



# Infomobile Greece 2015

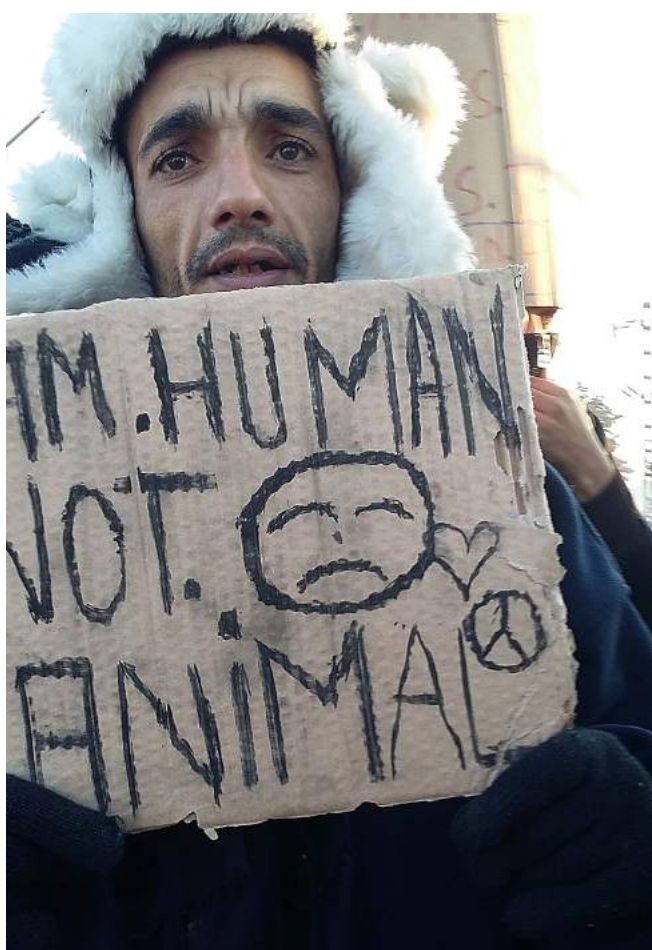
Nobody could have foreseen how quickly the situation in the Aegean changed in 2015, due to unpredictably high migration movements. More than 7.000 people arrived on the Greek island of Lesbos on a single day in late October 2015 and more than 56.000 people in the last week of October. When we stood on the beaches of northern Lesbos and experienced how one boat after another arrived there, while volunteers from all over Europe welcomed the newly arrived, one could have thought that this border had long been overrun and become a fact of the past. But, at the same time, we became witnesses of the loss of hundreds of people who drowned in the Aegean Sea. In view of the humanitarian crisis even the mayor of Mytilene demanded ferries that would transport people from Turkey to Greece so long as no safe paths to Europe existed.

The year 2015 brought many new developments, like the profile of the majority of refugees and the fast journey through Europe and to the "North". Until still today, more and more women and children, as well as old people, those injured through war, and the sick were now travelling. And while the first groups of travellers had to assert themselves at every border anew, as of September, people were able to move more quickly than ever before. Many of those we had encountered along this route in previous years needed months, if not years, to arrive because they were repeatedly arrested for months, were repeatedly

readmitted or pushed back or had run out of money and thus could not move on for certain periods. But at the end of 2015, the average time of travel amounted to merely two weeks, from Turkey to Germany.

In early 2016, the final closure of the Balkan corridor and the massive militarisation of the border between Turkey and Greece, through a novel mandate of the Greek military in coordinating reception and registration, the Frontex Rabit-mission, the recently deployed NATO vessels to the area, as well as the dirty deal between Europe and Turkey that introduced regular readmissions of the refugees detained following the implementation of the fatal agreement since its beginning on 20. March in the so called Hot Spots of the Aegean islands, raise various questions and make it difficult for us, maybe more than before, to make a prognosis. What is clear, however, is that the eastern maritime border of the European Union will remain a massively contested space and our presence there will continue, to support those on the move who enact their freedom of movement. In the following we will provide an overview of the Infomobile activities in 2015:

### **1) The border between Turkey and Greece: Attacks on refugee boats in the Aegean and Push-backs along the land border in Evros**



Since 2012, and in collaboration with Pro Asyl, we conduct interviews concerning push-backs and attacks on boats in the Aegean Sea and along the land border to Turkey in Evros, in order to monitor human rights violations at Europe's external border. In this process, a close collaboration with the Watch The Med Alarm Phone developed also, as further elaborated on below.

