

Nafarats: trip from Turkey to Germany – Part 1.1 Basmane

Posted on [September 9, 2015](#) by [admin](#)

The introduction: “11 Nafar and 1 human”

(Nafar in arabic is the one without name, without right, it is a number in the mass, and it is how the smugglers are calling their clients, in arabic. “He is only a pocket of money”).

We are a group of 12 people, 12 young persons full of hope and dreams, that met in Syria or in Turkey, and decided to go together to Europe. In the group, there is a doctor, a judge, 2 architects, a lawyer, 1 painter, 1 designer, a film maker, a social worker, a cook, an actor and a first-aider. Half of the group couldn’t continue their studies because of the war. Most of them escaped to Turkey some years before the decision to try their chance and cross the sea. But staying in Turkey means accepting to stay where there is no opportunity to work legally or to study. It means accepting to wait, only wait, for the situation to change. But our youth won’t last that long. In the group there are 11 Syrians and one French. For her, with her passport, the borders are open. In this system she is a human, she has the right and the possibility to be wherever she wants to. For different reasons, but with the common will of living this experience all together, we left Istanbul and are now on our way to a country where the nafarats could be humans again. At least, this is the goal.



Part 1: Izmir. Destination: Greece.

Basmane, Izmir (1/3)

Our bags are ready. We took the minimum: our passports (which are not worth much), our phones and batteries, sleeping bags, a first aid kit, 2 cameras to document the “trip” and few clothes. We studied the maps and the routes for the last month. We contacted some smugglers that could make us pass to one of the Greek islands, for a thousand dollars.



We left Istanbul by bus and arrived to Basmane, the neighbourhood around the train station of Izmir. We hoped to leave on the same day or on the next one. Finally, we had to wait there for 6 days. Describing the atmosphere of Basmane is not easy. Hotels everywhere, all full of migrants waiting for their turn to get into Europe. The ones who couldn't afford a hotel or find a room are passing their day following the shadows, on this very hot summer day. The first shop we saw had written on his window, in Arabic, “here we sell life jackets”. We knew we arrived. On the square, the streets, the roundabouts and on the park, you can see groups of “nafarats”. You can recognise them by their small backpacks, their big black plastic bags where they carry their life jackets (that you can buy everywhere, as well as the pneumatic “rubber ring”), and their smart phone. No doubt that the smart phone is facilitating the voyage for migrants. You need it to contact the smugglers, to check the maps and reassure the families.



The main language of Basmane is definitely Arabic. Hard to still believe that you are in the centre of Izmir, third biggest city of Turkey. Most of the migrants are Syrians, but many other nationalities are also passing through Basmane. For each community exists its own system; it's own smugglers, hotels, streets... The people meet and tell their stories. Some left in one day, some tried already 1, 2 or 5 times, they got caught by the police and are waiting to try again. On the other part of the huge green park where we spent most of our time (we eventually called it our home), the atmosphere change radically. With five stars hotels, luxury shops, and empty pavements, you enter there into another reality.



The 6 days that we had to stay in Basmane are happily in the past. We have been kicked out of most of the places where we tried to rest. A security man of the park asked us when we were entering in the morning, with our backpacks, where we were from. We answered that we were Italians, and he let us stay. The Syrians were not allowed he told us. The Italians yes. They eventually realised the truth later and kicked us out. One morning, we woke up with the police asking us to move out from under a bridge, and another one by some young guys throwing eggs at us and shooting “Syrians go back to your country”. Good morning to you too. The way the people were looking at us and talking to us became so tiring that we finally took 2 rooms in one of this nafarat’s hotel and passed most of the time there, looking to the fan and waiting for the moment to go. In a way, Basmane looks like those villages close to some very famous trekking points. They are full of trekking agencies, where all the tourist are getting prepared and buying the same equipments, comparing the tours and the prices... But this time there are no tourists, or official agencies, there are people that escaped from war and are preparing for a dangerous trip which will change their lives.

Nafarats: trip from Turkey to Germany – Part 1.2 The Smugglers.

Posted on [September 11, 2015](#) by [admin](#)

Part 1: Izmir. Destination: Greece.

The smugglers. (2/3)



The more common way to pass from Turkey to Greece is by boat. There are several Greek islands that are only a few kilometres away from the continent. The main destinations are Chios, Samos, Kos (those ones are less than 10 km away), and Lesbos islands. But there are also some small islands that are used as alternatives.

