

# lostatborder

A person is walking away from the camera on a paved path. They are wearing a yellow beanie with blue stripes, a light-colored jacket, and dark pants. They have a black backpack with the word 'CAMPER' on it and are carrying a black pot by its handle. The background consists of tall, dry grass and bare trees under a grey, overcast sky.

**A journey  
to the lost  
and the dead  
of the Greek borders**

## ACCIDENTS AND DEATH AT BORDER...

...belong unfortunately to the daily experiences of refugees trying to reach a safe haven. The massive fortification of the European borders is aiming to keep unwanted sans-papiers outside and to let only the fittest survive – in order to fill the gaps in the low-paid employment sectors of the European labor market. The European Border Control Agency FRONTEX in co-operation with national authorities are heightening and thickening the fences and walls around us, controlling and patrolling the borders and externalizing them to European neighbor states such as Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia a.o. They have created treaties of co-operation in deportations and huge refugee detention camps at the gates of Europe. The European strategy of externalization of borders reaches up into the hearts of Africa and Asia with a number of Readmission Agreements. This exclusionary migration policy is successively harshening but as an African refugee has put it:

*“No one can stop the rain!”*

As long as people are forced to leave their home countries because of war, repression, poverty and hunger, as long as the inequalities continue to exist and exploitation leaves many poor while a few get rich, there will be refugees arriving in all countries that can offer at least a little bit of protection and a small hope on having a future – in Europe but mainly in neighboring countries that offer support and protection. Nobody would risk his life without having a reason.

Trying to cross a number of borders, among them the ones of Fortress Europe is exactly that: A huge risk of death! It is a long way that has to be taken during day and during night, walking for miles in the heat and the cold, across mountains and rivers, driving (hidden) inside, on and under overcrowded trucks and cars without any fresh air, crossing the sea under all weather conditions in ship wrecks or small dinghies or walking through mine fields. The border crossings to Greece and

from Greece to other European countries are only one step of many. And so are the sad stories we are telling here only few out of many of which we might never hear.

## LANDMARKS OF DEATH AT BORDER



*The border lands at the Aegean islands are marked by relicts of the passing migrants.*



### AEGEAN ISLANDS

The border lands at the Aegean islands (Mytilini, Chios, Samos, Leros among others) are marked by relicts of the passing migrants. Dinghies, life vests, paddles, clothes, holy books can still be found on the beaches. The cemeteries of the islands remind of the victims of the border that never managed to arrive, but drowned on their way to Europe.

On Sunday, 5th of September 2010, Welcome to Europe installed a memorial for eight refugees, drowned close to Korakas/Lesvos in October 2009 when their boat crashed against a rock in a stormy night.

It says:

*We mourn the refugees that died during the attempt to overcome Fortress Europe on the 27th of October 2010. - Yalda 8 \* Neda 10 \* Mehdi 4 \* Zakia \* Tsimas \* Sonia 6 \* Abdulfasl 3 \* Zomaya*  
*We thank the heroic fishermen who saved the lives of the survivors.*

### EVROS/NORTHERN GREECE

It was only in the beginning of 2010 that the migration routes changed and the majority of refugees started crossing the land borders in Evros / northern Greece. The border-line between Greece and Turkey is 192,5 km long of which 12,5 km are land-borders and 180 km are marked by the river Evros. As Frontex has repeatedly stated, this border in 2010 covered up for 90% of the undocumented migration to Europe. In 2011 numbers of arrivals in Greece decreased but more than ever the relative percentage of border crossing through Evros has grown. It is the way to the lands of hope or into the hidden mass graves of refugees – the wet ones and the dry, the last minefields of Europe.

Until 2009 there was a constant number of border accidents in the mine-fields of Evros. The personal mines have been cleared since 2009, according to the Greek government but from 1974 on at least 100 persons lost their lives in the mine-fields and hundreds got injured.



Samir from Morocco lives and works in Athens the last years. The Greek Turkish borders are a nightmare of his memories. In 2002 he managed to cross the river Evros. After a few steps in the Greek territory there was a minefield which he and the other refugees who were travel-

dangerous. 70 refugees died in 2010 at the border in Evros, 47 in 2011 until August - not to mention the many injured who survived but were severely handicapped due to the weather conditions in winter or due to police violence in detention. Many of the bodies are carried also



ling with him had not seen. One of his friends stepped on a mine and was killed immediately. Samir lost his right foot. His friend Randoush lost both of his feet and one of his hands was injured. "For the government we are only victims," says Samir in a bitter tone. "I

want to move on in my life, I want to leave Greece." The government has not offered him any help, no recompensation, despite the great efforts he made together with a group of Greece and the exterior who were at his side.

The river Evros is at the moment the main place of death at the Turkish-Greek borders. Refugees trying to cross the border in small or big groups often underestimate and sometimes just don't know about the dangers of the river. Some cross in small dinghies but others even try to walk through the waters. Many don't know how to swim. Rainfalls increase the water level and the strength of the river flow. The fright of being captured by Turkish or Greek authorities or by Frontex officers makes the crossing even more

*It is the way to the lands of hope or into the hidden mass graves of refugees – the wet ones and the dry, the last minefields of Europe.*

on the Turkish side. The real numbers of dead are not known but are surely higher than officially declared.

In August 2010 a group of 50 tried to cross the river. Among them was the husband of Tahera. This was the last day she saw him alive. The last image she remembers is his body being carried away with the stream. Until today she does not know about the whereabouts of her husband - the father of her three children.



In September 2010 John from Kenya started searching for his wife. The only thing he knew for months was that she was supposed to cross this border and that he never heard anything else about her.

You will find more about the experiences of Tahera and John on the next pages.

## SIDERO/ EVROS

The cemetery in Sidero / Evros is the main burial site of refugees who lost their lives on the land border to Turkey. In August 2010 the cemetery of the Muslim minority of Sidero was nothing more than a mass grave at the rims of the village. Situated on a small hill and only marked by a sign, that was saying: "Cemetery of illegal migrants: Mufti Sidero" and that was covered by holes of bullets it was a plain ground that showed no signs of a proper and respectful treatment of the dead. After a huge campaign, publicity was drawn on the mass grave and the Mufti changed the appearance of the graves into individual graves, a fence was built around the cemetery and a new sign installed. At least 200 corpses of migrants who died at the border between Greece and Turkey have been buried in Sidero during the last 10 years, the undertaker stated.

## BORDER TO ITALY, BULGARIA, MACEDONIA AND ALBANIA

Anyway, if we speak of border victims in Greece we have also to refer to the border to Italy, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania. Usually, refugees trying to leave Greece towards northern Europe when not using the airports of the country try to leave either walking over the mountains

in the north or hiding inside and under trucks that leave for Italy with ferry boats from Patras, Igoumenitsa and Kerkyra island. There is still nothing known about victims of the northern land borders but there are a couple of victims in the Ionian Sea. There are at least two kinds of dangers at this border crossing: 1. The dangers that accrue from trying to jump on a truck, hiding inside or under a truck and 2. The dangers that arise from trying to cross the Ionian Sea in ship wrecks or small boats. The Greek-Italian border has also been increasingly fortified as it becomes visible in the ports of Patras and Igoumenitsa, the high fences, the repressive controls and the violence by the authorities, truck drivers and Neonazi groups in these hubs of transit migration.



## PATRAS

The exit-ports of Patras and Igoumenitsa are not only places of hope but also of suffering. They are places of innumerable injuries and death. Refugees and migrants suffer from violent attacks by the police, the coast guard, truck drivers and fascist groups. They are victims of traffic accidents while trying to jump in, out or under trucks or while being chased by the authorities. Injuries and death also occur inside trucks. Refugees have died due to suffocation, by the heat of the motor and the electric cables when hiding beneath a truck.

A case of coast guard violence occurred in 2007 when the unaccompanied minor M. from Afghanistan was hiding beneath a truck in the port area. Some coast guard officers guarding the area hunted him.

One of them took out a knife and started stabbing him under the truck without having a clear view. He stabbed him more than four times in the back and his feet. After his transfer to the hospital a coast guard officer came immediately to inter-

### *The exit-ports of Patras and Igoumenitsa are places of innumerable injuries and death.*

rogate and frighten him without informing the doctors about his visit. The young man was terrified also after release when he was again interrogated by the authorities who tried to cover the incident.

By the end of 2008 an unaccompanied minor was consciously hit inside the port of Patras by a truck while he was trying to enter another truck. Witnesses saw the driver looking at the refugee who had his back turned towards him and increasing speed. Shortly after he hit the youngster

strongly. H. was immediately transferred to hospital where he remained two weeks in coma. As by a miracle he survived. Today, he is waiting for the driver to be trialed before court for the attempt of murder.

In 2010 another Afghan refugee was hit by a truck outside of the port. He died. Since then there have been another two cases of car accidents in Patras. Nevertheless, there have also been a couple of deaths due to suffocation in trucks that have no air ventilation. Many of them never reach the public. A case like this was also referred to at the 17th of September 2010 in Kerkira island, close to Igoumenitsa.