In the wake of the change of government in Greece in early 2015, we observed a rapid decline in push-backs through the Greek coastguards. Given the official announcements of government representatives to end human rights violations at sea, it seemed especially important to closely observe this new political phase to see whether things would change, or not. Since then, the Infomobile conducts follow-ups of individual cases passed on to us by the Alarm Phone, an emergency 'hotline' for refugees in distress at sea. In cases where refugee boats were attacked, or where those fleeing were pushed out of Greek territory via the Evros border river, we tried a few days later to speak again to those affected, in order to find out more about and to document the events. What we learned through the interviews was that there was indeed a considerable decline in push-

backs. However, at the same time, there was an increase in pull-backs and attacks by the Turkish coastguards. Along the land border, everything seemed to remain the same: push-



backs continue to be the sad daily reality there, both at the Greek and Bulgarian land border to Turkey.

At the moment, we focus on our joint observations and documentation, especially since the increased Frontex deployment in the Aegean as part of the replacement of the Poseidon operation through the Rabbit mission, as well as the start of the NATO operation in February 2016, conducted by a fleet composed of 5 vessels.

You can find an example of an interview conducted by Infomobile from July 2015 here:

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

The Alarm Phone published a press release concerning the attacks on refugee boats already in August 2015:

→ [http://alarmphone.org/en/2015/08/05/alarm-phone-press-release-distress-at-sea-and-endangered-lives-due-to-coastguard-actions/?post\\_type\\_release\\_type=post](http://alarmphone.org/en/2015/08/05/alarm-phone-press-release-distress-at-sea-and-endangered-lives-due-to-coastguard-actions/?post_type_release_type=post)

## 2) New arrivals in the Aegean and on Crete: The 'refugee crisis' in summer 2015

In May 2015, Infomobile uncovered how the Greek administration marked refugees on Crete with numbers written on their hands. The scandalisation of this degrading practice to register and administer refugees was then picked up and discussed by the media.

→ <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/05/15/greek-authorities-mark-arms-of-in-crete-stranded-syrian-refugees-with-registration-numbers/>

In July 2015 we offered updates concerning the situation of refugees on Lesbos:

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

→ <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2012/03/20/immigrants-detention-camp-to-be-created-in-kozani/>

As part of the third camp 'journey back to the border' in August 2015, organised by Youth without Borders (JOG), Welcome to Europe (w2eu) and Infomobil/Welcome-Islands, we discussed the situation with the roughly 50 participants, most of whom had once fled via Greece into the EU as youths or even as children. A documentation of the journey will probably be released in April 2016.

The letter announcing last year's journey can be found here:

→ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/04/journey-back-to-the-border-part-iii/>







Im Oktober 2015 dokumentierten Publications during the 'journey back to the border' camps:

- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/14/arrival-in-mytilini-and-construction-of-the-camp/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/15/journey-iii-first-impressions/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/19/journey-back-part-iii-1-day-at-the-port/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/19/45-syrian-refugees-arriving-at-charamida-beach/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/20/horror-in-the-port-of-mytilini/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/20/about-the-port-police-control-of-a-member-of-the-journey-back-to-theborder-iii/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/20/children-in-the-port-of-mytilini/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/21/everybody-is-in-alle-sind-dabei/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/22/new-greek-law-it-is-legal-to-transport-refugees-in-a-privat-car/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/22/the-feeling-coming-back-to-the-border-after-6-years/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/25/801/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/27/journey-back-part-iii-what-solidarity-means-to-me/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/27/freedom-of-movement-for-everyone/>
- ➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/29/a-little-story-about-justified-anger-journey-back-to-the-borders-part-iii/>



In September 2015, we repeatedly became witnesses of police brutality on Lesbos, an issue, which accompanies us unfortunately for many years already.

→ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/09/06/police-violence-in-the-port-of-mytilini/>

In October 2015, we documented regularly the ongoing developments in the deportation centre/first reception centre/hotspot 'Moria' on Lesbos. We thereby uncovered in particular cases of police brutality and we also criticised the inhumane conditions in the camp.

- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/05/moria-lesbos-registration-chaos-police-violence-hunger-thirst-and-sleeping-rough/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/06/moria-lesbos-this-looks-like-the-end-of-the-world-here/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/07/moria-lesbos-tear-gas-and-beatings-continue-while-families-wait-in-the-mud-all-the-night/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/08/moria-lesbos-registration-speeded-up-a-few-days-before-visit-of-un-high-commissioner-for-refugees/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/11/moria-lesbos-disastrous-conditions-in-the-future-hot-spot-while-un-high-commissioner-for-refugees-visits-the-island/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/12/moira-lesbos-kara-tepe-re-opens-as-mere-accommodation-camp-and-registration-in-moria-breaks-down/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/15/moria-lesbos-chaotic-registration-queues-leave-refugees-under-inhumane-conditions-for-hours/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/21/moria-lesbos-hot-spot-reminds-of-war-zone/>
- <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/25/moria-lesbos-rain-sodden-feet-frozen-white-hands-hypothermic-pregnant-women-and-trampled-down-children/>



In this context, and in cooperation with the Watch The Med Alarm Phone, a joint letter was written, in which we denounced also the disastrous collaboration between the Greek administration and Frontex.

→ <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/10/24/frontex-slows-down-registration-procedures-in-hot-spot-moria-leaving-refugees-for-days-in-life-threatening-conditions/>

In October 2015, the story of Nasimgul was published in print. Nasimgul was a former resident of the self-organised welcome centre PIKPA. After a shipwreck near Lesbos, she survived 18 hours in the sea but lost sight of her small daughter. Nasimgul and also her daughter survived and this is their story:

➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/10/08/how-nasingul-survived-the-waves-new-w2eu-booklet-for-download-now/>

### 3) Athens Transit: Humanitarian Crisis in Cities and Homelessness

In July 2015, the Infomobile published a solidarity call for the support of homeless refugees in light of the incipient refugee crisis in summer 2015. Together with residents of the Welcoming Island we visited daily the Paidion tou Areos Park and the Viktoria Square in order to provide emergency support in individual cases, to offer advice as well as to provide immediate support for dozens of homeless families. We brought tents, blankets, clothes, food, milk and mosquito repellent for children, amongst others. We also informed Doctors without Borders about the urgent need for medical care for the homeless, brought unaccompanied minors to supportive NGOs and informed other solidarity groups about the urgent necessity for help. About two weeks later, nearly all organisations involved in refugee support as well as migrant communities sent representatives to the homeless refugees (offering help to greater or lesser degrees). The problems that these people faced were brought to the attention of the mass media, creating political pressure onto the government to find solutions. With the increasing number of newly arrived refugees, the number of tents in public spaces of Greek cities grew as well, and public debates now focussed on the humanitarian crisis. The solidarity call of Infomobile can be found here:

➔ <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/07/22/21-7-15-w2eu-infomobile-greece-call-for-solidarity-for-refugees-in-greece/>







A short time later and under a lot of time pressure, Elaionas was opened, the first open state-run facility for transit-refugees. The camp opened in August 2015 and many of the homeless refugees from the Paidion tou Areos Park found accommodation there. About 700 people can find temporary shelter there in container buildings. However, in midsummer, these spaces did not suffice any longer to cater the need. The government had to find other, even more provisional solutions and created mass accommodation facilities in the former Olympic sports facilities in the city districts of Elliniko, Galatsi and Paleo Faliro. Currently, Greece faces an even much larger humanitarian crisis. Closures of the borders to FYROM/Macedonia would lead to a complete collapse of reception structures. In the past months, the Infomobil visited repeatedly the mass accommodation facilities in Galatsi, Elliniko and Palaio Faliro and documented the situation of the people there. At the moment, only the sports facility in Elliniko constitutes a mass accommodation facility where about 900 people can be accommodated. Still up to 700 people seeking protection can find shelter in the open camp in Elaionas. Already now the new state-run reception facilities do not suffice. Moreover, many groups are completely barred from accommodation as access for people of certain nationalities is denied. Moroccans and others from the Maghreb are even threatened directly by imprisonment in pre-removal detention centres. Even for those who have decided to claim asylum in Greece, it remains very difficult to find a place in a state-run accommodation facility. In late January, following accounts of the UNHCR, there were merely 2.190 places of accommodation for asylum-seekers and unaccompanied minors – and that in light of the average 10.000 asylum claims made annually in the past three years. The UNHCR wants to create 20.000 accommodation places, for example in guesthouses and hotels, in order to accommodate those who are the most vulnerable, asylum-seekers and relocation-cases. However, the process to accomplish that is very slow. The UNHCR warned

