

Matthias Oel
Director
European Commission
Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
Directorate B: Schengen, Borders and Innovation

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Our ref: SAM/FSC/ADDE/8576/2021

Subject: Question for written answer E-003632/2021 to the Commission from Ozlem Demirel (- Ares(2021)5106798 Non-disclosure by Frontex of the precise coordinates of vessels in distress at sea

Dear Mr Oel,

With reference to the Question for written answer E-003632/2021, submitted by MEP Özlem Demirel to the European Commission, referring to information transmitted over certain radio frequencies by Frontex, please find below our reply.

QUESTION 1

What information does the Frontex Aerial Surveillance Service (FASS) also known as the Multipurpose Aerial Surveillance Service (MAS or MASS) generally transmit over the Channel 16 distress frequency following the location of a stricken vessel in the central Mediterranean and what information may be withheld?

Whenever a vessel in distress is detected by a Frontex Surveillance Aircraft, the information regarding the sighting is immediately communicated by Frontex to the competent Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) and, for enhanced situational awareness, to other MRCCs operating in the area.

In case human lives are in imminent danger, Frontex Surveillance Aircrafts will also relay a MAYDAY communication over the marine emergency channel for all the ships, including merchant vessels and NGOs in the area to render assistance.

In all communications made, Frontex acts in line with the international legal framework for SAR, providing all the necessary elements (full set of coordinates as an essential element) so that assistance can be provided, and human life preserved.

QUESTION 2

Under what circumstances are the full coordinates of a stricken vessel transmitted over the Channel 16 distress frequency?

In case human lives are in imminent danger, in line with the international regulations and procedures governing search and rescue, Frontex Surveillance Aircrafts will relay a MAYDAY communication over

the marine emergency channel for all the ships to render assistance, including merchant vessels and NGOs in the area. The transmission of the geographical coordinates of the craft in distress as an essential element and any other information that may contribute to a swift and successful rescue are also included.

QUESTION 3

In which instances has the withholding of full coordinates delayed attempts to assist a vessel, with occupants being drowned as a result?

Frontex never withholds the transmission of coordinates of a vessel in distress. On the contrary, alerts are immediately dispatched by Frontex to the competent MRCC, copying all neighbouring MRCCs. In extreme circumstances, the alert is also dispatched to all ships present in the vicinity of the distress case, using channel 16.

These two alert procedures are in full compliance with the international SAR conventions.

I remain at your disposal should you need any further clarifications.

Yours sincerely,



Fabrice Leggeri
Executive Director

