

11/03/2019

“My head was hurting so badly and I was feeling so sick. I was feeling as if I would be dying”

Date and time: March 11, 2019 09:00

Location: near Zilje, Slovenia

Coordinates: 45.4597271 , 15.2956027

Demographics: 13 persons (1 from Afghanistan, 7 from Iraq, 5 from Iran): 5 children between 7 and 14 years, 3 women, 5 men (oldest was 50 years old)

Minors involved? Yes

Violence used: Unclear (alleged repeated use of gas to make people vomit in cars)

Police involved: >10 police officers in different locations. Slovenian Police: Darkblue uniforms with guns, batons, handcuffs and sprays on their belts. Hexagonal or pentagonal emblem with the Slovenian flag and the letters “Policija” on the sleeve. Croatian Police: Darkblue uniforms. Several vans in different locations

Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?: Yes

What was the reaction to this intention?: The son of the reporting family was told “You can't stay in Slovenia”, the father was answered “No, just go back!”

Peculiarities: Striking accumulation of vomiting during all van transfers. A minor was temporarily separated from his parents without any information what is happening. Policewoman held gun on a man's temple. Asylum requests ignored. Signing of documents without translation or explanation

Reported by: [Re:]ports Sarajevo

Original Report

The group of initially 24 migrants started their journey on 3rd of March 2019 in Velika Kladuša (BiH) and crossed the border near Miljkovici (BiH) approximately at the coordinates 45.2027349, 15.8023509.

The group walked mostly in the nights and slept in the forests. After several nights of walking, the group ran out of food (except of some bread, walnuts and raisins). Their approximate coordinates at that point were 45.4240133, 15.6283776. Eleven persons decided to leave the group and to voluntarily go to the Croatian police who then took them back to Bosnia. The rest of the group (13 persons, among which 5 children between 7 years and 14 years, 3 women and 5 men) continued their journey towards Slovenia and tried to speed up as much as possible.

After a total of eight nights and two days of walking, on 11 March, they reached the border between Croatia and Slovenia. They entered Slovenia around 9 a.m. near Zilje (SLN) approximately at the coordinates 45.4597271, 15.2956027. They crossed the Kolpa river by foot, with the water reaching their upper thighs. The father of the reporting family had to cross the river twice because his wife, who had her menstruation and was generally weakened after the long walking, was not strong enough to carry any luggage through the river. There was heavy rainfall and they were all wet and cold.

After another hour (ca. 2 kilometres) of walking into Slovenia, they were apprehended by two Slovenian police officers who had a Renault Megane police car. One police officer was male and of young age. The other officer was a woman. She seemed very angry, pointed with her gun at the migrants and shouted at them. She then put her gun directly at the temple of an Afghani man.

The two police officers made a call and there arrived two vans with two or three policemen in each of them. The police officers were wearing darkblue uniforms and had guns, batons, handcuffs and sprays on their belts. On their sleeves, there was a hexagonal or pentagonal emblem with the Slovenian flag and the letters "Policija".

Two policemen led the son of the reporting family (aged 14 years) away from the group without telling the parents where they would take him. The parents were very worried. During the interview it was still noticeable how much this experience had unsettled them. The father told the policemen he wanted to go with his son, but they denied that, took him gruffly by his arm and pushed him into one of the vans. All men were told to get into the same van, while the women and the children had to get into the other van. The backspace of the vans had no windows and was very dark. There was just a small plastic window of maybe 7 centimeters height through which they could see into the driver's cabin. On the ceiling of the backspace, there were two ventilators. It was very cold in there. The father of the reporting family said that the air in the car was very bad. He pointed out that he had never before had to vomit in a car, but during the 30 minutes transfer which followed he had to throw up twice. All other persons in the men's van had to vomit as well. In the floor there was a kind of a hole where the vomit would go. When he put his nose to the crack between the wings of the backdoor and got a little bit of fresh air, he could get some relief. He believes that there was let some kind of gas into the backspace to make them vomit. He did not recognise a particular smell or a colour of the air in the van. The men knocked on the van's walls and shouted to stop the car and let them out. The policemen, however, just shouted back "*Šuti! Šuti!*" ("Shut up!"). In the women's car, several people vomited as well, but the mother of the reporting family could not specify whether most or all of the persons in there were vomiting because she was so much absorbed by worrying about her son. After some 30 minutes of driving, the vans reached a police station near Veliki Nerajec (SLN, coordinates 45.5096867, 15.1864282). Once outside of the car, the sickness faded soon.