Two friends from the group were mainly dealing with the smuggler issue. They began to contact in priority as the ones that have been “recommended” by friends that already passed. In total, they talked in the phone with around 30 different guys and met in Izmir directly 15 of them. The smugglers always use nicknames: the Tunisian, the Palestinian Abu Ali (father of Ali), etc... They have a very hierachic system, with a lot of different intermediates.

When we arrived to Izmir, the average price to cross was 1,000 dollars. 6 days later, it was more likely to be asked for 1,200 or 1,300 dollars. The reason of the rising of prices might be the high influx of migrants in the last weeks, or the increase of intervention from Turkish police.

To choose the smuggler, our criterias were mainly: Finding one that we could trust at least a minimum. They are obviously all lying, but some lies are really too big... We met Abu S. for example, a typical mafia gangster coming straight from the Godfather movie. According to his saying, he always send first an empty boat to Greece that comes back and check the road; he would never let the boat leave if there is the smallest wave in the sea; and even better: another boat would be following us, with a frog man inside that could either repair our boat if we have a problem with the motor, or even transfer us to his boat if the first one get broken. Well, as we said, the smugglers are all liars but some more than others... The second criteria is the island: to take as little risk as possible, we wanted to go to an island that won't be more than 15 km from the shore. Chios and Kos were our favourite choices. Some islands are also military islands, or without immigration offices, which would make the legal process once in Greece harder and longer. And finally the number of people that would travel with us in the boat. The size of the inflatable boats (Balem in arabic) are between 6m to 9m long (for around 1.5m large). And usually, in the bigger ones, there is between 35 and 55 persons (up to 60).

Finally, we can say that even after all the research and criteria we had, we finally got in a boat that was supposed to bring us to Chios but was actually getting to Lesbos (the further island), and we were only 33 persons in the boat, but in a small one, that was only 6.5m long.

The driver of the boat is always one of the passengers. He travels for free, but he takes more risks. If he gets caught by the police he can get until 8 years of jail.

This is the usual proceedings of the crossing:

After choosing and accepting the conditions of a smuggler, you get a meeting point and a time of departure. For the payment, there are 2 options: the more common one is to let your money to an unofficial office. You will have to pay a fee of 50 dollars per person. And if you can't cross as planned, you will take your money back. If you pass, the smuggler gets it. Of course you can never completely trust those offices and be sure that you would get your money back, but most of the time, you have no other choice. The second option though, is to let the money with a person that you trust and who will stay with the smuggler during all the time of the crossing. This is a better option, but can still be dangerous for this trustful person, as smugglers are not really what we could call angels... Once the money issue is solved, you packed your bag as small as possible, you ripped

all your things into a plastic bag and stretch film (to protect it from the water) and you got enough water and food to survive for the next hours or days, you meet with your new travel companions and get by taxi or bus to a hidden spot, in the forest, to get to the boat. There, while the smugglers that sell the trip are usually Arabic, this is the turn of Turkish smugglers to work. They can be very violent, and it's not rare that they force people to enter in the boat with guns, if those people want to cancel at the last moment. The police also catches a lot of groups at those spots, arresting the Turkish smugglers and usually letting the rest of the group there, or arresting them only for 2 days. If it's not the case, you will get in a very crowded boat, and go to your destination, hoping that the sea will be quiet and that the police of the sea won't catch you and force you back to Turkey.

Nafarats: trip from Turkey to Germany – Part 1.3. Our own story of crossing.

Posted on [September 12, 2015](#) by [admin](#)

Part 1: Izmir. Destination: Greece.

Our own story of crossing. (3/3)

We stayed 6 days in Izmir, and prepared ourselves several times to cross the sea, but at the last moment, we had to cancel it (the island was too far, the smuggler finally wanted some money before we would leave, the boat was too full...) or the smuggler himself cancelled it. In this period of stress and extreme heat, those failures were psychologically very hard. We were disappointed, down, angry, tired and the idea of giving up crossed the mind of more than one of us.

After 2 days in Izmir, we chose a "trip". The smuggler insured us that there won't be more than 40 people in the boat. Despite the tiredness, we were excited, hoping to be in Greece the next day.