On the 28th of September 2010 an Afghan refugee was running over the street in order to jump on a truck. The 29-year-old Sardar thereby was hit by another truck. He died on the same day after being transferred to the hospital. In the following days Afghan refugees made a huge demonstration protesting against the repression.

*Again a human life got lost. Again an Afghan refugee is the victim. Our co-national Sardar Aiomi died on Saturday the 27th of November 2010 on the intersection of the new national highway Patras-Athens and Kanellopoulou Street. Sardar tried to climb on a truck which was standing at the red traffic lights while another truck which was following the first increased the speed and hit him. He was transferred in very bad condition to Rio University Hospital. He died shortly after the arrival. The police characterised the injuries of Sardar as «light» and the Italian truck driver was released and allowed to continue his travel. Would they have done the same if the victim of the road accident happened to be a Greek national or a citizen of another EU-member state? Would they have «solved» the incident so easy? Would they present it as if nothing happened?*

*We should not forget, that the United States together with most of the European countries are responsible for the destruction of Afghanistan and the flight of its people. They baptised their forces of siege in our country as «peace force» and insist that they are helping us. Whom are they helping when the only thing they achieve is to destroy the country and us forcing us to leave our home? We know very well, what they did and what they do in our country. However, when we arrive persecuted by war in their countries, they ill-treat us and attack us by every means. The Greek state and the police have trapped our lives in a country without any right to life or to asylum. By this way, they force us to risk our lives every day in order to find a way to leave from here. It is for this reason that our friend Sardar lost his life and everybody is responsible: the Greek state, the police, the European Union and the UN.*

***Dear friend Sardar, have a good journey! The Afghan Refugees***



In May 2011 a truck-driver who had crossed Patras discovered the corpses of two men locked inside a cable drum, far away from Greece in Bad Hersfeld/Germany – most likely sans-papiers who tried to escape to another safe haven and died of heat and suffocation. Patras in this sense has become emblematic for accidents where refugees were either injured or died inside and under trucks and where they were hit by trucks or cars.

During the Christmas days of 2011, in the early morning of December 20, 2011 the police raided one more time the old redundant textile factory of Peiraiki Pa-

traiki where a couple of refugees have set up their provisory shelter close to the new port since they were expelled from other places by the police in the last months. In this atmosphere of panic one Afghan minor while trying to escape the police fell of the second floor of the building. He was severely injured. His friends said, that the police saw the young boy falling but did not call an ambulance or react in any other supportive manner.

Only two weeks later three Afghan youngsters (15-20 years old), who had recently arrived in the port city of Patras, were sleeping in the cabin of an aban-

doned truck nearby the same factory of Peiraiki Patraiki. In order to keep warm on January 2, 2012 during a cold night, they lit a fire inside the truck. The windows were closed, doors were shut, and the lack of oxygen caused the suffocation to death of one of the boys. The other two were taken to hospital in a critical condition.

*January 2, 2012*

In the name of god,

Since we were small kids in our home countries there was trouble, but we didn't understand what this trouble was. Later we grew up and we understood that this trouble is war. The seasons were changing and every day became more difficult. On this way we reached today.

Since then and until today we are thinking about our future and what our destiny will be. When we were in our countries they were telling us lies. They told us in Europe we would find democracy and we would get human rights. But it is different here. To build up our lives we have to cross the borders. In Greece this is very difficult.

Supposedly, the police exist in order to protect people. Here it is not like that. The police in Greece are beating us, is mocking us, is arresting us, insulting our countries and religions – all this even if we are minors. We were in the old port area and came to the fabric on the opposite side of the new port in order that the people of Patra are not disturbed by us and with the aim to leave to another country. Many times the police comes at 5am while we are sleeping, wakes us up, beats us, burns our documents, they tell us we would go on a trip and then they send us to Athens. There they usually leave us in the Aliens Police. Some of us who have no money have to walk back to Patras, a 6-day-walk.

We are forced to return to Patras because only from here we can leave Greece. We want to find another place to live our lives because the situation in Greece is very bad. We were all born from one mother and one father. We might speak different languages, we might be from different countries but we are all brothers and sisters.

We spoke with the police about our problems but it seems as if they do not care. Either during war in our home countries either in our daily lives here we have the problem of survival. Whatever we say goes in one ear and out the other. The only thing we want is a calm life. Until when do we have to be far from our families? Why don't they give us papers to be able to visit our families and come back to Europe? Could you live in



an old fabric as we do? Could you eat food from the rubbish? Life is not worth anything like this. Did you know that we have a cemetery for migrants and refugees in Patras? We left our homes in order to live not in order to die.

We ask everybody who reads this text to change any bad thought he or she had about us. If one migrant does something bad its not the fault of all of us. You should not change sidewalk if you see one of us on the street. There is no god who wants you to beat weak people, to arrest them, to cut them off from water and electricity supply and to humiliate them. When you see a police officer beating one more minor migrant, don't close you eyes and ears.

**STOP POLICE BARBARISM  
WE WANT TO LIVE IN SECURITY  
WE NEED HUMAN RIGHTS**

*Migrants and refugees from the old redundant textile factory of Peiraiki Patraiki*

## IONIAN SEA

Finally, as referred to above, refugees die also in the Ionian Sea when getting in distress at sea. Trying to avoid Greece a number of ship-wrecks filled up with up to 200 refugees are trying to reach the Italian coast directly from Turkey. There are also increasing numbers of ship distress, when refugees enter these kind of overcrowded ship wrecks or small dinghies and speed boats on Greek territory directing towards the east of Italy. In the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 a dozen of ship distress by refugee boats reached the public. Bad weather conditions brought the ships into trouble who then tried to find help by the Greek authorities. At the 16th of January 21 refugees got lost in the Ionian Sea. On the 21st of February 2011 again a ship got into distress, while 113 lives of the refugees could be saved in the last second and 3 disappeared in the sea.

On the 16th of March 2011 the 10th body of refugees from Bangladesh who had arrived at the coast of Crete com-

ing from Libya was found. The refugees had jumped into the sea in order to avoid to be returned back and in order to get a chance to claim asylum in Greece. It remains unclear if they ever got this possibility. Some of them were deported immediately back. On the 3rd of September 2011 at least four immigrants drowned in the Ionian Sea, when an inflatable boat sailing about 80 nautical miles west of

a total of 30 sans-papiers. If it is so, the number of dead finally found might rise to 19.

On Friday, September 23rd, a small boat that was trying to get to Italy carrying 65 Kurds and Afghans sans-papiers, broke 90 miles southwest of the island of Zakynthos. When port police reached the vessel only 32 immigrants were aboard. A helicopter participating in the rescue op-

*There are also increasing numbers of ship distress, when refugees enter these kind of overcrowded ship wrecks or small dinghies and speed boats on Greek territory directing towards the east of Italy.*

Kefalonia island, sunk on early Saturday morning. Eleven immigrants survived. One of them, whose condition was critical, was picked up by a navy helicopter and the remaining ten were picked up by the Turkish ship «MEHMET DADAYLI 1». The same ship discovered the four corpses. According to one of the survivors onboard inside the sunken boat were

eration managed to save 30 immigrants that had fallen in the sea. Late in the afternoon, the same helicopter discovered the bodies of 3 sans-papiers who drowned at sea. The number of deaths is still unknown.

## AUGUST 2010: THE QUEST OF TAHERA AND THE MASSGRAVE OF SIDERO

On the 25th of June 2010, twenty-two migrants died in one night. Rainfalls had increased the water level and the strength of the river flow and many people got drowned. Sixteen corpses have been found some days after at the Greek side have been transferred to Orestiadas' hospital. After following the procedures, a hearse carried them to Sidiro – a small village at the end of a dusty road, inhabited mainly by Greek Muslims. The Mufti however, had decided a while ago – probably in order to avoid reaching maximum capacity- to bury the dead undocumented migrants on a hill, outside the village.

The migrants' cemetery of Sidiro is a de facto cemetery, according to Article 2 (3) of the Ministerial Decree (A5/1215/1978) and is managed by the Mufti with no kind of administrative supervision or control currently being exercised over him concerning the administration of the cemetery. He arranges the digging up of the grave and the wrapping of the corpse in a cerecloth according to Muslim rituals. The body bag is buried next to each corpse. According to the Mufti, each corpse is buried in a separate grave, but he has repeatedly admitted to be able and remember the locations of all bodies. Finding the way to the cemetery is not



an easy task. You need to turn on a small dust road upwards, looking for something that reminds of a cemetery. The only sign confirming its existence – during a visit in August 2010 – was a sign sprayed with guns indicating “Illegal Migrants Cemetery” and beneath “Muslim Community of Evros”. The land was plane. At a second look one could see that the earth had recently been dugged up with a bulldozer. Two lines of earth, at some points small

parts of plastic are visible. Assumingly beneath each line there was one large whole. Each of them seemed to have place for more than 10 bodies.

