

24/03/2019

“One police officer [...] collected the bags of the men, turned the entire contents out on the floor and stepped on the belongings in order to “search” the bags. One Croatian police women watched this and laughed.”

Date and time: March 24, 2019 09:00

Location: along a highway 106, close to the Kulpa River, Slovenia

Coordinates: 45.48677369138069 , 14.900220108394024

Demographics: 6 men from Morocco and Algeria, 6 men from Pakistan, all over 18 (interviewed 27 years)

Minors involved? No

Violence used: making to sign documents without translation, detention (inadequate conditions), destructing property

Police involved: Caught by army personnel (1 man and 1 woman with semi-automatic weapons, camouflage color pick up truck) and 8 Slovenian police officers (6 in dark blue uniforms with the Slovenia police badges and Slovenia flags, 2 in plain clothes, 3 police cars, 2 undercover police cars, light green and white color van), at the Slovenian and Croatian police stations and the Croatian border station some officers), deported by the Slovenian light green and white color van and a Croatian police van

Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?: Yes

What was the reaction to this intention?: Denied access, instead: taking pictures and fingerprints, making to sign documents written in Slovenian and Croatian (without a proper translation), push back to Croatia and again to Bosnia

Reported by: [Re:]ports Sarajevo

Original Report

7 men left Sarajevo on March 15th, 2019. They reached the border of Croatia in the day time and proceeded to walk through Croatia for almost 12 days. At approximately 5:30 am on the morning of Sunday, March 24th, the group reached the Kulpa River and the border of Slovenia. One man decided to cross the river over a shallower, rocky area that led into a waterfall. The other 6 men decided to cross downriver from him. They all began to cross at the same time. The man giving the interview led the group of six. He says that the water was up to his chest and he navigated with a large stick. The group downriver were about halfway across the river when they heard a shout and saw the man upriver stumble and fall on the rocks. He fell down the waterfall and into the water. He was carrying a blanket and a backpack of clothes and the interviewed believes this caused him to submerge very quickly. All the men were screaming, but the man disappeared very quickly and the other could do nothing for him. The men downriver quickly crossed the river and did not see the submerged man emerge. They were worried about the police and keeping quiet so they proceeded uphill from the river. The man interviewed says:

“ We were very tired and wet and we didn’t care anymore after seeing what happened to our friend.”

The group of 6 walked through the forest until they reached highway 106. At this point the man said they felt too tired to continue and were ready to give up. As they walked along the highway, about at 9 am, they were quickly stopped by an army truck. The man described the truck as pick up truck and being camouflage in color. There were two army personnel inside, one man and one woman. They both excited the car carrying semi-automatic weapons. The interviewed one says:

“ The woman was showing off by pointing the gun at us.”

The army personnel asked if the men had any weapons on them. The army officers called the police, and soon 3 police cars arrived along with 2 undercover police cars. There were 8 police officers (6 in dark blue uniforms with the Slovenia police badges and Slovenia flags, 2 in plain clothes). The army personnel also called for a van (light green and white in color). Each man was searched and their phones and power banks were taken. The men didn't say anything about their friend to the police, because they had heard about another group that the police responded with more violence when they were told about a died friend of the group.

First, the men were taken with the van to the place along the river they said they had crossed at. The policemen got out of the vehicle and took pictures of the crossing place. Then, around at 11 am, the men were driven to a police station about at 30 km from where they were apprehended. There were no windows in the van and they were driven directly into a garage, so the man interviewed has no idea where they were taken to. The 6 men were taken into a large room and given flip flops, blankets and lunch. There were two bathrooms accessible. The police officer made the interviewed one to take out his ear piercings and everyone had to hand over their jackets. After eating each men were fingerprinted, photoed and asked for names. One man of the group was translating the speech of the police from English to Arabic. Each man was given a paper with his name on it that they thought were their asylum papers. They had to sign many papers (that each man thought were asylum papers). None of papers were translated and no explanation was offered about what they were signing. The man remembered seeing something about the amount €450 and he thought is was said that this was a fine for illegally crossing the border.

“ We all thought we were getting asylum. One Algerian friend [that was part of the group] who was pushed back from Slovenia before, was very excited, because the police had not registered or fingerprinted him before or given him any papers. The police [of this incident] seemed friendly and said that they would take us to a camp.”

Then the men were given dinner. They were held in the room for around 24 hours and they slept overnight. At the following morning:

“ We knew something was wrong when a police officer came to the room in the morning and asked for the blankets and ‘asylum papers’ back.”

The following morning, on Monday, March 25 th, around at 9:30 or 10 am the men were loaded into the same van than the day before and driven another 30 km. When the car stopped, the men saw through the crack in the door that they had arrived at what looked like a checkpoint or other border area. The police officers exited the car. The men were held in the car for 25 minutes and could hear the Slovenian police officers speaking with someone else outside. The men were not allowed to go to the bathroom so one man had to urinate in the corner of the van. When the men were let out of the van they could see that they were at the Slovenian-Croatian border checkpoint.

The men were led in a border station (probably at the Croatian side). One police officer (probably Croatian one) collected the bags of the men, turned the entire contents out on the floor and stepped on the belongings in order to “search” the bags. One Croatian police women watched this and laughed. The men had to sign a paper without a translation. Then each man was given a card with their names on. The man believed that the Slovenian police had given their information to the Croatian border police. The officers took pictures of each man holding up the card with their name and other information on. The Croatian police officers did not speak to the men at all and explain what was going on.

Then the men were loaded into another van and driven to a Croatian police station. The journey from the border to

the police station took about 2 hours. The men waited at the police station for 20 minutes before 6 Pakistani men were also loaded into the van. All the men were driven approximately 2.5 hours to the Bosnian border. The man tells how the drive was *“very fast and jerky.”* He says that they were falling around in the car throughout the drive. At the end of the drive, later on the 25 th March, the doors were opened and each man was given back his phone. The men were were dropped off at 16 km from Velika Kladuča. It took 2 hours to walk back to the town.