

STOP

THE

PUSHBACKS

•
demonstration

sappho square

2nd july

11:00

open assembly against border violence

In recent months we have been experiencing the long-awaited return to normality here on Lesbos - fewer and fewer migrant boats are arriving on the island, the numbers of people living in the Mavrovouni camp are plummeting. The so-called "refugee crisis" seems to be coming to an end. But this change is neither due to improved conditions in the countries from which the displaced people are coming, nor a better handling by European countries. On the contrary there is a cruel cost of this relaxation: Pushbacks. And pushbacks mean extreme violence and murder.

PUSHBACK describes the practice of forcing people back over a border - generally immediately after crossing it. While the Greek and other European governments continue to deny it, we know for a fact that pushbacks are happening with great frequency and with extreme violence.



Testimonies of vicious brutality

There are countless testimonies of people who have been dragged back into Turkish waters and **left to drift** on a raft in the middle of the sea, **exposed to death** if they are not rescued.

There are photos and videos of masked men on Greek Coast Guard vessels shouting and pointing guns, brutally **beating** people with long sticks, jumping into the rubber boat and **destroying the engine**, or creating huge waves with risky manoeuvres, sometimes leading to a **capsize** of the small rubber boat.

There are stories of police officers **hunting newly arrived groups** of migrants **with dogs** out of their hiding spots in the forest, forcing them into boats and dragging them out to sea, back to the Turkish border.

There are many reports of police and coast guards **robbing the people** during the pushback, taking all their belongings, including phones, all their money, papers and in some cases even the clothes, pushing them back to Turkey naked.

There were seven dead bodies washed up at the shore of this island, on Epano Skala on 1st March 2022, bodies of people who were reported missing after their attempt to cross borders.



Greek coast guards fire into sea near migrant boat (BBC News, March 2, 2020).

If we look and listen, it becomes blatantly obvious that violent crimes are happening in front of the shores of Lesbos almost every night. Every time we see a coast guard vessel leaving the port to patrol the sea border, we know that most likely people in inflatable boats are facing terror, danger of their lives and perhaps death at sea.



The body of an unidentified man is seen washed up on a beach on the Greek island of Lesbos on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. (AP Photo/Panagiotis Balaskas)

Obviously, the Greek coastguard is following the orders of the Greek state. And obviously the EU is aware of the crimes committed at the Greek borders and the violation of international conventions and immigration and asylum laws. EU not only allows this violence to happen, but actively reinforces it, as this is exactly the current European policy around migration: guarding the European borders at all costs and deterring immigration by scaring people that they will be drowned, abused, impoverished, or killed.

And while we do not expect states to care about human life, since they have always seen us and will always see us as numbers, the most frightening thing is the society that, although it knows, does not react. But how did we get here? Since 2015, when the island residents often took it upon themselves to rescue and care for the people who arrived, we are now at a point where all this violence and devaluation of human life find no resistance, but silence.

The Greek governments turned the "refugee crisis" into a business for national and international corporations and organizations and turned Lesbos and the surrounding islands into prisons, in order to keep the problem in a contained area and to receive the generous EU funds.

At the same time they reinforced and spread the propaganda of the "dangerous migrant", directing the social anger and indignation generated by their policies towards the displaced people.

And slowly we as a society stopped believing in what our eyes see- ordinary people risking their lives, crossing borders in search of a better life - and believed what we were told: that they were dangerous illegal invaders.

On 1st of March 7 dead bodies were washed up on Epano Skala. No official explanation or investigation. A few publicity stunts and then silence again. Have we finally become accustomed to horror and death? Have we settled for turning a blind eye to it all in exchange for getting our already stunted lives back?

**WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY DO WE
BECOME IF WE DO NOT RESIST THIS
CRUELTY?**

**LET'S RISE UP AGAINST PUSHBACKS
AND BORDER VIOLENCE.**

**LET'S RISE UP FOR DIGNITY, LIFE
AND FREEDOM.**

**JOIN US FOR A DEMONSTRATION ON
2ND JULY, STARTING AT 11:00 ON
SAPFOUS SQUARE.**