other European countries in late 2015 to not return those in need of protection to Greece, amongst others because of the deficient structures, problems to access the asylum system, other human rights violations and racist violence.

→ <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2016/01/27/if-the-border-to-fyrom-closes-reception-conditions-in-athens-for-refugees-will-become-unbearable/>

#### 4) Idomeni/Border to Macedonia: Violence, Racism and inhumane conditions

In 2015, the Infomobile also travelled to the Greek-Macedonian land border in Idomeni. There we documented ongoing situations during different periods of time. In addition, the Infomobile created contacts to local support groups and NGOs and informed them about the project. We were there in late August 2015 when the situation between those seeking protection and borderguards escalated. FYROM/Macedonia had declared a state of emergency and closed the border to Greece in parts. We visited Idomeni again in early December 2015, during the protest campaigns by those not from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, who were not allowed to cross the border. We spoke to refugees from Somalia, Yemen, Uganda, Iran, Pakistan, Morocco and other countries and informed them about the situation in Greece and in other European countries. We also documented human rights violations at the border through police forces or criminal groups. In collaboration with supporters and NGOs, we were able to provide legal and organisational support in individual cases, especially as there was a lack of information and orientation on site due to the large number of refugees.

An Infomobile report about Idomeni in December 2015 can be found here:

→ <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/12/10/police-raid-in-idomenirefugees-trapped-in-athens-now/>



#### 5) Unaccompanied Minors in Greece

In 2015, through the Cobler-foundation, we were able to fund legal support for individual unaccompanied minors who were imprisoned in Greece. In addition, we provided advice in 2014/2015 to hundreds of youths, conducted dozens of interviews and supported individuals when going to the authorities, in matters of family reunification, during the asylum process and their protests, as well as in other situations. Due to the lack of accommodation facilities, the new government also chose to use the 'better alternative', the so-called protective custody until an appropriate place of accommodation could be found. Hence, in early 2015, unaccompanied minors continued to be detained for up to two months in inhumane conditions. Many others were mistakenly registered as adults and were as such arrested together with adults, once their



papers expired. The slight decline of arrivals in winter 2014/2015 brought a little relief to the accommodation facilities and also the duration of detention decreased. However, up until mid-2015 when the border to Macedonia was opened and a legal corridor through the Balkan emerged, there were still dozens in detention, especially in the detention facility of Amygdaleza (Athens). In the phase that followed, with only a few exceptions, most of the many children and youths who had fled, registered as adults. The few who did not do that or who were, exceptionally, recognised by the authorities as unaccompanied minors, protested against protective



custody, for example by conducting hunger strikes. In summer 2015, they set the camp on the island of Lesbos near Moria on fire. Many fled the first reception facilities on the islands. Others did not succeed in their attempts to escape over barbed wire fences, and ended up, for example, with broken limbs. Several dozens of unaccompanied minors harmed themselves or even attempted suicide, and that already after merely a few days in protective custody. In individual cases, instances of police brutality in protective custody emerged.

Ultimately and throughout the year, thousands of unaccompanied minors, registered as adults, disappeared after a few days through the Balkans, north-bound. Only when in November 2015 the passage of the Balkan route was restricted to three nationalities, accommodations for minors in Greece filled up again. At the moment, in light of the imminent closure of the border to Macedonia, a worsening of the situation of unaccompanied minors looms. This is why we plan also this year to focus on supporting unaccompanied minors, and we will submit a consecutive application to the Cobler-foundation. A report about the situation of unaccompanied minors in Greece in 2015 will soon be published.