The French friend of the group was staying in Izmir and waiting for news from there. The rest of us went by taxi to a forest in the outskirts of Izmir. When we arrived there, there was absolutely no light, and it was in complete darkness that we tried to gather together. There were around 100 migrants in the forest including a lot of families with children (the smuggler had explained that 2 children were counting as 1 adult). This was the meeting place of 2 different groups. From there, the Turkish smugglers were organising the departure to the shore, by van. The first 50 people entered in the van, like tuna fish in a box, we could hear everyone shouting and children crying while the smugglers were pushing them inside. The door got finally closed, and it was total silence. Meanwhile, we decided to cancel, as we could see that our group was definitely more than 40 people, more likely 48. When we said it to the smugglers they became violent, shouting at us and even wanted to beat one of us. This friend had his phone in his hand and showed it to the smuggler shouting he would call the police. We could finally escape the place, but were very afraid, as one of the smugglers was following us. Finally a police car came close and he finally run back with the group. At this moment, one of the friends fell and hurt his leg. Because of the police car, we also threw all our life jackets. The night after this attempt was very hard, both on the psychological and physical level, but we tried to calm down and get some rest.

We finally had to wait 4 more days to try again. 4 very hard days in Izmir and the only hope was to leave, as soon as possible. We finally talked with a smuggler. Once again the French friend stayed and the “nafarat” left by bus. We had been told that we would go to Chios island, which is very near the shore, and close to Izmir. On the bus, when we checked the GPS, we realised that we were not on the good way at all, and understood that we would actually try to cross to Lesbos, a very big island that is further from the others.

The last group that died in the sea some weeks before was also trying to reach Lesbos, and we didn't want to go this way.

We talked with the smuggler, who convinced us to get until the spot, and from there, if we couldn't see the island, we could cancel. The will of passing was very strong, so we accepted. After the bus, we got into taxis, and succeeded to avoid the different police checkpoints on the way.

When we arrived to the spot everything happened very quickly. Other people were already in the boat, and we got inside in less than 5 minutes, even if we couldn't actually see the island. We were 33 in a small boat, of 6.5m long, and none of us had space to move even slightly. After half an hour on the sea, the motor stopped. We tried to fix it. With us there was a blind man and for him the situation was very scary. We also all got afraid of going back to Turkey, but after trying to fix the boat for half an hour, we finally tried to contact the coast guard police and asked our friend who was still in Izmir to contact them and to give them our location. She also got very scared, as we couldn't give her more detailed information than “Help! Call the police!”. She finally reached them and the coast guards were on their way when we let her know that the motor got fixed and that we were finally continuing our passing. We saw the police looking for us at our previous place. But even if they saw us, they didn't try to follow us.

Our driver was full of energy and encouraged the group a lot. We even finished the crossing by singing all together. After 4 hours in the sea, we were exhausted, completely wet and stressed, but we arrived. Hard to believe it. That's it guys, we are in Lesbos, we are in Europe!

Nafarat: trip from Turkey to Germany – Part 2.1. Mytilene, Lesbos Island: Welcome to Europe

Posted on [September 13, 2015](#) by [admin](#)

Part 2: Greece

Mytilene, Lesbos Island: Welcome to Europe (1/2)

We arrived to the island of Lesbos in the middle of the night, and reached by foot the city of Mytilene on the next morning. We saw a fisherman taking the boat that we used to cross the sea, another example of the parallel economy that is running on the back of the migrants.

On the Greek islands, the process is: once you arrive, you can register to the local authorities; they will bring you to a camp (when there is one), and you will receive an official paper that legalizes your situation within some days. With this document you can stay legally in the country for a certain period of time, while your asylum process goes on. In practice, most of the migrants use this

paper to travel in the country and continue their journey. Few of them decide to stay in Greece, where both the asylum conditions and the job opportunities are poor.



A Syrian on his way to the camp

Greece is officially part of Dublin II regulation (European law who states that the refugee has to ask for asylum in the first country he/she arrived), but in 2011 the European Court of Human Rights decided that Greece was violating the basic human right of the refugee, and since then the deportation back to Greece stopped in most of the European countries. All European countries ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention of 1951 and have the duty to receive the refugees, but to request asylum to a country you need to get there. You are then forced to cross the borders illegally and risk your life to be able to ask for your right.

