

Greek coastguard tried to tow hundreds of migrants to Italy, capsized the vessel

Martin Kreickenbaum
19 July 2023

On June 14, a fishing vessel carrying hundreds of refugees, the *Adriana*, sank off the Greek port city of Pylos. Roughly 600 people, including children, drowned. An investigation by German regional broadcaster NDR, the *Guardian*, the research agency Forensis and the Greek organization Solomon has now come to the clear conclusion that the *Adriana* was towed by the Greek coast guard towards Italian waters and then, when this was unsuccessful, capsized.

The search team spoke to 26 survivors, evaluated the available court records and examined the logbook entries of the ships involved. The Coast Guard ship 920 reached the *Adriana*, which had just received water, food and fuel from the tanker Faithful Warrior, on June 13 at 10:40 pm. Video footage shows that the completely overloaded *Adriana* was already listing dangerously by this point, and that an immediate rescue action should have been initiated.

The *Adriana* had been drifting for hours due to a broken compass and lack of fuel, propelled only by the current. But after the arrival of the Greek coast guard, she again moved at a steady speed towards Italy. Survivors report that the coast guard led them, claiming that an Italian coastguard ship was already waiting for them.

Around 1:40 am on the morning of June 14, the *Adriana* stopped, apparently the engine had failed again. Then it moved a few hundred meters to the east, which cannot be explained by wind or current. Eyewitnesses report that after the renewed engine damage, masked men from the Greek coast guard ship boarded the vessel and attached a rope to the bow of the *Adriana*.

It is fitting that the coast guard ship 920 had left Chania in Crete and, according to the logbook entry, had taken a four-member team of the KEA stationed in

Chania on board. The KEA is a military unit that specializes in carrying out dangerous operations at sea.

The coast guard claims that the rope was attached to stabilize the *Adriana*. However, Stefan Krüger, an expert on ship safety, expressed strong doubts about this version to the NDR. "This kind of listing momentum, which you certainly bring on with such a tow, does not lead to the ship being stabilized." Krüger rather believes "that the motivation was to tow the ship because the engine no longer worked." Only a short time after the tow rope was attached, the *Adriana* capsized.

Two survivors, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of the Greek authorities, told the BBC about how the capsizing occurred. "They fixed a rope from the left. Everyone went to the right side of our boat to balance it out. The Greek ship quickly moved away and tipped our boat. They took it with them for a long time."

Another survivor told the *Guardian* that Greek soldiers had attached the rope and the *Adriana* had been pulled for about 10 minutes. "I felt that they tried to push us out of the Greek water so that their responsibility ends." Other survivors said the *Adriana* suddenly moved forward "like a rocket" even though the engine was not running.

The fact that the version of the Greek coast guard does not correspond to the actual course of events is also evidenced by the testimony of the survivors before the investigating judge, who is examining the sinking of the *Adriana*. According to this, the statements recorded and published by the coast guard were made under pressure and manipulated.

As the *Guardian* reports, the statements made by two survivors of different nationalities, according to the coast guard, surprisingly agree word for word: "We

were on the boat that was old and rusty with too many people ... That's why it capsized and eventually sank."

But under oath before the prosecutor, the same survivors days later blamed the Greek coast guard for the sinking. A survivor who told the coast guard in his testimony that the trawler capsized because of its age and overcrowding later testified, "When they boarded the boat (and I'm sorry to mention that), our boat sank. I think the reason was the towing by the Greek boat."

Survivors told the BBC that they were intimidated by the coast guard. Whenever it was said that the Greek coast guard had caused the capsizing, they were told to shut up. "You have survived death! Stop talking about the incident! Don't ask any more questions about it!" they were told.

Other incidents demonstrating that the Greek coast guard was never interested in rescuing the refugees have come to light. The European border protection agency Frontex also remained idle, although it was informed at an early stage that there was an urgent case for a naval rescue.

According to information from the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag*, the boat was first sighted by Italian authorities at 6:51 a.m., according to an internal Frontex document. Frontex previously claimed to have only learned about the overloaded ship at 9:47 am through a reconnaissance drone. In fact, as early as 8:51 a.m., the sea rescue center in Rome alerted both Frontex and the control center in Piraeus, from where rescue operations of the Greek coast guard are controlled. The information also reportedly included the fact that two children had died on board the fish trawler.

Nevertheless, it took hours for the Greek coastguard ship 920 to leave Crete. It remains unclear why boats located much closer in Kalamata, Pylos or Patras were not alerted and sent. Speaking to the *Guardian*, a member of the Greek coast guard expressed his complete incomprehension that a rescue operation had not been initiated immediately: "It was a situation in which you send everything you have. The trawler was clearly in need of help."

Clearly, however, the Greek authorities were more concerned with bringing on board members of the KEA stationed in Chania in order to remove the ship from Greek waters. An actual rescue operation was therefore not planned at any time.

The Greek coast guard has since confirmed that it was informed by Italian authorities at an early point. Greece's newly appointed migration minister Dimitris Kairidis said in Brussels that "an independent judicial investigation" is underway. If someone is found guilty, "there will definitely be consequences." "Until then, we should not jump to conclusions or bow to political pressure," he added.

Frontex has initiated its own pro forma investigation of the sinking. But at the same time, the EU Commission continues to back the investigations of the Greek authorities. These, however, focus on the nine Egyptians arrested after the shipwreck, who allegedly steered the boat and distributed water and food.

The Egyptians are accused of belonging to a human smuggling ring and causing the capsizing of the ship. If convicted, they face life imprisonment. Survivors reported to the BBC that the Coast Guard forced them to refer to these nine as masterminds and people smugglers. "The Greek authorities detained them and wrongfully accused them of covering up their own crime," one survivor said.

The sinking of *Adriana*, which killed more than 600 refugees, was evidently an act of mass murder, committed either deliberately or by failing to provide assistance, for which the EU is responsible.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact