

30/01/2019

"MAYBE [WE] SIT TWO HOURS ON THE GROUND, IT IS SNOW, WE ARE STAYING LIKE THIS AND YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO MOVE"

Date and time: January 30, 2019 20:00

Location: Bogovolja, Croatia, close to Bogovolja

Coordinates: 45.06777580000001 , 15.748140299999932

Push-back from: Croatia

Push-back to: Bosnia

Demographics: 5 person(s), age: unknown , from: Tunisia

Minors involved? Unknown

Violence used: beating (with batons/hands/other), pushing people to the ground, theft of personal belongings, remaining in one position for several hours

Police involved: around 50 police officers in blue Croatian uniforms/ black uniforms/ civilian clothing, some wearing long rifles in 5 or 6 cars, 1 police van

Taken to a police station?: yes

Treatment at police station or other place of detention: detention, fingerprints taken, photos taken, personal information taken, papers signed, denial of food/water

Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?: Yes

Reported by: No Name Kitchen

ORIGINAL REPORT

The group of five left Velika Kladusa on the night of January 30, 2019. They walked towards Croatia with the intention of meeting someone who would drive them to Slovenia.

After they crossed the Croatian border, they walked less than one kilometer, crossing a small river leaving their shoes soaked by the water. Then, they arrived to a mosque which was the prearranged location to meet their driver. At approximately 8 pm, two officers passed by this spot and apprehended the group. The officers carried pistols and wore dark blue uniforms which had the words "Policija" written on them in yellow lettering. First, the officers searched the group of five and took their personal belongings.

"We sit down and it's wet place and they say 'stay, sit down', and we sit down there , and they took our mobile phones, money, cigarettes, some sweets to eat in the street on our way"

They were then forced to hold a specific position for two hours, sitting on their knees with their hands behind their backs.

"Maybe [we] sit two hours on the ground, it is snow, we are staying like this and you don't have the right to move. If you move, he kick you, if you move to change your position, for example, you will sit on your ass"

"Already we have maybe nine or ten hours with eat nothing, and we have some food in our sack [but] they don't

let us to eat”

Although two officers initially apprehended the group, after a period of several hours, more than 40 officers had arrived to the scene. They had the intention of arranging for a trap which would enable them to detect the group's driver. The officers had seen that somebody had called the group via WhatsApp and immediately decided to set up a police group to catch the driver:

“Later come maybe 40 or 50 policemen. [To] catch the driver.”

One of the respondents described the situation as a trap that the officers decided to put into play:

“When you want to trap a mouse, you make something to trick.”

So, the more than 40 officers dispersed in a circle around the location next to the mosque where the driver was supposed to pick up the group. Several of these officers carried long rifles, similar to Kalashnikovs. They were described being from the same unit as the officers who originally apprehended the group of five. Most of them were wearing dark blue uniforms. Nonetheless, several of the officers wore different, black uniforms and some civilian clothing. The respondents described that one of the officers who arrived later was the “boss” of all the officers in the scene:

“The group of police men said this is the boss and he promises you to have [asylum].”

They further described this man to be approximately 38-year-old, average height, around 180 cm, with a weight of around 80 kg, no beard and short brown hair shaved at the sides. He didn't wear a uniform, instead he wore plain clothes looking like black sportswear.

The respondents also described another officer in detail, a female one, quite tall and muscular, perhaps 180 cm, her hair cut short and shaved on the sides, around 30 years old, carrying a pistol and a radio device. Similar to the “boss”, she also didn't wear a uniform, but plain clothes. She was responsible for taking photos of the group and asked them where they were from.

In total, there were five or six cars dispersed around the scene, waiting with their lights turned off. In addition to this, there were around seven groups of officers by foot around the scene. There were also two officers who stayed with the group of people on the move, as they waited for the smuggles.

“Even if you think to run away, you can't. All the place is surrounded by policemen.”

“We are writing with [the driver]... We organized with a car driver to come to pick us up, so they stayed waiting for this driver and they say for us ‘Act like normally, like nothing happened to you. Stay here and when [the] car comes, when the car driver comes, just go normally without doing any act and they promised us to give a s yl if we help him to catch this man.”

When asked if they felt like they had the option *not* to take part in this police action, the respondents said:

“No, you don't have this option. If you don't do like this, you will get smacked.”

Accordingly, the group followed the officer's instructions. When the car approached, the officers ordered the five of them to approach the road.

"When the car comes from this side, they stop just here and they say to us 'Go, go, go'."

The car driver stopped his car and the group entered:

"We just open the door and go inside the car and the scenario starts. All the place is surrounded by policemen."

"We go inside the car, then they shoot gun in the sky, then [they] catch us again, 'On your knees' staying maybe two more hours and then we go."

Immediately, several officers started shooting in the air with their guns before the rest joined the scene and encircled the car. At this point, the group of five were again told to get on their knees and to put their hands behind their heads and then had to remain in this position again for several hours.

After this, the group was taken to a police station which was approximately twenty minutes away, likely in Slunj (HRV). They arrived there between 1 and 2 am on January 31. The group was still wet from their previous hours in the cold, and they reported that nobody offered them anything during their time in the station.

"We stayed like that, wet, without nothing, without food."

The group was neither offered food, water or blankets during the almost 24 hours they were kept in the station:

"It's a small room, maybe 3 meters. It's dark. No something to make us warm, nothing. Just something to sleep for one person and we stay five [persons]."

After a period of several hours, they were asked by some officers for their names, surnames, and country of origin. Then, photos were taken while they had to hold a sign with their name, date and nationality on it. They were also made to sign several papers:

"[We signed] three papers. And they didn't give us the time to read the papers. The first paper is with the Croatian language, just one in English but... when I ask him 'let me read what I will sign' they say 'Just sign, just sign'"

Later in the morning the group's fingerprints of each whole finger and then in addition of each fingertip were taken.

One of the respondents was taken to Karlovac (HRV) later in the day, at approximately 5 pm and the rest of the group stayed in the station. The individual was transported in a police car which had windows, so he could see outside. He described traveling through mountains on this journey for some time before passing a sign which signaled one direction led towards Zagreb while another direction led towards Split. The car turned towards Zagreb until they reached Karlovac where he met a judge:

"Then they took me, only me, to Karlovac to meet the judge."

He was brought there to speak on behalf of the group because he is speaking English almost fluently. Before arriving to the judge, his shoe strings as well as the string from his hoodie were confiscated from him:

"They make me go there, they put out my shoes chords...so when I was walking, all people see."

"They took me there and he [the 'judge'] say 'Say the truth and I will help you to have a syl'. So I say the truth, I told him all the story but the police investigation goes in the wrong way. In the police investigation, I see the

paper, it is in English, they don't say that we help [them] to catch this driver. They don't write this. So the judge ask me and I tell him about this story, how we helped the policemen to catch this driver and how they promised us to have a syl. He say 'Okay, okay, okay'."

After he had told his initial story in English, an Arabic translator arrived who then talked to the judge in Croatian for a bit. The translator in Karlovar was described as being middle-aged, between 55 and 60 years old. During the interview with the respondent, he told him that his child was the same age as him, 26, and that he was married to a Bosnian woman. He didn't speak a clear Arabic dialect so the respondent isn't sure whether he was from Egypt or Syria. The respondent was asked with the help of the translator about his name, if he had previously known the driver, how much he had paid for him, why he left Tunisia and what his previous job was. Then, they returned him to the original police station where he had to stay for four more hours:

"When I come back from Karlovac we stay four more hours and they kick us out."

"That's it. Then they bring me back to the jail and stay for maybe four more hours and then maybe at 9 or 10 pm they take us, put us back in the car and move back to Bosnia."

It was a twenty-minute drive from the police station back to the border. In total, there were five officers present during the push-back with one car in addition to the transportation van present at the location. One officer stayed in the other car during the push-back, another one wore a balaclava while the others had their faces exposed. They were all wearing the same dark blue uniforms as the officers from their capture the previous night.

"They work in the same police station."

When the group of five arrived, they saw that the van they were transported in was parked, facing in the direction of a stream which rose up to their knees.

"Just open the door of the car [and] you see the river."

In the dark, there was an officer standing on each side of the car's back door, leaving it impossible to move in any direction other than towards the stream. They were taken out one-by-one:

"They put us in the border, just in the border [makes a close space with his hands]: This is the river and he put us in the car here. They open the two doors of the car and say 'Go! Go! Go!'. They make us afraid. And then we start walking like normally and then they start to kick us and we go, we don't know the place, we don't know nothing. It's dark. It's night, it's dark. We start running, running, and then they [are] running behind us and they start kick us in the back. They don't show us where is the way, where to go, where are our location, they say nothing."

"First, they don't kick, they just make gesture, act like they will hit us but they don't hit us. When we are already walking towards the river, then they start. Only in the back."

They were beaten by slightly flexible batons made out of rubber.

After they crossed to the other side of the stream, one of the officers took a bag which had their mobile devices and some money in it and threw it over to the other side of the river. They had originally brought €80 to Croatia but only received back €60.

They didn't eat or drink anything for the whole time of their detention:

“Eight hours before we start the trip we don’t eat nothing. So when the police catch us we stay more than 24 hours without eating nothing, without drink nothing, just toilet, and the toilet is inside the jail.”

Also at no point an asylum process was started, other than promised by the authorities first.

An older image of the mosque where the group was forced to kneel for several hours and later take part in a sting operation in Bogovolja (HRV).