Ever since “Welcome to Europe” Network publicly denounced the cemetery as a massgrave for immigrants, a number of journalists have been visiting the mufti and the cemetery. Some changes have occurred: the shape of the cemetery changed, the earth has been removed.

Now its form reveals the existence of 48 individual graves. The mufti repeatedly stated to journalists, that he keeps a map of the cemetery, marking each time the new grave and its protocol number. He



*“Last time I saw my husband, as the water carried him away with his eyes closed and the bag with our children’s clothes still on his shoulders.”*  
**Tahera, from Afghanistan (32 years old)**

Tahera has three kids (10, 8 and 6 years old). Her husband got lost on the border between Turkey and Greece, at the river Evros. Until today she doesn’t know if he’s dead or alive. The rest of the family managed to reach Germany, but her heart remains on the wet border, still looking for her husband. “We were around 60 people, but only a small dinghy for some women and the kids. The others had to walk through the river. Some of them were not tall enough, soon their heads slowly disappeared under the water, which carried them away in the dark, along with their cries for help”. It was two o’ clock in the morning when they started their journey to Europe from Turkey.

There were also some other Afghan and African families – around 60 people – who moved in two separated groups. “For one hour we walked through the forest. We reached the water, but they told us it’s not good to cross the river now. We left and then came back again by the river side at 4 o’ clock in the morning. There was only a small boat. For women and all

admits though, that it is impossible to identify the older graves. There are no signs on the graves, though they have been reportedly using metal signs to indicate the protocol numbers.

Burial expenses were covered by the Evros prefecture, with funds from the Ministry of Interior (now interior, de-

centralisation and e-government). After the Kallikratis’ reform in January 2011 (where the prefecture has been substituted by the district of East Macedonia and Thrace), payments have been ceased, as responsibilities still have to be clarified.



the children got on the boat.

Eleven persons, among them a girl with disabilities. The others had to cross the river, by holding hands. The water was very high and those who couldn’t swim, suddenly disappeared into the water. When we reached the shore, we got out of the dinghy. I saw a friend of my husband, who knew how to swim, saving two african women. Then I lost sight of him. Last time I saw my husband, as the water carried him away with his eyes closed and the bag with our children’s clothes still on his shoulders”.

Eight persons managed to save themselves on the riverbank. The Turkish police arrested them. “We talked on the phone, but they also don’t know anything about my husband and the other missing persons!” Close to the river, there were some rail lines. Even though exhausted and under shock, they tried to search for the others, but didn’t find anyone.

Then they sat there, waiting for the police to come and arrest them. They immediately told them about the missing people. Tahera and her three children were transferred to Neo Chimonio’s Police station. She stayed for two days. The police released them, in order to ease the re-unification procedure, in case her husband would be found.

The police searched in the river for a couple of hours. When they came back, they saw some photos taken by their mobile phones to Tahera, but she couldn’t recognize her husband among them. None of the fourteen corpse retrieved by the Greek authorities would fit Tahera’s description. They were not in Tychoero, Soufli, Alexandroupoli, Didimoticho, Orestiada, Dikea, Sidiro, Ferres, Neo Chimonio... Four more bodies were found on the turkish side. It’s her last hope.

#### STILL MISSING:

**B.A.Z. / Afghanistan, male (1970):** he was carrying a black bag with yellow pockets with the clothes of his children. He was wearing a dark red shirt with yellow stripes, gray trousers, brown shoes with no bootlaces and two rings

– one blue. On his hand a silver watch with a golden frame. In his pocket he was carrying a Koran and a pen.

**S.M.Q. / Afghanistan, male (1983).** He was wearing a stripped beige and pink

shirt, blue jeans and sneakers. He had short hair and 500 euros with him.

**M.A.J. / Afghanistan, male (1951):** he was wearing a brown trouser, black shoes, glasses, a waterproof watch and a ring with an eagle symbol.

## JANUARY 2011: DEATHS BETWEEN KERKYRA/ GREECE AND BARI / ITALY

The following testimony of Amin Fedaii, a 16-year-old Afghan refugee, is alarming.

*“I felt very queasy, I was in the bottom of the ship and tried to sleep. I was not really sleeping I was so afraid. I was drifting away.”*

More than 20 refugees (mainly from Afghanistan) died while trying to flee from Greece and to reach their relatives and friends in other European countries.

The asylum system in the crisis-ridden Mediterranean country has entirely collapsed. Refugees cannot find protection neither any income and often even no accommodation. Against this background deportations to Greece according to the Dublin II-regulation have been stopped in many European Countries, but the

affected persons got stuck in unbearable conditions in Athens or in the port-cities of Patras and Igoumenitsa. While EU-citizens can travel without any problems, refugees are trapped: a regular exit is refused, although they have – particularly if they come from war-zones like Afghanistan – good chances to receive a residence permit on humanitarian grounds in many EU-countries.

Amin survived and is now living in an accommodation for unaccompanied minors in Hessen, Germany. But he had to experience the meaningless death by drowning of 20 persons. First their entry and afterwards their rescue had been refused. 20 more victims of a merciless European border regime, which obviously is calculating with the death of refugees.

Amin, survivor of the accident tells his story: “When I tried to flee Greece first in January 2011 in Athens, they put us in one truck with 200 persons. Beforehand, they told us that the truck would have air conditioning. It had not and so we ran out of oxygen soon with so many people. Soon many people fell unconscious. We started knocking the boards and screaming for help, but the driver did not react. One person had decided not to enter the truck before and we had his mobile number, so we called him to come and open the door for us, because we were not far yet. He did not come quickly, so we had no other chance and we called the police. They picked us from the truck and kept us for one night in police station. We started once again to Igoumenitsa soon and we were shown the ship that should bring us to Italy. This boat was obviously in a bad condition, but we were so desperate and in need to find a way out of Greece and so we entered. We were many persons: about 260 mainly Afghans. We left for Italy. I felt very queasy. I was in the bottom of the ship and tried to sleep. I was not really sleeping I was so afraid. I was drifting away. Then my friend woke me up: “Get up! There is water inside the ship.” There were several cracks. The crew tried to pump down the water but it was not successful. It became 5 PM and there was more and more water inside the ship. I was feeling a panic, I felt it

*was the last minutes of my life now. The ship lost more and more of its wooden parts. We had buckets and with five persons we tried to get out the water with these buckets. It was impossible. The others had already lost all their hopes. The Captain still said: “Don’t worry, we will be in Italy soon. We are only one hour distance from Italy.” At 7:30 PM the bilge was full of water. It was over. The captain tried to find help. We called the Italian coast guard. They asked us where we are, but we could not explain exactly. They explained the weather conditions are very bad, it was getting stormy more and more. There was only crying and praying now. There was no land in sight and no help. I was crying and vomiting all the time, finally there was only blood left to vomit and so I vomited a lot of blood. At 9:30 PM we had lost our hope, but then we saw a military ship. We were waving and shouting but they did not come closer. This ship was without a flag. Some of us could speak English and they said there were English words written on it. After another half hour there was a big Dutch vessel. Our engine was broken down meanwhile. The Dutch vessel put on some big lights and they threw nets and ropes for us to enter their ship. But many of us were in absolute panic. They were pushing others and many fell*

*into the sea. More than 20 people died in this situation. But the Dutch vessel rescued more than 200 of us. It was a Dutch captain but the whole crew who rescued us was from Philippines. I was one of the last persons that were rescued. Some minutes later our ship sank completely. We were all shivering but there were no blankets, we were so many. The Italian coast guard refused us entry. And so the Dutch vessel brought us back to*



*Greece. They started moving back at midnight and we reached Kerkyra at the island of Korfu 12 hours later. It was around 11 AM the next day. When we arrived, there were a lot of Greek and foreign journalists and people from UN-HCR but there was a lot of police and they refused to let them talk to us. They put us in a camp and then for one week in prison. We got only one meal per day and the Greek police treated us very badly. After one week police brought us to the mainland and then 2 and a half hour by bus to a city where they showed us the bus to Athens. All this happened in January 2011. In May I finally reached Germany.”*



## AUGUST 2011: THE MEMORIAL FOR JANE AND THE SEARCH FOR SAID

### THE RIVER

John wants to see a map of the Evros region so that he understands where the river is. He expresses his wish to go to the river, to the place where



his wife lost her life. We decide to go all together with him. Samy also wants to see the river. He wants to look out for his friend Said – alive or dead.

*Yesterday there was an African man here. He was crying and running up and down along the riverbank desperately. He was looking for his wife.*

Both of them came for their beloved – family and friend. John to say goodbye and Samy to find answers. It is the end of one journey and the beginning of another one.

We drive through dried sunflower fields and arrive in a military area close to river and the border. At this height the river and the border are one. The separation line splits the stream into a Greek and a Turkish side. 50 meters for each. Access is forbidden, but nobody stops us. Close to the river: two Soldiers and a hunter beneath the shadow of the trees. We ask for permission to go to the riverbank with John and Samy. They agree immediately.

The river looks calm. The opposite side seems very close. It is difficult to imagine that the way through it hides so many dangers. 70 dead in 2010 – 47 of them still not identified. 47 this year until now.

Two years ago, the mine-fields of Evros still belonged to one of the main causes of death for refugees here. Hundreds died or got injured in that period until the Greek government completed the clearance of antipersonnel mines in 2009. Since then most deaths are caused by drowning and hypothermia.

The border crossing at the river Evros (Turkish name: Maritsa) is malicious as the Coroner of Thrace explained to us: *“The first danger is the river itself. It is a big river with a very strong stream. The water is dirty and the*

*ground is muddy with an uneven texture. This means that there are many branches glued to the bottom of the river.*

*In addition, a one meter distance from the riverbank its’ depth is 50 cm, the next step that one will make may have due to the vortex of the river, so called holes, a depth of three meters. A second factor increasing the danger is that migrants usually cross in the night in fear and anxiety. They don’t see where they are going*

*which makes them panic easily. Many of them don’t know how to swim. If they will fall into the water they will loose the feeling*

*of space and they might drown. Finally, the migrants are often not allowed to carry their bags with them due to lack of space in the inflatable boats, which results in one person wearing three shirts, three trousers one above the other. If they fall in the water the weight of the wet clothes will pull them down.”*

On the opposite side of the river, only a few meters down the stream one can see a loosely bound blue string. It is fixed at some trees and reaches our side of the river – the Greek.

A local fisher approaches us. He explains: *“That is Turkey there on the other side, of course! For sure there are some refugees hiding there in the bushes. It is day and*

*A factor increasing the danger is that migrants usually cross in the night in fear and anxiety.*

*they are afraid to be seen. They wait to cross. Also on this side might be some hiding now. They wait for the police to come and pick them.”*

He tells stories of dead bodies of shootings of people that are saved by locals also about a local woman who was for hours in the water and nearly drowned but then she was saved. *“We local people find many dead bodies here. Yesterday there was an African man here. He was crying and running up and down along the riverbank desperately. He was looking for his wife. What shall we do? Sometimes people drown here even in the shallow parts of the stream. They panic, scream and flounder in fear. They cannot sense the river ground because they are afraid. (...) Sometimes there are very small babies and children crossing this river. They cry so much...!”*





The place we stand is a path that is used every night. John stares at the water. In silence he throws some flowers into the water in memory of Jane. Samy stands at the riverbank. His glimpse got lost in the stream. He cries. He is searching the whole area with his eyes. Waiting to get an answer. It seems as if the water is attracting him, as if he will let his body slide into the river in the next second.

Upon return we meet a group of newcomers. The hunter brings some water. He always does that, he says. A big group of exhausted men walks through the fields. They are from Bangladesh. Probably, they arrived at night and are now looking for the way to the police. Only a few meters further away we see another even bigger group hiding in the fields.

## THE PASSING BY

It advance of the commemoration ceremony and the inauguration of the fountain as a place of memorial but also of hope we return to the village to have some food. The atmosphere is filled of sadness. There are not many words left.

Suddenly, three small groups of refugees pass by on the street. The last is a group of four African women. They walk very slowly as if carrying a heavy burden. Exhausted and full of pain their bodies look. Johns' friend calls them: "Come and say hallo to us!" Surprise fills their eyes. They let themselves fall down on four chairs start eating quickly the food we invited them to. "We are from Congo," one of them says. Her friend starts crying. "We arrived today. Since six hours we are walking up and down in this village to find the police station. Nobody wants to tell

us where it is." She wears no shoes. Only slippers. The waitress appears suddenly with a pair of shoes. Humble she puts them on the ground next to the girl with the slippers. "It is a pity...!" After food, the four women head towards the police station now knowing where they can find it. Slowly, very slowly and hobbling.

There are refugees along the whole border and on the main streets. Walking, standing, sitting. In small groups the newcomers look out for the police to come and pick them up. "We tried to leave from here, but no bus, no taxi would take us. Now we want to go to the police to get the paper. Then we can leave from this area. There is no other way," a group of young Afghans and families tells us. The second stream of people consists of the ones released from prison. The next step. They have received the paper. They can take the bus, the taxi, the train – if they have money. Many have not. They walk all the way.

## THE FOUNTAIN

On the 30th of August we come together at a fountain in Provatonas to give our respects to the victims of the border. John lost his wife Jane, Tahera her husband Bashir and Samy his friend Said in the Evros River. They represent hundreds of other migrants who drowned in the water, were killed by landmines or are still missing. The dead bodies found were treated disrespectfully. In 2010 we discovered a mass grave in Sidero where the corpses

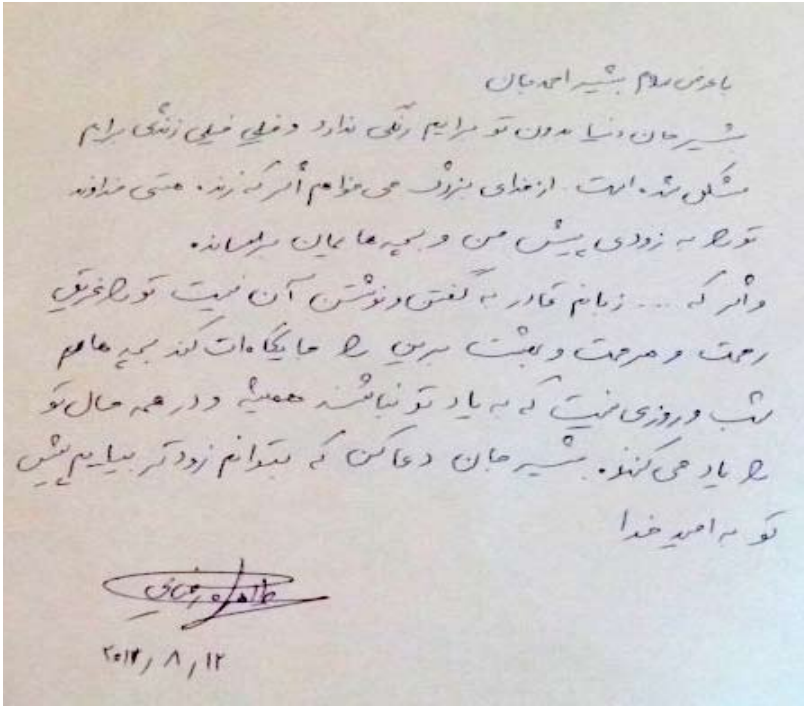
could not be identified. We returned to give back a piece of dignity to the dead and also those who survived.

We came together today here on the road to Tichero. We gathered in Tichero around this fountain for remembering the victims of the European border regime. Immediately, when we arrived here, we were reminded of the currency of this memorial ceremony. The Turkish newspaper Hurriyet reported that a migrant was killed when Frontex patrol opened fire to migrants crossing the Greek-Turkish border at Evros River. Due to the gunshots one of the rubber-boats sunk. The migrants swam to the Turkish riverbank. One migrant who was waiting to board on a boat at the Turkish side was shot in his back. This is one of the shattering news of these days.

Many people lost their lives in Evros and more than 2.000 refugees and migrants died in the Mediterranean Sea this year. Mainly when they tried to reach Malta or Italy from Libya or Tunisia. The numbers of deaths at the European borders have increased tremendously. Something has to be done about it! All of these dead have a face, a name. All of them left behind relatives and friends. Besides their bodies

*We want to give back a piece of dignity, to those whose lives disappeared into the senselessness of the European border.*

also their hopes and dreams got lost. We want to give back a piece of dignity, to those whose lives disappeared – right here – into the senselessness of the European borders. We gathered for giving back a piece of dignity also to those who survived. A piece of dignity that was lost on the way to Europe, like the passports or the photographs showing the faces of the beloved ones that are carried away by the water. We want to give back a piece of dignity to all of us, who feel ashamed in the moment of these deaths because we failed in our attempt to stop this murderous regime and to create a welcoming Europe. We came with different backgrounds. Thanks to all who are here today and thanks also to those who cannot be here, but are nevertheless with us right now, like Tahera who lost her husband Bashir in summer 2010 in Evros. Tahera is a refugee living in Hamburg with her children. She is not allowed to travel and so she cannot be here with us today. Tahera wrote the following letter to her husband Bashir at the 12th of August 2011.



For my husband Bashir:

My dear Bashir,  
 The world without you is no world, it's a world without colours. Life has become very hard. I beg god, if you are alive, please may He make you come back to me and to our children very soon. And if really happened what I am not able to find words for, that you will never come back, I ask god for you to find a better place in paradise. There is not a day or night passing when the children don't wake up or fall asleep thinking about you. They miss their father very much and talk about you all the time. My dear Bashir, please, I would like be close to you.

Tabera

Everywhere around this border we found people who have not closed their eyes. Thanks to all the unknown people who help migrants in their own way, silently and on an every day basis.

