



## 23/09: 30 ppl on their way to Lesbos, attacked by masked persons, intercepted to Turkey, presumably a push-back

In Distress
  Interception
  Push-Back

VERIFIED

24.09.2019 / 17:12 / Aegean Sea

### Watch The Med Alarm Phone Investigations – 23rd of September 2019

Case name: 2019\_09\_23-AEG578

**Situation:** 30 travelers (7 pregnant women, 3 old women, 13 children) attacked to destroy their engine, picked up by the Turkish Coastguard, taken to the Turkish-Syrian border

**Status of WTM Investigation:** Concluded

**Place of Incident:** Aegean Sea

#### Summary of the Case:

On Monday, 23rd of September 2019 at 03:33am CEST our shift team received a GPS location and two phone numbers of a group of 30 people traveling towards Lesbos, Greece. Shortly before, a boat had come by their boat and destroyed their engine. Their location showed they were close to the Greek-Turkish border on the Turkish side. When we called the travelers at 03:38am, they reported that water was entering the boat and they urgently needed rescue. At 03:43am we called the Turkish Coastguard and passed them the GPS location and the phone numbers of the group. At 03:53am we informed the travelers that help was coming. They told us they were drowning, and we tried to calm them.

At 04:04am we sent an e-mail to the Turkish Coastguard and UNHCR containing the GPS location and information about the situation of the travelers.

At 04:16am we got through to the group again. They did not have internet connection anymore and could therefore not send another GPS location. They reported seeing a boat observing them without intervening to their situation, and that it was the same boat that had destroyed their engine. They said there were men in black clothes on board but could not tell if it were some kind of uniforms. The travelers were desperate about the fact they would be brought back to Turkey after the rescue and people were panicking.

At 04:26am we called the Turkish Coastguard to report that the travelers were observed by another boat and to ask for an estimated time of arrival of the rescue vessel. They told us their vessel had just arrived at the location we had given to them.

At 04:30am we talked to the travelers again who reported the other boat had left and that one of them had taken pictures of the situation when the engine was destroyed. Some minutes later they saw lights approaching. We tried to get in touch with the person who had taken the pictures but it was not possible then and we agreed the material should be sent to us after the rescue.

At 04:51am we talked to them again and learned that no rescue was launched, the boat on scene was only taking pictures of them. We called the Turkish Coastguard to find out why they were acting like that and they stated that they were waiting for a second rescue vessel to arrive in some minutes to be able to pick up all people. At 04:56am we passed on this information to the travelers who reported they already saw a second boat approaching.

At 05:19am we talked to them again and they said there was no second boat and the first one had turned off its lights. Then the line was cut.

When we called the Coastguards at 05:21am to ask what was going on, they told us to call back and when we did at 05:30am, they reported they had rescued a group at the position we had given to them. So they assumed our case was another group of people. At 05:34am we tried to get through to the travelers but without success and from then on, we could not reach them anymore.

At 06:04am we talked to the Coastguard again, there was still an ongoing rescue operation, but they were not sure if it was the group we were in touch with.

At 07:24am we talked to the Coastguards again and were informed that they had rescued five groups of migrants during the night, and a group of 30 people heading towards Lesbos had been picked up, too. We could not get further information about the group or the other groups. We continuously tried to get through to the people but could still not reach them. At 08:34am the Turkish Coastguard sent an e-mail

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15:54 Oct 09, 2021 / Aegean Sea Kms

[08/10: 22 people pushed back south of Lesbos](#)

11:41 Apr 28, 2018 / Aegean Sea Kms

[27/04: 50 travellers rescued by Greek coast guard to Lesbos](#)

15:41 Jan 02, 2016 / Aegean Sea Kms

[01/01: 2 boats in distress near the Greek island of Lesbos](#)

15:25 Feb 23, 2016 / Aegean Sea, Lesbos Kms

[22/2 Alarm Phone alerted to 4 emergency situations in the Aegean Sea, near Lesbos](#)

09:41 Aug 06, 2019 / Aegean Sea Kms

[05/08: 35 people in distress, rescued to Lesbos/Greece](#)



confirming the rescue of 30 people at the position we had given to them.

At 08:49am we finally received the confirmation of the rescue by one of the travelers who sent a video showing him in a Turkish UNHCR camp. About the act of destroying their engine he reported: "They came and pushed us to Turkish side". He also reported he had been beaten when he wanted to use his phone to make a call and his phone had been taken away from him and photos and phone numbers had been deleted before he got it back.

At 09:20am we also got in touch with a second person from the group. He also reported being back in Turkey.

When we investigated further about the case we got in touch with one of the travelers who reported more details: According to them there were seven pregnant women, three old women and 13 children on the boat, two of the children very sick, hoping to get the necessary medical treatment in Europe. The persons who attacked the boat and destroyed the engine had used a small jet boat and covered their faces with masks.

When the Turkish Coastguard took them back, they brought them to the Turkish-Syrian border and handed the men to the Syrian army. Their families were left alone close to the border.

**Last update: 15:13 Oct 23, 2020**

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