While we were getting registered in the police station, the French friend from the group took a ferry that lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes (compared to 4 hours for the rest of us), paid 25 Euros instead of 1250 dollars, and only needed to show her passport to enter Greece. We are not all equal when facing with the borders, and freedom doesn't mean the same thing for all.



One day later, five of us went to the camp to wait for the documents while the rest of the group rested on a beach. Everyday around 1000 migrants arrive to the Lesbos Island. There are two different camps in the island: one for the Syrians and one for the migrants from other nationalities. The procedure for the Syrians is both quicker and easier. You can receive your document within 2 days while the others might wait for some weeks. The Syrian camp of Lesbos is an open camp. The camp's infrastructures are very poor and with few tents; toilets in horrible conditions, and most of the migrants prefer to sleep outside. A group of volunteers and of migrants is still trying to keep the place clean and "livable".



Clothes hanged in the camp, for drying



Refugees sleeping at night close to the ferry station

Inside the camp, you can hear all the different stories about the crossing between Turkey and Lesbos Island. Some people passed 12 hours in the sea, some got attacked and lost everything, including their papers and money. The majority of the migrants are young men, but you can also see a lot of families, some pregnant women and elderly people. We learned that the day we arrived that an old man died in the camp. Two members of his family were also in the camp, and we can't imagine their pain, being here, so far from their own land and family.

Despite the poor conditions, the atmosphere is much more joyful than what we experienced back in Izmir. Finally all those people made it. They all arrived to Europe. The way in the sea is in the past.



A girl in the camp



A girl in the playground, with a life-jacket.

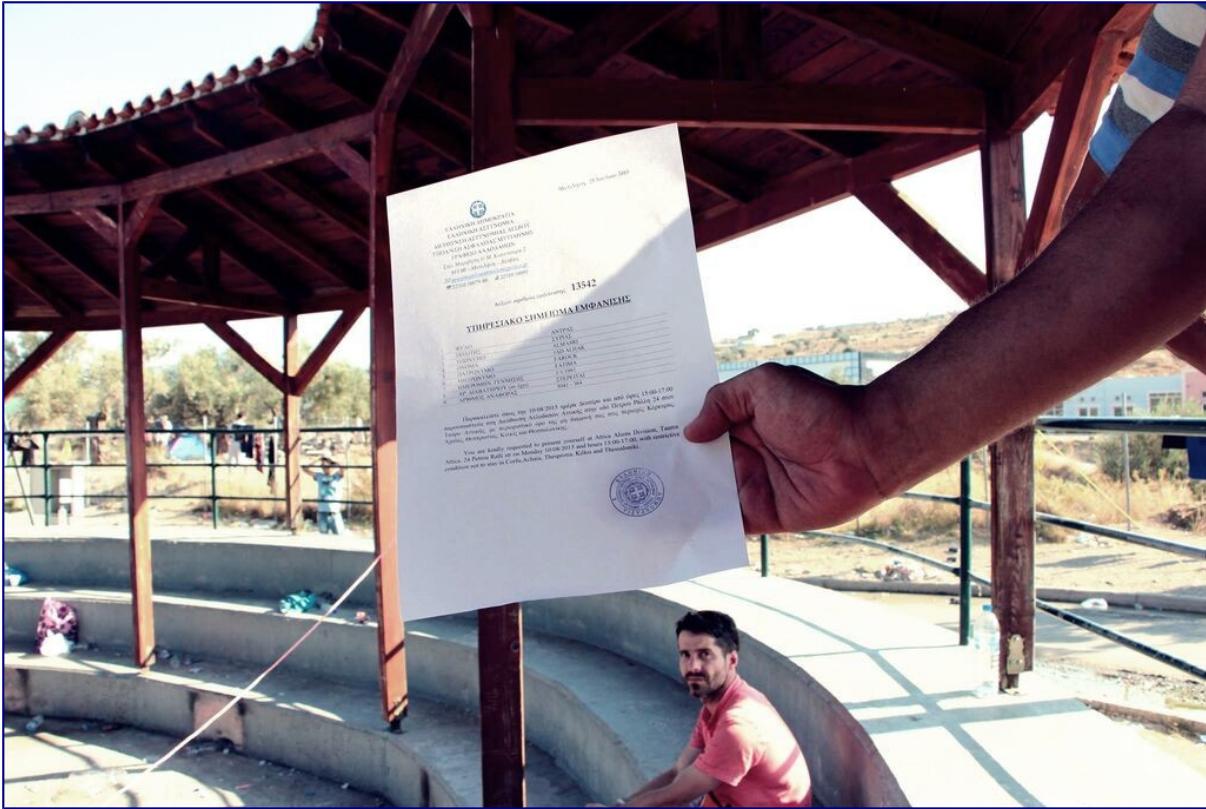
Around 6pm, the police arrived to the camp wearing hygiene masks (very welcoming) and began to call one by one of the 400 Syrians that had arrived on the same day than us to give them their document. We got very happy and excited when our turn came and decided to celebrate with some very nice people we met in the camp. No doubt we will all remember this party for all our lives. We felt that in this day our lives changed. We didn't know what would happen next, but for sure it could never be the same as the day before. We stayed one more day in Mytilene because we loved this