John plants a tree for Jane and holds a speech:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the last year we have been searching for my wife Jane. The dream of finding her alive was shattered when the DNA-results came out positive. I do thank God for showing the light. I know Jane will keep living within us through the legacy she has left behind. The effort of many individuals and organisations is highly appreciated. The love shown in searching for Jane has gone beyond colour and borders. People have come together in unity to answer one goal: Finding Jane! Jane's body lies in Sidiro. She was buried after being collected from the Evros River on the 2nd of August 2010.

Tribute to my loving wife Jane: Jane! For the last one year my life has almost been blocked, stopped. I have had sleepless nights looking for you. I have finally got the news, thanks to the confidence you have followed sued in me. I know it is your wish to be taken back home Kenya. This I will indeed make an effort with the assistance of my friends. My love for you is beyond measure and you will keep being between us forever. We will keep the flame by. We know your values and we will carry on the spirit. Will our lord help us to stand firm as a family. Our dear parents, brothers and sisters, our loving children, will always remember you. Relatives and friends will always remember and respect you. The papas of the fountain here Jane, in the same respect, have included you as a member for the Evros victims, but not as a last respect: May God bless your soul in a kind of peace. Amen. My appeal here, today, Ladies and Gentlemen is that just as we joined hands looking for Jane, we join hands making it possible to take Jane back home in Kenya to be buried in respect and dignity.

Thank you very much.



Here and today, at this place of failure and loss, we want to stop for a moment and create a space for all those who lost their lives. Remembering here, means to save the stories of the uncounted faces of those who died at the borders of Europe. Their death is the death in search for freedom. And that concerns all of us. So let us speak out their names.

**ABDEL RAHIM – HE LIVES!**  
**JANE NJOKI KABUE – SHE LIVES!**  
**BASHIR AHMAD ZAMANI – HE LIVES!**  
**SEYEF HAHDHI RASIMI – HE LIVES!**  
**MOHAMAD ASKAR YUSUFI – HE LIVES!**

We will never forget them. We shall tear down the borders that killed them.

**WE WILL SEARCH AND FIND: SAAID NOOR SAAID AND AHMAD FAISAL MAHHMADY!**

Due to human rights violations and degrading and inhuman living and detention conditions in Greece, refugees sometimes try to cross the border back to Turkey. Since two weeks Said from Sudan is missing. He got lost on his way back to Turkey after he had spent some months in Igoumenitsa, still trying to make his way to Italy. Said got disillusioned. His energy faded away. Even back might be better than being stuck, starving on a mountain. And now his trace got lost while search-

ing a way out of here.

We are also thinking of Ahmad Faisal Mahhmady now, whose trace got lost at this border in July. His cousin from London wanted to be with us here today but it was not possible for him.

And there is another name on this memorial plate: **Abdel Rahim** became a victim of the landmines. He died at this border in 2002.

Bashir, Jane, Abdelrahim and Said represent hundreds of other migrants who drowned in the water, were killed by landmines or are still missing. Remembering and listening to stories, hopes and dreams that have been washed ashore means also to listen to their warnings and accusations: This Europe is not safe, human rights and refugee rights have been neglected! They ask the ones alive to take action against this Europe of Frontex – borders and walls. They demand to struggle and to invent a Europe of solidarity, overcoming the killing migration regime as it happened in history during the dark periods of the Middle Ages. For the ones who will pass by in the future, the fountain should be a place to rest on their further way, providing them with water and the feeling that they are welcomed.

We invite you to a journey to tear down the borders and to build another, a welcoming Europe!

Letter by Louisa O'Brien, representative of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines:

*This Memorial is a mark of shame. Shame that so many have to leave their homelands to find a life, or to be safe from persecution; shame on international communities past and present that have always looted and pillaged those homelands. Shame on a civilization that has no shame. Not far from here, human beings who survived their inhumane journeys are locked up in abysmal conditions. And they are the lucky ones. Since the minefields were laid in 1974, we know that well over 100 people have died on them. We believe that there were many more we never learned about. The survivors of landmine accidents face a life of continuous struggle and pain. In 2009 Greece declared itself mine-free. In the context of Evros this means that tens of thousands of anti-personnel landmines have been removed from the soil, causing over 30 Greek de-miners to die in the process. This memorial is also for them. The people who died here were forced to travel fugitively through the dark to try to arrive at a safe place. They didn't find it. May they not be forgotten.*

**"I HAD A LOT OF LUCK, I CAME THREE TIMES TO GREECE AND I AM STILL ALIVE."**

S. (refugee from Sudan) is searching for his missing friend Said in Evros/ Northern Greece

Soufli, 1st of September 2011

I want to tell you my story...

"My name is S. I am from Sudan. I have problem in Sudan. There are problems among the different tribes. In Sudan I had to go to military service but I don't want to participate in this war between tribes. I was thinking so much what to do. Some people told me to escape to Greece, because it is a country of freedom, a country with an old civilization. Greece is the land of the old philosophers. I was always reading them in Sudan. I wanted to study philosophy. I decided to go to Greece. I went to Libya, after Libya I went to Syria, after Syria I went to Turkey, after Turkey I came to Greece.

The first time I came over the sea. It was very dangerous. The coast guard caught us

in the sea. They said welcome, no problem. Then they took me to the camp (detention centre) of Samos. I was there for about one month. When I was released I went to Athina. I saw all people, the drugs, the police... They gave me "charti" (white paper: administrative deportation decision) and I left to Patra. I lived there maybe three months, but I couldn't manage to leave to Italy. After that, I went to Komunisia (Igoumenitsa). The police caught me many times. I was about 12 times in the prison. Now I am very afraid of the police and I got to know maybe 12 different cities. Sometime they arrested me because my "chartia" had become invalid, sometimes without any reason, sometimes in the "dingle" - you know dingle is to hide under the truck for going to Italy with the ship.

Some Greek police officers act like human beings but I remember something: The police beat my friend Samy in the kidney. Now Samy is dead. He died due to this injury.

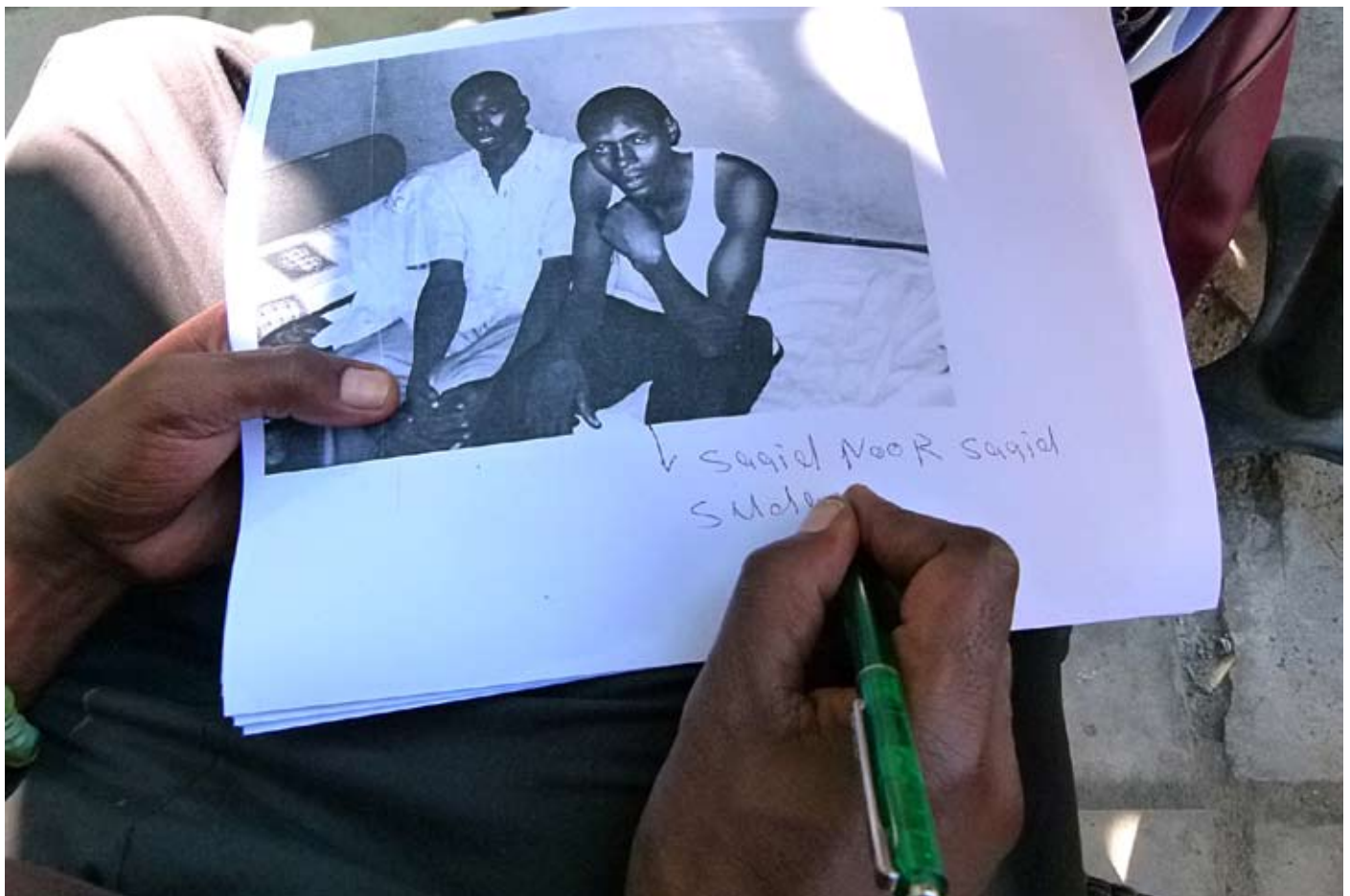
...for my friend Samy who died,

The first time I came here to Evros with my

friend Samy. Me and Samy had problems in Athina. The police beat Samy in the kidney and they put me in the prison. I was very afraid. I went back to Turkey and Samy left to another city. He went to Komunisia. I lived in Turkey about three months and came back to Greece.

