

08/03/2019

“They find it funny to let you walk for 20 kilometers and take you back again.”

Date and time: March 8, 2019 00:00

Location: Croatian-Serbian border and Serbian-Bosnian border

Coordinates: 45.1629298 , 18.0081565

Demographics: 2 persons, both male, both aged 35, 1 Algerian, 1 Libyan

Minors involved? No

Violence used: slapping into face, kicking into legs and backside

Police involved: >10 police officers involved in different places (all male). Darkblue uniforms Different police cars in different places

Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?: Yes

What was the reaction to this intention?: The policemen laughed at the migrants and said that this is not possible.

Peculiarities: pushed back to a third country, two illegal push-backs on the same “game”, humiliating treatment

Reported by: [Re:]ports Sarajevo

Original Report

The journey of the two migrants started around 7 March 2019 near to Bosanski Brod (BiH, coordinates 45.1253588,18.0053567). They entered Croatia by crossing the Save river in the night around 3 a.m. To cross, they used a small, abandoned boat that they found on the Bosnian bank of the river.

On the Croatian side, they walked for about one hour into Slavonski Brod (HR). On their way, they saw a group of policemen but they managed to stay undetected.

Around 4 a.m., they reached the bus station of Slavonski brod (coordinates 45.1629298,18.0081565). They wanted to look for a bus that could take them to Zagreb. Instead, they saw a taxi with an official taxi sign on its roof. It was a grey Mercedes. They talked to the taxi chauffeur and he offered them to take them to Zagreb for 200 €. While the two migrants were discussing among them whether they would accept this offer, the taxi chauffeur made a call. As it turned out, he called the police. Apparently he had noticed that they are refugees. The interviewee mentioned that according to his knowledge, the Croatian police rewards citizens who report refugees to the police.

After a short time – they were still standing outside the taxi – the police arrived. They arrived by two cars, they were about 8 to 10 male policemen, wearing darkblue uniforms. Among these policemen were also the ones whom the two migrants had seen before. They were told to get into a white Mercedes van. The police then drove with them to a nearby Croatian-Bosnian borderpost (probably 45.1568823,18.0022095) where the Croatian policemen talked to Bosnian officials (policemen or borderguards).

Then the Croatian police drove them back to a police station in Slavonski Brod. The two migrants stated that they want to ask for asylum. The policemen, however, just started to laugh and said no. At this point of the interview, the interviewee said that he feels that the policemen were racist and hated Arabic people.

The police took the cigarettes, the money (100€ and a smaller amount of Bosnian Marks), the Bosnian camp IDs of the two migrants – in the words of the interviewee “ *everything that we had with us, except our phones and the part of the*

money that I managed to hide from them. They took even the perfume bottle that my friend had with him". He did not disclose where he had hidden the money. They were never given back their belongings. When the policemen took the camp IDs and the Bosnian money, they looked at it and laughed; the interviewee had the impression that they were deriding these Bosnian documents.

Inside the police station they were led to a cell. The interviewee mentioned that he saw the flag of the European Union at the wall of the corridor leading to the cell. When they had been brought to their cell, four policemen came to beat them. One of the policemen slapped the interviewee in his face, and the interviewee's friend was kicked into the back and the legs. While they exerted this violence, the policemen were talking to each other but not to the two migrants.

In the police station the two migrants were told to fill several papers. For example, they had to write down the names of their parents. The police also took their finger prints. On the instrument used to take their finger prints, there was also a sign with the flag of the European Union. The interviewee was then told to write his name on a paper and to hold it in front of his chest; the police took a picture of him in this position. The policemen explained them that they take this information in order to register them for a camp in Croatia where their request to stay in the EU would be considered. However, as it turned out, this explication was only to make fun of the two migrants.

Around 7 a.m., i.e. after some 3 hours in the police station, two policemen came to their cell and took them into the same car (white Mercedes van) by which they had been brought to the police station. After a drive of some two hours, the car stopped in front of a building on which there were the flags of the EU and of Croatia. A man wearing civil clothes came out of the building. He had some papers with him and the two migrants were told to sign them inside the car. The papers were in Croatian language. The two migrants do not understand Croatian and were not explained what the content of the papers was. They were not even given time to have a closer look at them before signing. Next to the field where he was asked to sign on one of the papers, the interviewee recognised the sign of a flag resembling the flag of Croatia.

After that, the two policemen in the car asked them "Where do you want to go? To Bosnia?" The migrants said yes. In fact, however, they were brought to the border between Croatia and Serbia. The interviewee stated that the policemen obviously aimed at humiliating them by their misleading question.

After some 15 minutes of further driving after the signing of papers, the car stopped in a forest and they were told to leave the car and to go to Serbia. The two migrants replied that they did not want to go to Serbia but to Bosnia. The policemen answered that they should now just leave. The migrants were not returned their belongings that had been taken away in the police station.

The two men first started to walk in the direction of Serbia but after a while decided to change their direction and head towards Bosnia. They used the GPS of their phones for this. During the interview, the interviewee could not recall the exact location. They had followed a railway track for a few hours (the interviewee estimated the walking distance to have been almost 20 kilometers) when they were stopped by four policemen in a car. After the latter had made a phone call, the same two policemen who had driven the migrants to the Serbian border before arrived with the same van. They told them to get into the van and drove again to the same point in the forest where they had let them out before. They laughed at them and told them to go back again. The interviewee felt humiliated by this treatment. He said "They are treating us like animals, they don't see us as normal humans. They find it funny to let you walk for 20 kilometers and take you back again." He further mentioned that during the several hours in the custody of the police – meanwhile it was about 1 or 2 p.m., and they had been arrested at 4 a.m. –, they were not given anything to drink or to eat, not even water. He said that he did not ask the police for it because he felt it would be pointless: "Even if you ask them, they would not give it to you".

The two men reached a Croatian village a few kilometers from the border. The villagers were friendly to them, and a boy

helped them to buy some food and to charge their phones.

Around 6 p.m., some 15 hours after they had entered Croatia, the two migrants crossed the border to Serbia. They walked for some 8 hours; the interviewee estimated the distance to have been 30-40 kilometers. They saw Serbian policemen on their way but they did not take notice of them. The two migrants crossed a first river and then reached the Save river which marks the border between Serbia and Bosnia. Around 2 a.m., they found a bridge by which they were able to cross the border river (probably 44.9095444,19.2961859). They used a walkway underneath the main lane of the bridge. They accessed the walkway through a door. The bridge was very long.

After 1,5 hours of walking in Bosnia, they found a gas station where they ate something. A man at the gas station called a taxi to take them to the next bus station, however no taxi arrived. They thus continued to walk. It was raining. When they went to a market to buy some food, two locals called the police. The Bosnian police arrived by car and drove them back to the border to Serbia and told them to cross it.

They walked in Serbia until they reached the same walkway underneath the Save bridge to come back to Bosnia again. They walked in the forests in order to stay undetected. They finally reached Tuzla (BiH, 44.5428788,17.5550128), and from there, they were able to take a bus to Sarajevo. They arrived to Sarajevo seven or eight days after they had entered Croatia.

In the end of the interview, the interviewer asked the interviewee whether he wanted to add anything. The interviewee replied: “ *The Croatian police behavior is cruel, I just wish that this will change.* ”