

***Everyone Knew the Migrant Ship Was Doomed. No One Helped.***  
***Matina Stevis-Gridneff & Karam Shoumali - The New York Times***



*A undated handout photo provided by the Greek Coast Guard showing migrants onboard the Adriana before it capsized off the coast of Greece. © Hellenic Coast Guard/Reuters*

*From air and by sea, using radar, telephone and radio, officials watched and listened for 13 hours as the migrant ship Adriana lost power, then drifted aimlessly off the coast of Greece in a slowly unfolding humanitarian disaster.*

*As terrified passengers telephoned for help, humanitarian workers assured them that a rescue team was coming. European border officials, watching aerial footage, prepared to witness what was certain to be a heroic operation.*

*Yet the [Adriana capsized and sank](#) in the presence of a single Greek Coast Guard ship last month, killing more than 600 migrants in a maritime tragedy that was shocking even for the world's deadliest migrant route.*

*Satellite imagery, sealed court documents, more than 20 interviews with survivors and officials, and a flurry of radio signals transmitted in the final hours suggest that the scale of death was preventable.*

*Dozens of officials and coast guard crews monitored the ship, yet the Greek government treated the situation like a law enforcement operation, not a rescue.*

*Rather than send a navy hospital ship or rescue specialists, the authorities sent a team that included four masked, armed men from a coast guard special operations unit.*



*Survivors of the Adriana shipwreck sleeping at a warehouse on June 14 at the port in Kalamata, Greece. © Thanassis Stavrakis/Associated Press*

*The Greek authorities have repeatedly said that the Adriana was sailing to Italy, and that the migrants did not want to be rescued. But satellite imagery and tracking data obtained by The New York Times show definitively that the Adriana was drifting in a loop for its last six and a half hours. And in sworn testimony, survivors described passengers on the ship's upper decks calling for help and even trying to jump aboard a commercial tanker that had stopped to provide drinking water.*

*On board the Adriana, the roughly 750 passengers descended into violence and desperation. Every movement threatened to capsize the ship. Survivors described beatings and panic as they waited for a rescue that would never come.*

*The sinking of the Adriana is an extreme example of a longtime standoff in the Mediterranean. Ruthless smugglers in North Africa cram people onto shoddy vessels, and passengers hope that, if things go wrong, they will be taken to safety. But European coast guards often postpone rescues out of fear that helping will embolden smugglers to send more people on ever-flimsier ships. And as European politics have swung to the right, each new arriving ship is a potential political flashpoint.*



*A plainclothes port police officer escorting two Egyptian men, part of a group of nine Egyptians who were arrested, on June 15 in Kalamata. © Stelios Misinas/Reuters*

*So even as passengers on the Adriana called for help, the authorities chose to listen to the boat's captain, a 22-year-old Egyptian man who said he wanted to continue to Italy. Smuggling captains are typically paid only when they reach their destinations.*

*The Greek Ministry of Maritime Affairs said it would not respond to detailed questions because the shipwreck was under criminal investigation.*

*Despite many hours of on-and-off surveillance, the only eyewitnesses to the Adriana's final moments were the survivors and 13 crew members aboard the coast guard ship, known as the 920. A Maritime Ministry spokesman has said that the ship's night-vision camera was switched off at the time.*

*Court documents show that the coast guard captain gave the authorities a CD-ROM containing video recordings, but the source of the recordings is unclear, and they have not been made public.*



*Survivors of the Adriana shipwreck waiting to be taken to a refugee camp in Kalamata. © Eirini Vourloumis for The New York Times*

*Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of Greece defended the coast guard during comments in Brussels this past week, calling its critics “profoundly unfair.” The sinking has brought rare public criticism from officials in the European Union, which has remained silent as the Greek government has hardened its stance toward migrants.*

*In Greece, nine Egyptian survivors from the Adriana were arrested and charged with smuggling and causing the shipwreck. In sworn testimonies and interviews, survivors said that many of the nine brutalized and extorted passengers.*

*But interviews with relatives of those accused paint a more complicated picture. At least one of the men charged with being a smuggler had himself paid a full fee of more than \$4,000 to be on the ship.*

*Collectively paying as much as \$3.5 million to be smuggled to Italy, migrants crammed into the Adriana in what survivors recalled was a hellish class system: Pakistanis at the bottom; women and children in the middle; and Syrians, Palestinians and Egyptians at the top.*

*An extra \$50 or so could earn someone a spot on the deck. For some, that turned out to be the difference between life and death.*



*Men carrying body bags from the Greek Coast Guard ship 920 to a refrigerated truck at the port in Kalamata on June 14. © Angelos Tzortzinis/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images*