I wanted to live with Samy because his father and my father are best friends. Me and Samy don't like military service because this is the problem of Sudan the fighting among tribes. You know the government in Khartoum has war with Darfur und South Sudan.

Last year I went to Italia, after Italia I went to France. I lived there maybe three or four months. Then I decided to return back to Sudan: Samy was back in Sudan and suffering because of the problem with his kidney. I wanted to help Samy. I wanted to give him my kidney. For Samy I came back to Sudan. The Sudanese police arrested me. They brought me to the military court because escaped from military service. They judged me a fine and that I had to do my



military service after nine months. Samy died. I could not save him. I escaped again. I went to Libya, after Libya again Syria, Turkey and then I was here again. I came back to Greece.

...for my friend Said who got lost, Now because my friend Said got lost, I have no good psychology. I have problems like many of my friends. Some of my friends died. Some are crazy now.

I came to Alexandroupoli because I want to find Said. He came here 20 days ago in order to re-

turn back to Turkey through the river Maritsa (Evros). He had no money to go back another way. Now, I am not sure if he died or if he is alive.

Said I met in Patra. He is from Darfur. I am from Khartoum. Although we are from different areas and these areas have war among each other, Said understands me. He told me I don't care about where you are from or who you are. I am with you. Said and me we want to make a friendship between Darfur and Khartoum. Said understands that I am from Khartoum but I am not like the President Al Bashir. Said is a good friend.

Said tried many times to leave from Greece. He did not manage. He decided to return to Turkey. He had no money to survive in Greece. He could not find any work. He had nothing. He was sleeping in the streets with

the homeless. Said said if I stay in Greece maybe I will get crazy. Maybe I will kill myself. He thought Turkey would be better than Greece. He left with two other friends together for Evros. They went to Orestiada. When they arrived at the river Maritsa they saw people. I don't know, maybe soldiers. They were very afraid and run into the water. Said cannot swim. His two friends crossed to the other side. When they arrived, they looked back, but there was no Said.

### Now, if Said died, I don't know what will happen to our dream

The family of Said called me and asked what happened. I don't know really. I came here to find out what happened. I have Said's photo. If I had to come here alone to look for him maybe I would have killed myself. Since three days we are looking for Said: in the prisons, in the hospital, at the river. ... (crying) ...

I feel alone. I can't express my feelings. I am very, very sad but I am also happy. Sad because of Said, because I am not sure if he died or not. And happy because I now have a family that is searching Said together with me. Really, this time I feel human! First time comes this feeling. Understand? Before many times I was thinking so much that me I am not human, not human.

I feel Said is still alive, because this flowers on the floor and the water... I feel some people call me from the military car that

passed by the other day. I heard somebody shouting my name. I don't know if it was real or maybe dream? But I feel Said is alive. I am thinking so much because I am not sure. Is Said alive or not? Maybe if I was sure, I would feel better.

The river Maritsa is very dangerous. It is a border and there are soldiers. The border is something very bad. They wanted to catch Said... if they didn't try to catch him maybe he would be alive. He would be in Turkey now. The river is very bad.

When I came through this border we went with a very small boat. It was very dangerous. There were many people in the small boat. Too many. Dangerous, very dangerous! I went when the weather was good. Cold weather is very dangerous. Hot weather less dangerous. Many refugees cannot swim.

When I looked at the river yesterday I was very afraid. I remember Said. I remember the wife of John. I remember many people died here in the Maritsa. All people dead.

I had a lot of luck I think, because I came three times to Greece and I am still alive. Two times through the sea, one time here in Maritsas. Very dangerous! But I am alive now! When I saw the river the first time I was very afraid, because I need my life! I want to do things in my life. I want to help Samy's wife. I want to write a book. I want to help my sisters in Sudan.

*Sometimes I dream of the river. Like yesterday. Really! It was strange. A bad dream. Me, I swim very well, but in the dream... I am shouting for help. When I saw the river yesterday I had the feeling of sadness. I wanted to finish my life.*

*The Greek government planned to build a fence here. This is better! Because Greece is very, very bad. You know, some people dead. Some people are now crazy: Said, Samy, Joker, Abdurahim... all now crazy. Closing the border is good! If I know somebody who wants to come to Greece I tell him: don't come, go anyway, go in the fire, but don't come to Greece! You know, here all people look at me. But I am not different! I am human! Mavros, mavros... black, black. Sometimes I am very sad if people look at me like this. Why? No have TV? No have internet? Don't come to Greece! Go anywhere else.*

*My dream is I want to write a book. I want to study philosophy. I want to make a family. I want a relaxed life. I want a good future. I don't want anymore problems! But I want my life to be out of Greece and not back in Sudan. Germany, Sweden, France, Norway... doesn't matter. I just can't go back to my home country because really it is dangerous for me. I did not make my military service so they will catch me and put me in the prison. Maybe 3-4 years... Now time is very bad in my country. Now Sudan has split into two countries. I can't go to Sudan but I also can't live here. I want to try to go out of Greece.*

*But first I need to know what happened to*

*Said. Now, I am not well, I cannot sleep. If I was sure that Said died it would be better. If I would know that he is alive even better. But now I am not sure if he died or not. His family is thinking so much. They are missing him so much. Every day they call me. His mother is so anxious that she got sick. She is in the hospital now. Maybe she will die, because she does not know what happened to him. Even if she would know for sure that he is dead, I think she would feel better and get healthy again. ...and for our dream of peace.*

*I need to know what happened to Said. Said is not my brother. He is my brother and father and friend. Everything! Me, I am from Khartoum, Said is from Darfur. My tribe and his tribe in Sudan fight against each other. The government makes this fighting because it wants all people of Sudan only to think about this and not about the real problems, the exploitation of the land and the patrol, the inequalities... Since 25 years it is like this. Said understands me, he helped me. Me and Said, we want to make a new friendship between Darfur and Khartoum.*

*Our relationship has to do with peace and with many other important things in life. Said is very smart, ok. He did not believe in anything like the lies of the government. Said is a good man.*

*Now, if Said died, I don't know what will happen to our dream because it's not my own dream only. My dream for the future was a shared one among me and Said. We dreamed of peace. I know it's difficult for*

*this dream to come true. Maybe Said comes back again. If Said died maybe other people will come from Sudan, people like Said. People with this dream of peace. I am going to try to become friends with other people the same like Said.*

*I am very sad in these days. I am very very sad! I have this feeling, I don't know, maybe not all people can understand this feeling. Me understand this feeling of Said. I am afraid, thinking so much, maybe this is a dream, maybe I wake up tomorrow and see Said smiling to me.*

*You know the other day at the fountain I had the impression that some people called my name. This is my feeling. I feel it's a dream maybe. Everyday, maybe tomorrow new time. I am waiting. Maybe it's all only a dream.*

*It is better that I came here to look for Said. Better than waiting for news in Patras! Maybe if I was now still in Patras I would be dead or crazy. Here I am going everyday to all prisons, I am going to the hospital, M. and you and S. help me. Now it's good. But really in Patra maybe I would have killed myself. Maybe I would have drunk drugs. Now that I went to Maritsa (river Evros) to look for Said I am better. Really after I saw Maritsa I felt better. Little rest. Better feeling, yes."*

## THE QUEST THROUGH THE PRISONS

We have to find Said. His brother sent an old photo of his to Samy's mail. Him with two friends in Turkey, while they were on their way to Greece. Samy writes Said's full name on a number of print outs of the photo. He writes his age, his nationality. In the end he writes just beneath Said's face: Sorry my friend!

In order to find Said we start looking in the prisons of Evros. There are four of them: Soufli, Tyhero, Ferres and Fylakio. With the photo in his hands Samy enters the prisons one by one. It is not easy for him. He is very afraid of the police and he is so anxious about Said's whereabouts. He feels all the responsibility on his shoulders. He feels Said's family waiting for answers. It is not easy to go to the prisons. We are not allowed to enter. Samy cannot go inside the cells and assure himself that Said is not there.

