

08/05/2019

## **"THEY [THE POLICE OFFICERS] ASKED: WHERE ARE YOUR FRIENDS? BUT IT'S THEIR JOB TO CATCH PEOPLE, NOT MY JOB, I DON'T TELL THEM."**

**Date and time:** May 8, 2019 04:00

**Location:** near Maljevac, Bosnia-Herzegovina

**Coordinates:** 45.190535 , 15.783799

**Push-back from:** Croatia

**Push-back to:** Bosnia

**Demographics:** 24 person(s), age: 25-35 years old , from: Pakistan, Algeria

**Minors involved?** No

**Violence used:** beating (with batons/hands/other), kicking, pushing people to the ground, electric shock, threatening with guns, gunshots, theft of personal belongings

**Taken to a police station?:** no

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

**Reported by:** Border Violence Monitoring

### **ORIGINAL REPORT**

On May 5, around 5:00AM in the morning, a group of 14 Algerian men left Velika Kladuša (BiH) towards Croatia. They walked for 3 days mostly on forest paths while avoiding big streets, the respondent estimates the distance that the group walked by foot as around 60-70km. It was raining most of the time, the paths were muddy and the group got lost more than once due to the maps on their phone bugging because of the humidity.

On 8 May in the morning, the group walked along a highway to find a way to cross it and ended up crossing it from above at a point where it passed through a tunnel.

Around 4:00AM in the morning on the same day, on their attempt to cross a small street just after the highway (see Fig. 1), the group was stopped by 4 police officers in one car and one van waiting for them. They had parked the cars in a way that formed a lane of approx. 15m and were waiting at the other side of the street. As soon as the group left the forest and entered the small street, they turned on the blue light and

*"they shoot too many times in the air, like 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, maybe 8 times in the air."*

The group started to run towards the forest at the other side of the street, but the respondent and some of his friends were too exhausted to run quickly enough. The respondent reported that one of the officers was equipped with an electric teaser and used it on one of his friends while the group tried to escape, and when his friend running next to him was stopped, the respondent quit running as well.

*"They share what they do: One with the teaser, one shooting in the air, two with batons."*

Four more individuals who were too tired to seriously attempt to escape from the police officers – so finally six people of

the original group – were caught, told to go to the floor in basic english and threatened with weapons not to move.

*“Anyone they were catching was beaten, but they don’t beat too much at this point, just a little bit to make you scared and not run away. The big beating was later when they took us back.”*

The respondent and his friends were casually asked where they were from, where they want to go.

*“One of us said: ‘Asyl, asyl!’ but one of the police said: ‘Go Bosnia asyl!’”*

They were asked for their phones and their pockets’ content and the officers took at least 80€ from the men, their phones and cigarettes.

*“If they ask you to give your mobile and you hide it, they will remember, so you better give it when they ask.”*

During the interaction with the six men on the street, the officers made no move to catch the other individuals from the group who continued their journey through the forest for five more days and were finally pushed back to Bosnia from Slovenia.

*“They [the police officers] asked: Where are your friends? But it’s their job to catch people, not my job, I don’t tell them.”*

After 20-30min, another van without windows arrived which the respondent identified as Mercedes Sprinter and the six people were taken into it.

They spent a whole day in the van, driving on good and less good streets, stopping for several hours from time to time and not being provided food nor water. Around three or four hours before they were brought to the Bosnian/Croatian border, a group of around 10 men from Pakistan joined the group in the back of the van. As there were no more spots on the two rows of the back seats, most of the newly apprehended men had to sit on the floor.

In the morning twilight of the 9 May, the whole group was released at a small street with a slope on both sides on the Croatian side of the border with Bosnia near Velika Kladuša (see Fig. 2).

The men were taken out of the van one by one, pushed down the slope at the side of the street towards the border and beaten with batons, fists and feet by police officers standing on both sides just after the van’s door, shaping a confusing tunnel of strikes, punches and kicks that the individuals had to pass through while stumbling down the slope.

The respondent describes the whole procedure as very quick, less than one minute, he recognized though that there were two police cars parking next to the Mercedes Sprinter. He estimates that the police officers who apprehended the group were not present any more.

*“No police is working 24 hours, they sleep, we not.”*

However, it was not possible for him to identify the police officer ultimately as they were wearing black masks by then. The group was not given their phones back.

After having gone through it, the respondent waited at the foot of the slope for his friends to pass the “tunnel”, crossed the green border towards Bosnia-Herzegovina together with them and walked back to Velika Kladuša in the sunrise.

Fig. 1: Point in Croatia where the group was apprehended

Fig 2.: Point in Croatia where the group was released