*Many of the passengers, at least 350, came from Pakistan, the Pakistani government said. Most were in the lower decks and the ship's hold. Of them, 12 survived. The women and young children went down with the ship.*

### **Setting Sail**

*Kamiran Ahmad, a Syrian teenager, a month shy of his 18th birthday, had arrived in Tobruk, Libya, with hopes for a new life. He had worked with his father, a tailor, after school. His parents sold land to pay smugglers to take him to Italy, praying that he would make it to Germany to study, work and maybe send some money home. "We had no choice but to send him by sea," his father said in an interview.*

*But as the Adriana set sail at dawn on June 9, Kamiran was worried. His cousin, Roghaayan Adil Ehmed, 24, who went with him, could not swim. And the boat was overcrowded, with nearly twice as many passengers as he had been told.*

*No life vests were available, so Roghaayan paid \$600 to get himself, Kamiran and a friend to an upper deck.*

*They were part of a group of 11 young men and boys from Kobani, a mainly Kurdish city in Syria devastated by more than decade of war. The group stayed in dingy, rented rooms in Beirut, Lebanon, then flew to Egypt and on to Libya.*

*The youngest, Waleed Mohammad Qasem, 14, wanted to be a doctor. When he heard that his uncle Mohammad Fawzi Sheikhi was going to Europe, he begged to go. On the flight to Egypt, the two smiled for a selfie.*

*Haseeb ur-Rehman, 20, a motorcycle mechanic from the Pakistan-administrated Kashmir, felt he had to leave home to help his family survive. Together with three friends, he paid \$8,000 and left for Libya.*

*He was one of the few Pakistanis who managed to snatch a spot on deck.*

*The journey, if all went well, would take three days.*

*As early as the second day, survivors recalled, the engine started breaking down.*

### **Lost**

*By Day 3, food and clean drinking water had run out. Some migrants put dried prunes in seawater, hoping the sweetness would mellow the saltiness. Others paid young men \$20 for dirty water.*

*Unrest spread as it became clear that the captain, who was spending most of his time on a satellite phone, had lost his way.*

*When Pakistanis pushed toward the upper deck, Egyptian men working with the captain beat them, often with a belt, according to testimony. Those men, some of whom are among the nine arrested in Greece, emerged as enforcers of discipline.*

*Ahmed Ezzat, 26, from the Nile Delta, was among them. He is accused of smuggling people and causing the shipwreck. In an interview, his brother, Islam Ezzat, said that Ahmed disappeared from their village in mid-May and re-emerged in Libya weeks later.*

*He said a smuggler had sent someone to the family home to collect 140,000 Egyptian pounds, or \$4,500, the standard fee for a spot on the *Adriana*.*

*Islam said he did not believe Ahmed had been involved in the smuggling because he had paid the fee. He said the family was cooperating with the Egyptian authorities. Ahmed, like the others who have been charged, has pleaded not guilty.*

### **'They Will Rescue You'**

*By Day 4, according to testimonies and interviews, six people in the hold of the ship, including at least one child, had died.*

*The next day, June 13, as the *Adriana* lurched toward Italy between engine breakdowns, migrants on deck persuaded the captain to send a distress call to the Italian authorities.*

*The *Adriana* was in international waters then, and the captain was focused on getting to Italy. Experts who study this migratory route say that captains are typically paid on arrival. That is supported by some survivors who said their fees were held by middlemen, to be paid once they had arrived safely in Italy.*

*The captain, some survivors recalled, said the Italian authorities would rescue the ship and take people to shore.*

*Just before 1 p.m., a glimmer of hope appeared in the sky. A plane.*

*Frontex, the European Union border agency, had been alerted by the Italian authorities that the Adriana was in trouble and rushed to its coordinates. There was no doubt the ship was perilously overloaded, E.U. officials said, and unlikely to make it to any port without help.*

*Images of the rusty blue fishing boat appeared in the Frontex command center in Warsaw, where two German journalists happened to be touring, a Frontex spokesman said. The Adriana was a chance to showcase the agency's ability to detect ships in distress and save lives.*

*Now that Frontex had seen the ship, which was in Greece's search-and-rescue area of international waters, the Greek authorities would surely rush to help.*

*Two hours later, a Greek Coast Guard helicopter flew past. Its aerial photographs show the ship's upper decks crammed with people waving their hands.*

*Nawal Soufi, an Italian activist, fielded calls from frantic migrants.*

*"I'm sure that they will rescue you," she told them.*

*"But be patient. It won't be immediate."*

### **Mayday**

*Around 7 p.m. on June 13, almost seven hours after Frontex spotted the Adriana, the Greek authorities asked two nearby commercial tankers to bring the migrants water, food and diesel to continue their journey, according to video recordings and court documents.*