Meanwhile, the policemen who went with the son told him to show them where and how the migrants' group had crossed the border. By using the proper road (instead of the way through the forest which the group had taken), they reached the river within some 30 minutes. The policemen asked the teenager "*Would you like to stay in Slovenia?*". When the boy said yes, they asked him why. The teenager said that Slovenia is part of the Schengen area and the economic and employment situation is much better than in Bosnia. The policeman answered "*ok*". The teenager asked him "*What can we do so that we can stay in Slovenia?*". The policeman just replied "*You can't stay in Slovenia*". The teenager asked him several times why they could not stay, but each time the policeman just answered "*I don't know*". The teenager was then taken into a police car (a Volvo), driven to the same police station as the rest of the group and reunited with his parents.

In the police station, the migrants were given fastfood. One by one of them was asked a series of questions, for example where they come from. The father of the reporting family told the policemen that he wanted to stay in Slovenia. They asked him "*How do you want to live here?*". He replied that he wants to work. After that, they just said "*No, you just go back!*"

After a while, the policemen took all bags of the migrants, put them into plastic bags and searched everybody including the children. The migrants were also taken away their money and their phones: "*They took everything except the clothes we were wearing. They took even our shoes and gave us slippers instead.*" All belongings that contained metal, such as their razors, nailclippers, scissors, needles and earrings, were thrown in a bin.

The father of the reporting family then had to sign three or four papers, all of which were in Slovenian language. There was a translator present, however he did not explain them what was written on the papers. The father did not know why the translator did not give any explanations. He did not get a copy of the papers he had signed.

After an estimated three hours in the first police station (near Veliki Nerajec), they were told to get into two vans again. Inside the van, they again had to vomit.

After ca. 20 minutes of driving, they reached another police station. In there, they were assigned one room per family. The room was warm, they were given food, blankets and sheets. The room did not contain a bathroom, but there was a toilet. They stayed in this location for one night.

In the next morning, two cars transported them to the border to Croatia. The bordercrossing was on a highway. No river was visible. The Slovenian police gave the migrants their luggage back and handed them over to the Croatian police. The Croatian policemen were wearing darkblue uniforms. They told the whole group of 13 persons to get into one van and to take their luggage with them into the van. During the following transfer, they had to vomit again.

After approximately one hour, the car stopped at a Croatian police station of unknown location. The two employees inside were wearing civil clothes. The migrants were told to write their name on a paper and to hold this paper in front of their chest. The officers took pictures of them in this position. This was done one by one, also for the children.

After that short stop, the transfer in the van continued. Again there was vomiting. The father of the reporting family described this transfer as follows: “ *I just wished that nobody would speak to me, my head was hurting so badly and I was feeling so sick. I was feeling as if I would be dying.* ” His son reported that there were no seats with seatbelts in the van, just a board at the wall where they could sit. Some children and also his mother fell down on the van’s floor. “ *We were like zombies. I did not feel anything else but vomit and headache.* ”

After some 1.5 hours, the van stopped. It was located at the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, east of Velika Kladusa. It was in the mountains and there was just a small road for tractors etc. There were villages nearby. The reporting persons located the push-back to have taken place around the coordinates 45.218623, 16.011921 (near Veliki Obljaj CRO). They were returned their phones and their money but not the metallic items which the Slovenian police had put into a bin. The Croatian policemen then said “Hajde! Ideš, marš!”.

On their way to Velika Kladusa, they noticed dozens of broken phones on the roadside. After an estimated 25 kilometres of walking, the enfeebled mother of the reporting family fell down. It was already dark. They then reached a restaurant and asked the Bosnians inside for help. The latter called the Bosnian police who then took them to a hospital. The Bosnian police was acting friendly, according to the reporting family. After some two hours in the hospital, the mother was given a serum and the family went to Miral camp in Velika Kladuša. From there, the IOM brought them by car to the camp in Bihac. They arrived around 3 a.m. on 13 March in Bihac camp.

In the end of the interview, the mother of the reporting family stressed that she will never forget this experience. “ *Our deportation from Slovenia is one of the worst experiences I have ever had. This journey is a very difficult memory for me.* ”

The father nodded and added: “ *And nonetheless, we will have to try again. We do not have another choice. Where else should we stay?* ”