already entering the boat, with 35 people on board. We called the Greek coastguard on Lesbos at 7.50am, but it was clear to us that they were not able to intervene without a precise position. We were told to ask the travellers to call 112. However, at 8am both contact persons informed us that the group had safely arrived on an island, presumably Lesbos. At 8.15am the travellers called us directly, stating that they had reached land but are in need of help. We urged them to call the emergency hotline 112.

At 8.20am we were informed about a boat in distress east of Samos, with 35 travellers on board (case 4). We received the coordinates and a video clip from the boat, in which the travellers asked for help, because the sea was very rough. We alerted the Greek coastguard and they took the coordinates. At 9.30am and again at 9.50am another contact person forwarded coordinates in the same area to us. Although we were not able to discern whether they belong to the same boat or to another one, we again informed both the coastguard and the port authorities on Samos. Afterwards, we could not establish contact to neither the travellers nor the contact persons again. In the afternoon, the port authorities on Samos confirmed to us that they had rescue several boats with more than 300 travellers on board. However, they were not able to tell us whether the boats we had contact to were amongst them.

Around midday we received the coordinates and phone number of a boat quite close to the coast of Lesbos (case 5). We contacted the travellers via WhatsApp and learned that they were not in distress. Half an hour later they wrote us that they had arrived on the island.

Around 2pm we were called by several numbers, presumably all belonging to one boat in distress north of Lesbos, with 50 travellers on board (case 6). We heard a lot of screaming in the background and asked the travellers to provide us with their coordinates. After some minutes we received the coordinates via WhatsApp and immediately alerted the Turkish coastguard, as the boat was still in Turkish waters. In another call at 2.40pm the Turkish coastguard told us that they had searched for the boat but did not find it. Thus, we also called the Greek coastguard, supposing that the boat might have entered Greek waters in the meantime. The Greek coastguard took all our information but asked us not to call back for confirmation. In the following hours we were not able to get in contact with the travellers again. But at 6pm one contact person informed us that the Greek coastguard had rescued the travellers.

At 3.40pm we were alerted to a group of about 200 travellers who had stranded on the Greek island of Farmakonisi (case 7). We were not able to get in contact with the travellers directly, but talked to a contact person at 4pm. He told us that the group had run out of water and food. We talked to the Greek rescue coordination centre in Piraeus at 4.15pm and learned that they were aware of this group, but too busy with rescue operations to take care of them. Thus, we alerted the UNHCR in Athens and the Hellenic police to this situation and asked them to pressurize the coastguard as well. At 5.30pm we had a last contact to the group. They wrote to us that they were still stuck on the island. On 29th of October our contact person confirmed that the travellers had been picked up from the island.

At 6.20pm a contact person alerted us to a boat in distress north of Lesbos, with 45 people on board (case 8). The contact person had already informed the Turkish coastguard and they had promised to send a rescue vessel. At 6.50pm we were able to talk directly to the travellers and received updated coordinates. Apparently, they were still moving in the direction of Lesbos and had reached Greek territorial waters. Later on, at 8.15pm, we again received new coordinates and informed the Greek coastguard accordingly. At 9pm our contact person told us, that the boat had been rescued by the Greek coastguard.

At 7pm a caller alerted us to a boat with 50 travellers on board and forwarded their phone number to us (case 9). With the help of a translator we were able to speak directly to the travellers. They were 30 adults and 20 children and their engine had stopped due to a lack of fuel. Unfortunately they were not able to provide us with their position. But at 8pm the contact person informed us that the group had managed to arrive on an island. Later on we learned that they had arrived on Farmakonisi.

At 10.35pm a contact person forwarded the phone number and coordinates of a boat to us, which was in distress in Turkish waters south of Cosma (case 11). At 10.27pm we

us, which was in distress in Turkish waters south of Çeşme (case 12). At 10.53pm we talked to the travellers and they asked us not to alert the Turkish coastguard, although they were in severe distress. In another call some minutes later they had changed their mind, as the situation became too dangerous. We alerted the Turkish coastguard immediately afterwards and at 11.05pm the travellers told us that they were being rescued by the Turkish coastguard at this very moment.

At 10.55pm another contact person alerted us to a boat in distress very close to the previous case south of Çeşme (case 12). In this case we were informed at 11.15pm that the travellers were rescued.

At about the same time a third contact person informed us about another boat in distress, 2 kilometres further north (case 13). We alerted the Turkish coastguard at 11.05pm and learned 10 minutes later that the group was saved.

Last update: 11:44 Nov 06, 2015

Sources

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