In Soufli the guards are not happy about our visit. "Go away. We have not time now. Don't you see that we are busy?" Only after we request to speak with the director he promises to show Said's picture to the detainees. He disappears for some minutes in the direction of the cell and returns. "Not here!"

Driving away we see three taxis and many refugees around in the village. They are from Pakistan. Just released. We ask the refugees if they have seen Said in prison. They don't understand. Instead the taxi drivers get quite nervous through our presence. Not strange, we think. They will probably take more than 1000 Euros to bring the refugees to Athens or elsewhere.

We go to Tyhero. The police is stressed out. They have a lot of newcomers that have to be registered. About 300! All of them wait outside at the back of the prison. They sit on cardboards and blankets. Women, men, children. Inside the

prison there are 55. Samy speaks to them through an elongate window nearly at the roof of the building. They press their faces on the bars. Some Nigerians, some from Santo Domingo. "We are almost six months here. We applied for asylum." We ask them if they have a lawyer. "Yes," says a Nigerian, "but our lawyer is not Ali Baba! He cannot say 'open sesame' and then the door will open!"

The registration marathon carries on. Most of these people will be released as soon as they are registered and receive their paper. They cannot be deported, due to their nationalities. There are so many arrivals during the summer, that the police cannot fit all these people inside the prisons. It is thus easier to let them wait outside until they can go. They will not run away. They wait for their paper anyway. The ones inside the prison belong to the persons that can be deported. Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians, Turks, Georgians, Nigerians and the ones from

Santo Domingo. Every now and then we see refugees leaving the group in order to find some hidden place to urinate.

At once, we see a well known face appear at the corner of the prison. It is Bijou, the young Congolese woman that was crying so desperately the other day. She is cowering at the corner just beneath the Greek flag and behind the police officer who has turned his back to her and she smiles brightly in our direction waving her hand playfully. We smile towards her and then she disappears just as quickly as she appeared.

We are not alone. There are two other small groups of people waiting closely to

the photo. They don't recognize him. "I don't think I ever saw him. When I arrived on Greece I heard there was an incident at the river. Some people drowned. They fell of an inflatable boat. I think six persons. But they were heading towards Greece. It was not him. You said he was going in the other direction and without a boat. I am sorry. Good luck!"

The public bus arrives at the prison. Only one person leaves it. He goes to the huge gate and asks the guard to see his brother. He holds a small plastic bag. "I brought clothes for my brother." He comes from far away. From the Netherlands. It is the second time he travels so

Iran," he tells us. "My brother is almost six months here. He applied for asylum. I have to go back all the way to Alexandroupoli now and take the bus tomorrow morning at 5 o'clock. (...) You know, I myself have been here 20 years before. I came with my family. We crossed the river. I don't know how we managed. It is not my first time here and now I am not alone. My friend is also in Alexandroupoli. He is from Syria and his brother is also in the prison here."

## THE RAILWAY STATION

In Orestiada railway station we visit a young Moroccan. Mounir is 23 years old. He wants to return to Morocco. Together with somebody who already cared much about him we meet him. He lives since days in a discarded train wagon. "I arrived in Greece through the river. I was arrested, brought to the prison. I stayed there for nearly one month, then I was released. I had no money, so I walked to Orestiada. It took me some hours. I came to this railway station. My plan was to go and find my uncle in Crete. I couldn't. Again, there was no money. Then I met this man. We became friends. I asked him for 35 euro to take the train and go to Athens. He gave me 100 instead. In Crete I was only 5 days. No money, no work and no good chance. I decided to go back to Morocco. In Athens I tried to get a laissez-passez from my embassy in order to return. They told me I had to pay the ticket by myself, but I had no money. So,



us. Some from Pakistan and some from Lybia. They are also looking for friend and relatives. But the officers are stressed and strict. "Nobody can enter here now," they shout.

Samy talks with the detained Nigerians and tries to hold the photo of Said up in order for them to recognize if they saw him or not. If he is inside or not. "No Sudanese here," they say. "Sorry!"

The police is not willing to check their computer or look at the photo of Said. We drive to Ferres prison. One women's cell one for men. The director is very friendly. He checks his computer for Saids name, for Sudanese, even for Nigerians. He makes some phone calls, but nothing. "I wish you good luck in finding Said," he says to Samy. "May god be with you!"

The next day we drive to the North. One prison is left. In the police directorate they tell us that there has only been one incident of a dead African migrant in the last month. There is no need to look at the photos of the corpse. He is much shorter than Said. Relief. Then we check the prison of Fylakio. No Said in the registration list. No Sudanese there the last month. Two Nigerian detainees look at

far to see his brother. The officer is not very keen to help. "It's not possible now. You have to come back tomorrow to see



him!" Then he shouts: "You see that we have a lot to do. Come tomorrow!" Disappointed and tired a man cowers at the gate. "I came from Alexandroupoli. The bus is gone." He looks sad. "I am from

I returned to Orestiada. I thought, maybe I can cross the river and go to Turkey and I thought, there is no other place for me to go. When I arrived there I became very afraid. I could not cross this river again.

My old friend supported me again with food and he helped me to call my family. Where should I find the money to go back?”

In small distance from Mounir there sit two Nigerians. They applied for asylum in detention. Since they were released two days ago, they sleep in the railway station. “We have to wait until tomorrow to go to our asylum interview, then

***“When I arrived on Greece I heard there was an incident at the river. Some people drowned.”***

we can leave.” Greece has not sufficient housing facilities for asylum-seekers anyway, so they will have to find a place on



their own. They are hungry. “We want to go to Athens after our interviews. There is no money. I don’t know how we will go.”

***“WE DON’T WANT EVROS TO BECOME ONE HUGE DETENTION CENTRE!”***

In a small village called Karoti, not far away from Didimotixo, the government is planning to built one of the “new type screening centres” that they had announced in the national action plan for asylum reform. These plans were implemented in the new asylum law of January 2011 but until today the government found a lot of obstacles in finding locations. As soon as Citizen Protection Ministry was giving names of possible locations for the screening centres, the local population was protesting. It happened in Western Greece in Amfilochia earlier this year and again in spring in Evros. The military base in Karoti planned to be used as screening centre was partly destroyed only shortly after by a fire. In a number of public protests and interviews local politicians spoke openly about their

disagreement of the governments’ plans. The main arguments concern the dangers the new screening centres would create for the local touristic economy. Disappointment grows also from the huge investments into the border surveillance, the fence and the screening centres. Money, that does not exist for the development of the local economy or society. Huge disagreements have been also expressed con-

cerning plans to build a 10,3 km fence along the Northern land border to Turkey in the area of Orestiada.

The mayor of Soufli spoke openly about his concerns:

“I absolutely disagree with the construction of the fence – me and the local society we disagree! The fence will not solve any problem. In contrary, it will just transfer the majority of border crossings from the North to the South of Evros. It will cost 5 million Euros –

maybe reaching 10 millions – and it will have unpredictable maintenance costs. And this, according to our information – will be costs covered by the Greek state. This money could be invested in regional development which could stop the younger generations from migrating to other parts of Greece. (...) We believe that this measure is inadequate and will create only expenses to Greece. Regarding the construction of new screening centers in the area we disagree. We have told our concerns also to the Minister. We will not allow and does not allow it regardless if it is cost. We will not allow it – whatever it takes. We are the first to condemn these prisons. In these places – I will say it with simple words and in a popular way – not

even pigs can survive, not to speak about human beings. This is why we insist that the detention centers they want to build will not be any better. (...) Me myself, I avoid going to the centers because I feel that human life is spurned. (...) These are no buildings for human beings. (...)

The aim of Frontex in being here is not to stop the entrance of people into Greece. Their aim is the registration. The information provision that from that point such many persons crossed. They are not needed. Migrants do not hide themselves anymore, they walk on the streets. This means, that the mere aim of Frontex is the registration, the entrance stamp of Greece. If tomorrow from wherever they went to they will be returned, they will be sent again to Greece. If somebody disagrees with what I say, he might explain to me why the presence of Frontex might be useful. But he should not tell me that there are less irregular migrants coming because of Frontex. These are Halimas’ fairytales. In the last winter numbers of border crossings were less because of the winter. Nobody can tell me that the presence of Frontex is something positive.”

## **NEWS FROM MOUNIR AND AHMAD**

With many difficulties and a lot of support Mounir, finally, had a chance to leave Greece and return back to his family, but it was destroyed by the Greek authorities.

“Some people helped me to go again to



Athens to the embassy. I borrowed money for the ticket. I found a ticket. Three days I slept in front of the embassy on the street together with other Moroccans who were waiting to return. We shared one place, we shared the little food we had. On the day of my departure I went to the



airport. I felt relief for some moments. Then I reached the police control. They tear up my laissez-passer and brought me to the prison. I don't know why. I lost my ticket, the money I had borrowed. I was not allowed to leave Greece. Isn't that what they want from us? To leave their country? What kind of country is this? I really don't know what else to expect..."