This project led also to another project in Hamburg, the “First Steps” (Erste Schritte) project of the *Wohnschiffprojekts Hilfe für Flüchtlingskinder e.V.*, which had received initial funding from the *Hamburger Spendenparlament*. Contact was established to unaccompanied minors from Greece who arrived in Germany and approached us for help. “First Steps” offers support to groups of unaccompanied minors, with the main aim to encourage self-help, exchange and the treatment of past and present experiences, as well as future possibilities. We accompany the minors for over a year now by encouraging discussions, by organising





regular cooking sessions and by offering various creative activities. An interim report will be published in the next few days.

Concerning the protests and hunger-strikes of unaccompanied minors in Greece, see amongst others:

➔ <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2015/03/20/hunger-strike-of-unaccompanied-minors-in-lithi-police-station/>

## **6) Cooperation and building participatory structures**

Due to the dramatically changed situation on the Aegean islands and also later on along the Balkan route, we intensified our efforts to cooperate with other activist networks in 2015. We want to elaborate on the four main examples in more detail here:

### **a. Welcome to Greece Guide/Advice to Refugees in the Aegean: Cooperation with Medico International**

In summer 2015, we printed an updated edition of the welcome guide 'Welcome to Greece!' with the most important information concerning Greece in four different languages (English, Farsi, Arabic, French). Already the year before we had distributed this guide during the 'journey back to the border' to those who had just arrived. In 2015, there were so many that we increased the quantity and in October we had to reprint a second updated edition. All in all, we printed and distributed 55.000 Welcome to Greece guides, most of which were in Arabic and Farsi.



Welcome to Greece guide:

➔ <http://w2eu.info/greece.en/articles/greece-guide.en.html>

In addition, we created the Dublin guide in August 2015 with a focus on the Balkan EU member-states, which was also printed in great quantities during the ‘journey back to the border’ and distributed, mainly in Arabic:

➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/08/25/information-for-refugees/>

When Skynews reported about the ‘Welcome to Greece’ guide in a denunciatory way in September 2015 (falsely claiming that the guide was produced by Turkish smugglers who would sell it to the highest bidders), we received increasing media requests. We then posted some information concerning the emergence of the guide on our blog to provide answers to frequently asked questions:

➔ <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/2015/09/15/welcome-to-greece-some-facts-about-the-refugee-guide-of-welcome-to-europe/>

Due to the high costs of printing in such high volumes, we began to cooperate with Medico International who had become active for the first time within Europe and had started to report more also about the situation along the Balkan route, in cooperation with the Moving Europe Bus (see below):

➔ <https://www.medico.de/fluechtlingshilfe-weltweit-16230/>

#### b. **Watch The Med/Alarm Phone – The Situation in the border area Turkey-Greece**

Three journeys to Turkey took place in cooperation with the Alarm Phone in 2015. During these journeys we mostly distributed the number of the Alarm Phone and ‘Safety at Sea’ information on site and in this way got into conversation with those who sought to travel on. Together we observed and documented human rights violations along the Turkish-Greek border. More information about the Alarm Phone can be found here:

➔ <http://alarmphone.org/en/>

#### c. **Moving Europe**

“Moving Europe” is a cooperative project between bordermonitoring.eu, Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration, Medico International and Welcome to Europe, which was launched in late October. The Moving Europe Bus provides refugees on the Balkan route with electricity for mobile phones, internet and especially with information for their journeys. In April 2016, a meeting of both busses, Infomobile Greece and Moving Europe, is planned at the



Greek-Macedonian border – ideally also with a small delegation from Germany that will travel back to the border, similar to the ‘journey back to the border’ project organised by Welcome to Europe and Youth without Borders. Further information about Moving Europe can be found here:

→ <http://moving-europe.org/>

#### d. **Web-guide Welcome to Europe: Flyers and Live-feed**

Not least, we would like to point to the web-guide w2eu.info. Parallel to the Infomobile and in close cooperation, Welcome to Europe provides already since the beginning of 2010 the web-guide w2eu.info in four languages and with information for refugees and migrants on their way to and through Europe – with the clear aim to support the struggle for the freedom of movement. Through these activities, a lively network emerged, allowing those fleeing to find support when encountering various problematic situations along their journeys. This network formed out of support structures has proven its value last year, when more and more people got in touch with us, especially on the migratory journeys from Greece via the Balkan route. Besides the above mentioned printed info-guide ‘Welcome to Greece’ and a longer guide for the Balkan route in August 2015, we contributed to several other info-flyers and focused on distributing information in print. For example, an information flyer concerning the deportation threats toward Afghans in Germany was written and similarly a flyer on how to deal with fingerprinting in Bulgaria. Both flyers aimed at passing on practical advice to those concerned, including advice on how they could become active. They were published entitled ‘Information against the fear’. The flyer concerning deportations to Afghanistan can be found here:

→ <http://w2eu.info/germany.en/articles/germany-deportation-afghanistan.en.html>

And concerning fingerprinting in Bulgaria here:

→ <http://w2eu.info/bulgaria.en/articles/bulgaria-dublin2.en.html>

In addition, a live-feed was added to the more static and more long-term valid web-guide, in order to pass on up-to-date information concerning the situation at the border crossings along the Balkan route. By now, the live-feed is mainly fed with information by the team of the Moving Europe Bus who also continue to print and distribute updated info-flyers: on the one hand in Idomeni at the Greek-Macedonian border, and on the other hand in Serbia where the migration route from Greece meets the route via Bulgaria. The live-feed of Welcome to Europe can be found here:

→ <http://live.w2eu.info/>

#### 7) **Support of Individual Cases**

We used increasing donations, to the extent possible, also for urgent emergency support. The Infomobile supported, amongst others, dozens of unaccompanied minors so that they could buy ferry tickets from Lesvos to Piraeus. We supported people who had lost their relatives on the journey to Greece or whose relatives passed away on Lesvos, as well as those who had injured themselves during this dangerous journey or in reception centres. We also supported homeless refugees in Athens, not least by organising accommodation in the two apartments on the Welcoming Islands. Our support of individual cases focussed





especially on vulnerable groups of refugees, such as unaccompanied minors, families with small children, victims of torture and police violence, shipwreck survivors, and relatives of border-victims, the sick, the old and the mentally ill.

#### **8) Welcoming Islands**

We financed two apartments in 2015 through private donations where at times 8 refugees were accommodated at the same time. Amongst them were Afghans, Eritreans, Somali, women, men and unaccompanied minors. While, up until the middle of the year, we had a relatively stable group of residents, several families in transit were accommodated since summer 2015. Some of our long-term residents are by now in Germany. Currently new people are moving in, most of whom we know from Idomeni. These are people who do not belong to the three nationalities that are allowed to travel on and who are, at least temporarily, imprisoned in Greece. A report on the Welcoming Islands will be translated to English soon.

#### **Prospects for 2016**

In March 2016 there will be another cooperative project between Watch The Med Alarm Phone and Infomobile Greece concerning push- and pull-backs at the Turkish-Greek sea border. Also, another joint journey to Izmir is planned. For early April 2016 we want to organise an Infomobile bus-meeting in Idomeni (Greece). Besides the Greek Infomobile, the Moving Europe Bus, activists of the Infomobil/Noborder Serbia, as well as the Infomobil Hamburg will join. One of the planned collective actions will be to create a memorial in Macedonia to remember refugees who lost their lives along the Balkan route, especially



along the train path in Macedonia. The Infomobile will presumably stay in Lesvos in summer 2016 for a longer time, in order to offer advice to the newly-arrived. A memorial for the victims of the sea border, organised jointly with Youth without Borders and Watch The Med Alarm Phone as part of the annual 'back to the border' camp, is contemplated without fixed dates.

Throughout the year, various journeys to Idomeni, Patras, and Athens are planned, with the main aim to offer advice to refugees, to distribute w2eu.info guides, to document human rights violations, to support individual cases, and to network with other grassroots-Antira groups in the different places.

*Infomobile Greece / w2eu*

## **IMPRESSUM**

<http://infomobile.w2eu.net/>

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