

24/03/2019

## "THEY DRIVE VERY FAST AND JERKY. WE WERE THROWN BACK AND FORTH INSIDE THE TRUCK ALL THE TIME"

**Date and time:** March 24, 2019 09:00

**Location:** Vrh pri Fari, Slovenia, along highway 106 close to the Kulpa River

**Coordinates:** 45.48677369138069 , 14.900220108394024

**Push-back from:** Slovenia

**Push-back to:** Croatia, Bosnia

**Demographics:** 12 person(s), age: 27, unknown , from: Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria

**Minors involved?** No

**Violence used:** destruction of personal belongings, theft of personal belongings

**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

**Taken to a police station?:** yes

**Treatment at police station or other place of detention:** detention, fingerprints taken, papers signed, no translator present, denial of access to toilets, photos taken

**Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?:** Yes

**Reported by:** [Re:]ports Sarajevo

### ORIGINAL REPORT

Seven men left Sarajevo on March 15, 2019. They reached the border of Croatia during day time and proceeded to walk through Croatia for almost 12 days. At approximately 5.30 am on Sunday, March 24, 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 six men decided to cross downriver from him. They all began to cross at the same time. The interviewee led the group of six.

*"The water was up to my chest and I navigated with a large stick."*

The group downriver were about halfway across the river when they heard a scream 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 interviewee believes this caused him to submerge very quickly. All the men were screaming, but the man disappeared quickly and the other couldn't do anything for him. The men downriver continued to quickly cross the river and didn't see the other man emerge anymore. They were worried about the police and quietly continued walking uphill, leaving the river behind.

*" We were very tired and wet, and we didn't care anymore after seeing what happened to our friend."*

The group of now six walked through a forest until they reached highway 106.

*“When we reached the street, we felt so tired. We almost couldn’t continue and were ready to give up.”*

Not long after they started walking on the highway, they were stopped by an army truck around 9 am.

*“A pick up truck stopped us. It had camouflage color.”*

There were two army personnel inside the truck, one man and one woman. They both got off the car carrying semi-automatic weapons.

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

The army personnel asked if the men had any weapons on them. They denied and the army officers called the police. Soon, three police cars arrived along with two undercover police cars, carrying altogether eight police officers, six in dark blue uniforms with the Slovenia police badges and Slovenia flags, two in plain clothes. The army personnel also called for a van in light green and white 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 with a similar case, where the police responded with more violence when they heard about their dead friend.

First, the men were taken with the van to the place at the river to show them, where they crossed it. The police men got off the van to take photos of the crossing point.

Around 11 am, they continued to drive them to a police station about 30 km from the spot where the army had discovered them. The van didn’t have windows and they were driven directly into a garage, so the interviewee has no idea where they were taken to. The six men were taken into a large room and given flip-flops, blankets and lunch. There were two bathrooms accessible. The police officer made the interviewee take out his ear piercings and everyone had to hand over their jackets. When they finished their food, each man had to give his fingerprints and name and a photo was taken. One man of the group was acting as a translator and translating from English to Arabic. The police handed out a paper to each of them, that they believed were their asylum papers. They had to sign many papers, thinking all of them were asylum papers. None of papers was translated and no explanation was offered about what they were signing. The man remembered seeing something about the amount of 450 Euro, and he thought 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 able to sleep during the night.

*“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, around at 9.30/10 am, the men were loaded into the same van they arrived with the day before. After 30 km driving, the car stopped and the men saw through a crack in the van’s door, that they had arrived at what looked like a checkpoint or another border area. The police officers left the car. While the men were waiting inside the van around 25 minutes, they 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 off the van, they could see that they were at the Slovenian-Croatian border checkpoint.

The men were brought into a border station, which was probably at the Croatian side. One police officer, presumably a 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 woman watched this laughing. The men had to sign another paper without translation. Then, each man was given a card with his name. 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.

*"The Croatian police officers didn't speak to us at all. We didn't know what's going on."*

Afterwards, they had to enter another van that drove them around two hours to a Croatian police station. There, they waited for 20 minutes before six Pakistani men were also loaded into the van. All the men were driven approximately 2,5 hours to the Bosnian border.

*"They drive very fast and jerky. We were thrown back and forth inside the truck all the time."*

At the end of the drive, later on March 25, the doors were opened and the police returned their phones. The men were dropped off 16 km before Velika Kladuša. It took them two hours to walk back there.