During our tour to Evros in 2011 Ahmad was missing. Only a few days after

our return, his relatives contacted us in order to inform us that they found him in Turkey. He is in a detention centre. The Turkish authorities caught him before he could reach the Greek side and transferred him to a prison in the inland.

## SURVIVORS IN DETENTION



In many cases of accidents at border crossings we have witnessed that survivors and also survivors who had lost relatives and friends, were detained following their rescue.

In Evros specifically, most of the times the survivors were detained immediately despite asking for help from the very first moment of their arrest. They did not know if their relatives and friends were alive or dead.

Their detention deteriorated their mental health and hindered the procedure of finding their relatives. There was no psychological support provided to the survivors. Upon their release they have never been referred to a competent organisation for support or housing. The police kept on detaining them without taking into account their vulnerability.

This was the case for Habibe from Iran who reported that she lost her two daughters in the river in the end of September 2011. Together with her husband she went upon arrival directly to the police directorate of Orestiada asking for help. The police arrested them. They were

taken to Fylakio where they were registered as Iranians and where they stayed in detention pending deportation. Even though the loss of the two children was officially reported to the police, they kept on detaining them with the aim of deportation in separate cells. They stayed for about three weeks in detention until the dead body of the younger daughter was

*"I don't care that I am the only Afghan staying in detention. I just care to find my brother alive"*

identified. During their detention they didn't have any psychological or social support. They were released without any referral to any kind of support. They were not told where to find the corpse of their daughter and what to do in the following procedure. They were also not told how to search for the still missing elder daughter.

*"There were two boats at the riverside. The first left with eight persons inside. We entered the second with a total of 13 persons. The boat turned around and we all fell into the water. Some of us could hold on the boat while others were carried away by the stream. We couldn't swim. The boat got*

*into a vortex so we could not orient ourselves anymore. We didn't understand which side was Turkish and which Greek! The ones of us holding on the boat reached the Turkish coast. Me and another woman were just trying to survive. The Turkish authorities rescued some of us. My two daughters and some others were carried away by the stream. I couldn't see them. I was trying to keep myself on the water. I just heard their voices shouting: 'Mother, help us!' The Turkish police searched for some hours for my daughters. Then they brought us to detention. I was desperate. We were brought to Istanbul and released. With the hope of finding my two daughters we returned to Greece. We crossed the river again and went directly to Orestiada Police Headquarters in order to report the loss of our daughters. We asked the police for help. They said we should tell that in the place they bring us. Then they brought us to Fylakio detention centre. Upon registration we said that we lost our daughters. It was horrible. We asked for help and they showed us a catalogue of food. By asking us about traditional meals they wanted to understand our nationality."*

Also Said from Afghanistan lost his 14-year-old brother at the border. Even though he reported the disappearance of his brother the police keeps them in detention in Tychero until today. He is in a very bad psychological condition.

*"In mid-August 2011 I was on my way to Greece with my 14-year-old brother. At the river we were separated. I was told to enter the boat and wait for my brother on the other side. I didn't want to leave him behind, but they didn't allow me to stay. When our boat arrived at the other side I looked back but there was no second boat following and no people to see anymore at the Turkish coasts. I waited, but nobody came. We were arrested and brought to Fylakio where I stayed only one day. I went to Athens in hope to find my brother there. For one and half month I was sleeping on the streets and*

*in the parks. I had no money; nothing to eat. Then my father called from Afghanistan. Our mother has died. He had no news from my brother. He told me I have to go and find my smaller brother. With the little money he sent to me I went back to Evros. I was walking along the rails when I arrived at the backside of Tychero detention centre. I stopped to ask for my brother. The police asked me for my papers. I showed them my deportation order. They said: 'Your papers are invalid we will put you into prison.' The*

*30-days period had passed. Upon registration I told that I am missing my brother. First they told me that they would help me. Then the interpreter said: 'You are lying!' I don't care that I am the only Afghan staying in detention. I just care to find my brother alive."*

These are only two cases of many. In most of the times the survivors are not identified during detention and not being helped. They have to start their quest

for the lost after their release and upon arrival in Athens, because there is no kind of support during detention. They have to contact NGOs to support them and they have to go back to Evros to search by themselves.

## THE JOURNEY GOES ON!

*"Unfortunately the corpses do not arrive here with a valid passport in their mouth!"*

As the Coroner of Thrace says, corpses are found most of the times by hunters or fishers of the area or by patrols of the border guards, soldiers or Frontex. When a dead body is recovered, it is immediately reported to the Police, which takes all the measures for the registration of the incident and the collection of possible evidences. The corpse is then brought to the Forensic Medical Service at Alexandroupoli's General University Hospital. The coroner after examining the body, takes a DNA sample for identification purposes. They then keep a record at the Police, with the deceased fingerprints, clothes and other personal items. If the corpse is identifiable, some pictures to establish his or her identity.

The legally defined period of keeping a corpse in the mortuaries' freezers is three months, but due to a lack of spare room or in advanced state of decomposition, usually an immediate burial is granted by

Alexandroupoli's Public Prosecutor.

Bodies are placed in cadaver pouches and handed over to the Funeral Office. At each body is given an identification protocol number, corresponding to the police's file, written with a permanent marker, in order to proceed with the DNA identification procedure, if needed.

If someone is looking for a missing family member, they can request to take a DNA test. After registration a hearse carries the body to one of the many Muslim cemeteries in the region (i.e Alexandroupoli, Didymoticho, Agriani). One of them is located in Sidiro. The village's cemetery began functioning as a burial place for dead migrants in 2000, when others reached capacity.

Since it is highly problematic to understand where which body has been buried on the cemetery of Sidiro it would be good to find new ways of marking the corpses and to imply a specific burial procedure to the Mufti. As the Coroner of Thraces stated, it is very helpful for them to get into contact with the relatives of the dead in order to follow-up the information the police and the hospital collect for the identification of the bodies and in order to give the dead a chance of a respectful burial and a last dignity.



The presence of a responsible person of the Forensic Medical Service during the burial is highly recommended: to assure the corpse can be found later, if relatives wish to bring their lost ones back home. This could be one concrete step to solve at least some of the existing general problems. For John (and many others) it is of big importance to complete the process of mourning by finally bringing Jane back home to Kenya.





## LOSTATBORDER.ANTIRA.INFO

A new blog was created in solidarity with migrants and refugees getting lost at the borders of Europe and in solidarity to those left behind, their relatives and friends. It is planned to become a small structure of support, providing answers to procedural questions, i.e. of searching for somebody who tried to cross a border but never appeared again and contacts to the institutions, NGOs and individuals that can help.

This blog is needed as long as there are destinies of people who lost their relatives at the land border between Greece and Turkey – in the region of Evros and beyond. It can become also a space of communication about stories of loss and of exchange of experiences.

Unfortunately every year hundreds of people disappear while trying to cross the European borders leaving their families and friends behind with anxiety and fear about their whereabouts. Since moving populations such as migrants and refugees often have their relatives in other countries waiting for

them, it can be quite difficult to find some information on what has happened when somebody is missing at the border. We want to help and fill this information gap. We want to connect the relatives and friends of border victims to each other and we want to let you know and feel that you are not alone on this journey! The borders that separate our world into pieces called nations are a construction of walls which have open doors for some while for others they are closed. We do not see them as a protection shield but as a killing machine that has no reason of existence. Our struggle is for a world without borders and for free movement of all people.

**NO BORDERS!**

**For more information visit:**  
<http://lostatborders.antira.info>  
<http://infomobile.w2eu.net>  
<http://w2eu.net>

## IMPRESSUM

Published in October 2011  
by Marion Bayer, Salinia Stroux, Marily Stroux,  
Chrissa Wilkens, Regina Mantanika and Reimer Dohrn  
Infomobile/ Welcome to Europe Network  
Pictures by: Salinia Stroux, Chrissa Wilkens,  
Hinrich Schultze, Marily Stroux  
Graphics: Lilli Birnstingl  
Download at: <http://infomobile.w2eu.net>  
Contact: [infomobile.w2eu@gmail.com](mailto:infomobile.w2eu@gmail.com)

Associated projects:  
<http://w2eu.net> – Welcome to Europe Network  
<http://w2eu.info> – Webguide for Refugees and Migrants  
<http://schengendangle.jogspace.net> – Blog for refugees on the move in Patras, Igoumenitsa and Calais  
<http://birdsofimmigrants.jogspace.net> -  
Blog for minor refugees  
<http://wohnschiffprojekt.blogspot.eu/> -  
Wohnschiffprojekt Hamburg

Donations for the Infomobile:  
Wohnschiffprojekt Altona E.V.  
Cue: Infomobile  
IBAN: DE06 2005 0550 1257 1227 37  
BIC: HASPDEHHXXX  
Within Germany:  
HASPA (Hamburger Sparkasse)  
BLZ 200 505 50  
Kt.-Nr.: 1257 122 737

**«If you are a refugee and you die  
nobody asks any questions,  
but for living somewhere  
everybody is questioning you.»**

