

## **"THE VAN WAS COMPLETELY DIRTY INSIDE, THERE WAS STILL THE VOMIT OF THE LAST 'PASSENGERS'."**

**Date and time:** April 16, 2019 10:00

**Location:** Dalnje Njive, Slovenia

**Coordinates:** 45.4248188 , 15.1581189

**Push-back from:** Slovenia, Croatia

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

**Demographics:** 15 person(s), age: 28-35 years old , from: Iran

**Minors involved?** No

**Violence used:** insulting, exposure to jerky style of driving and bad air quality, causing sickness, mixing personal belongings of numerous migrants

**Police involved:** 2 Slovenian officers in army camouflage suits and 3 Slovenian officers in darkblue uniforms with a white van with a blue inscription "Policija". Later 2 other vans in Slovenia. – Several Slovenian guards in a "detention center" (some in police uniforms, others in plain clothes). – Several Croatian officers in darkblue uniforms at several places in Croatia. Two different vans in Croatia.

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

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

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

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

### **ORIGINAL REPORT**

The group of four men started their journey on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April from Sturlic (BiH). Around midnight, they crossed the border to Croatia.

After three nights and one day of walking, they arrived to the Croatian-Slovenian border in the early morning of 16<sup>th</sup> April. At 4 a.m., they made their first attempt to cross the border river (Kolpa). However, the current was too strong and they had to turn around. By 10 a.m., they found another place to cross the river. It was west of Severin na Kupi (HR). The respondent was the second man of the group to cross. One of his friends was already on the Slovenian side, the two others were waiting on the Croatian side. However, when he had reached the middle of the river, three officers appeared on the Slovenian side (45.4248188, 15.1581189). The respondent decided to continue to the Slovenian side so as not to leave his friend alone.

The three officers came down the hill through the forest. Two of them were wearing army camouflage suits, the third one had a darkblue uniform. They pulled their heavy guns and pointed at the two Iranian men. One of the Slovenian officers then made a call, and after a short while the Croatian police arrived to the other side of the river and apprehended the two men who were still there. The respondent said that his friends told him later that the Croatian police destroyed their sleeping bags and their shoes and then pushed them back to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The two men on the Slovenian side of the river were all wet after crossing the river. They asked the Slovenian officers to

change their clothes but the officers refused that. Instead, they made a call, and one more officer in a darkblue uniform arrived. The officers then told them to get into the backspace of their van. It was a small white van with a blue inscription “Policija” on it. The two men in the camouflage suits left by another vehicle, and the two officers in darkblue uniforms drove the van.

There were seats in the backspace of the van, but no seatbelts.

*“There were no windows, there wasn’t even enough oxygen”.*

The respondent fainted at times, had to vomit and fell down on the van’s floor several times during the transport. His friend tried to make the policemen stop the van by knocking and kicking on the walls, but the policemen did not react.

After an estimated 40 minutes of driving, the van stopped at a police station. The two policemen took them into the police station. The respondent told them:

*“I want to have asylum, I need to be in a safe country.”*

But the policemen replied, in a friendly way:

*“No, it’s not possible, our law does not give us the authority to do that.”*

The policemen then took the two men’s backpacks and the only phone they had with them. The two people on the move did not have money with them. The two policemen interrogated the respondent but not his friend. The respondent did not know why only he was interrogated. They took his fingerprints and took pictures of him. Moreover, he had to sign papers which were in Slovenian language. The policemen did not explain him what was the content of the papers, and the man did not ask them because he believed that it was not important. The policemen gave them food and water.

They spent an estimated two hours in the police station. They still had to wear the clothes with which they had crossed the river, but little by little they were drying. Then they had to get into another van. This van had windows. One of the two policemen from the apprehension site was also in the van, plus one other policeman who was also wearing a darkblue uniform.

After some three hours of driving, they arrived in what the respondent called a “detention center”.

*“I do not know why they took us there.”*

Some of the staff there were wearing police uniforms, others were wearing plain clothes. The two men were searched and then given a cell with two beds. The toilet was in the same room as the beds. The staff brought them dinner, but after that

*“nobody came to see us, it was like in a jail.”*

They spent one night in the “detention center”. The next morning (17<sup>th</sup> April), the staff arrived around 7 a.m. and told them to get into another van. Two other migrants were already inside the van. In this van, there was enough oxygen and there was light.

After an estimated three hours of driving, they arrived to the Slovenian-Croatian border. There was only a small road and no buildings except a small border station. The Slovenian officers handed the migrants’ backpacks and their phone over

to the Croatian officers at the border. The officers talked to each other for an estimated five minutes.

The Croatian officers who were wearing darkblue uniforms then brought the two men and also the two other migrants from the van to a police station at the Croatian side of the border. There, the migrants and their luggage were searched again which took an estimated ten minutes. The officers kicked the migrants' backpacks around, and they said things to the migrants in Croatian which they did not understand exactly but which were obviously insults. The men had to sign one paper whose content they did not understand. The officers also took pictures of the men holding a paper with a number in front of their chest.

The four migrants then had to enter another van.

*"It was completely dirty inside, there was still the vomit of the last 'passengers'."*

After 40 minutes of driving in the dirty van, they arrived to a big police station where they had to change the van. There were already many other migrants, and all of them were apportioned to three big vans for deportation. In the respondent's van, there were 14 men which meant that the van was very packed. Two persons even had to sit on the floor. After 30 minutes, the van stopped, and a woman who spoke Arabic had to board the van so there were now fifteen persons inside.

*"The driver was driving in a very bad way, he obviously wanted to bowl and bother us. He was suddenly braking, then speeding up very fast, and he made many curves. If somebody transported sheep, he would not drive in such a bad way! The driver treated us worse than sheep."*

Many people had to vomit, and they were vomiting on each other because there was so little space. The quality of the air was very bad. There were two fans on the ceiling, but they were working only for ten minutes or so during every thirty minutes. Particularly the Arabic woman had difficulties with breathing, and she tried to tell the driver to stop but nothing happened.

*"The woman was standing in the middle of the driving van so that she would be as close as possible to the fan at the ceiling. I felt so bad to look at this!"*

After some four hours of driving like this, the van stopped. The location was on a small road near Katinovac (HR), approximately at the coordinates 45.2302024, 15.9221061. The two other big vans from the big police station were not there. Neither were there any Bosnian officials.

The Croatian policemen had put the belongings of the fifteen people into a single big bag which they handed over to one of the migrants now.

*"They did this to cause a fight among us."*

Indeed, the man with the bag tried to run away with all the belongings. The others caught him soon, but he managed to run away again and to take half of the stuff with him. Then a fight about the rest of the belongings started among the remaining fourteen people.

*"The Croatian police watched us from aside and laughed, as if they were watching a funny movie."*

From the pushback location, it was more than 20 kilometers to Velika Kladuša which the respondent and his friend had to walk without food, water and energy. They arrived to Velika Kladuša late on 17<sup>th</sup> April.

At the end of the interview, the respondent added:

*"I do not understand this: On the one hand, the EU says they want to fight smugglers. But at the same time, they close the borders which gives work for smugglers. They should do interviews with us here to find out who has the right to asylum!"*

*I have already had a very long journey. It has been a very bad experience. I just want to go to a safe place, but everywhere it is dangerous for us. I really don't know what will happen to me in the end of my journey."*