*A crucial part of the Greek authorities' explanation for not rescuing the Adriana is their claim that it was actively sailing toward Italy. When the BBC, using data from neighboring vessels, [reported](#) that the Adriana had been practically idle for several hours before it sank, the Greek government noted that the ship had covered 30 nautical miles toward Italy since its detection by Frontex.*

*But satellite imagery and data from the ship-tracking platform MarineTraffic show that the Adriana was adrift for its final seven hours or so. [Radar satellite imagery](#) from the European Space Agency shows that by the time the Greeks summoned the commercial ships, the Adriana had already reached its closest point to Italy.*

*From then on, it was drifting backward.*

*The first tanker, the Lucky Sailor, arrived within minutes. The second, the Faithful Warrior, arrived in about two and a half hours. The captain of the Faithful Warrior reported that some passengers had thrown back supplies and screamed that they wanted to continue to Italy.*

*How many people actually rejected help is unclear, but they included the Adriana's captain and the handful of men who terrorized the passengers, according to survivors' testimonies and interviews.*

*Others were placing distress calls. Alarm Phone, a nonprofit group that fields migrant mayday calls, immediately and repeatedly told the Greek authorities, Frontex*

*and the United Nations refugee agency that people on the Adriana were desperate to be rescued. Several passengers testified that they had tried to jump aboard the Faithful Warrior. But the migrants said that the frenzy only destabilized the Adriana, so the Faithful Warrior withdrew.*

*As night fell, the Faithful Warrior's captain told the Greek control center that the Adriana was "rocking dangerously."*

*Radio transmission records show that, over five hours, the Greek control center transmitted five messages across the Mediterranean using a channel reserved for safety and distress calls.*

*Henrik Flornaes, a Danish father of two on a yacht far from the area, said he heard two mayday relay signals that night. They provided coordinates near the location of the Adriana, he said.*

*A mayday relay directs nearby ships to begin a search and rescue. But the Greek Coast Guard itself mounted no such mission at this point.*

### ***An End Foretold***

*As midnight of June 14 approached, the Greek Coast Guard vessel 920, the only government ship dispatched to the scene, arrived alongside the Adriana.*

*The presence of the 920 did not reassure the migrants. Several said in interviews that they were unsettled by the masked men. In the past, the Greek government has used the coast guard to deter migration.*

*In May, [The Times published video footage](#) showing officers rounding up migrants and ditching them on a raft in the Aegean Sea.*

*The mission of the 920 is unclear, as is what happened after it arrived and floated nearby for three hours. Some survivors say it tried to tow the Adriana, capsizing it. The coast guard denied that at first, then acknowledged throwing a rope to the trawler, but said that was hours before it sank.*

*To be sure, attempts to remove passengers might have backfired. Sudden changes in weight distribution on an overcrowded, swaying ship could have capsized it. And while the 920 was larger than the Adriana, it was not clear if had space to accommodate the migrant passengers.*

*But Greece, one of the world's foremost maritime nations, was equipped to carry out a rescue. Navy ships, including those with medical resources, could have arrived in the 13 hours after the Frontex alert.*

*Exactly what capsized the ship is unclear. The coast guard blames a commotion on the ship. But everyone agrees that it swayed once to the left, then to the right, and then flipped.*

*Those on deck were tossed into the sea. Panicking people stepped on each other in the dark, desperately using each other to come up for air, to stay alive.*

*At the water's surface, some clung to pieces of wood, surrounded by drowned friends, relatives and strangers. Others climbed onto the ship's sinking hull.*

*Coast guard crew members pulled dozens of people from the sea. One person testified that he had initially swum away from the 920, fearing that the crew would drown him.*

*Waleed Mohammad Qasem, the 14-year-old who wanted to be a doctor, drowned. So did his uncle, who had posed with him for a selfie. The ship's captain also died.*

*Hundreds of people, including the women and young children, inside the Adriana stood no chance. They would have been flipped upside down, hurled together against the ship as the sea poured in. The ship took them down within a minute.*

*Haseeb ur-Rehman, the Pakistani motorcycle mechanic on the top deck, survived. "It was in my destiny," he said from a migrant camp near Athens.*

*"Otherwise, my body would have been lost, like the other people in the boat."*

*Near the end, Kamiran Ahmad, the teenager who had hoped to study in Germany, turned to his cousin Roghaayan. From the migrant center in Greece, the older cousin remembered his words: "Didn't I tell you we were going to die? Didn't I tell you we were already dead?"*

*Both went into the water. Kamiran's body has not been recovered.*

*\*\*\* Reporting was contributed by Hwaida Saad from Beirut, Lebanon; Zia ur-Rehman fro*