place, because we could enjoy the great food, because of the beach and the sea, we could almost fooled ourselves and believe we were on vacation. We all decided that once we would have our refugee status and have more freedom of movement, we would go back here. It is a very beautiful place. We still had to face racism when an employee tried to kick us out from an open and free beach, but we were then feeling powerful, with our legal paper in hand, enough to fight back and win our case.

We finally got on the ferry to Athens, ferry overcrowded with hundreds of people hoping for a better future.



While waiting to get documents from the police



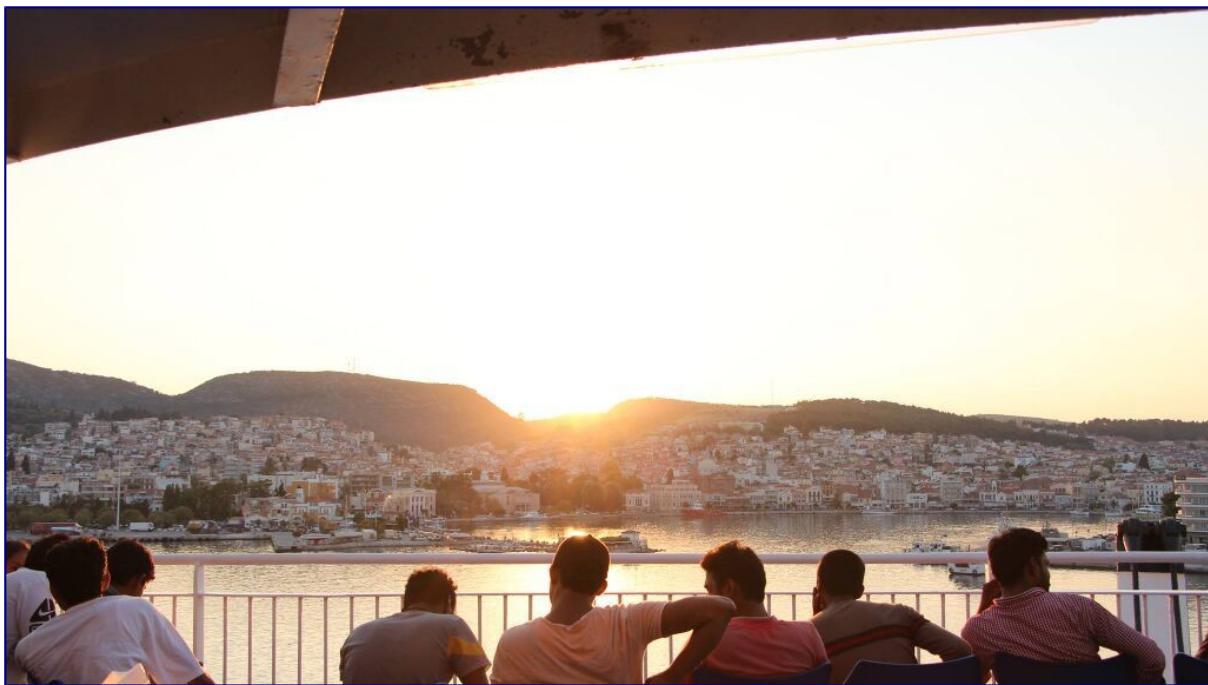
The document taken from the police



A group taking selfies in front of the ferry to Athens



The ferry for Athens.



On the way to Athens, in the ferry.
