

18/04/2019

"ME AND THE MINORS ARE WITNESSES OF ALL THE VIOLENCE THAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST, AND THIS SCARS WILL STAY INSIDE OURSELVES."

Date and time: April 18, 2019 04:30

Location: Bosnian/Croatian Border at the River "Glina" next to "Crni Potok"

Coordinates: 45.217018 , 15.857698

Push-back from: Croatia

Push-back to: Bosnia

Demographics: 5 person(s), age: 14-19, 24, 32 , from: Syria, Iraq

Minors involved? Yes

Violence used: pushing people to the ground, insulting, gunshots, forcing to undress, reckless driving

Police involved: 3 police cars with 7 policemen and one dog

Taken to a police station?: no

Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?: Yes

Reported by: Border Violence Monitoring

ORIGINAL REPORT

The group consisted of five male individuals: a 32-year-old Palestinian-Syrian male, a 19-year-old male from Iraq, and three Kurdish-Syrian brothers aged 14, 17, and 24 years old. The eldest Kurdish-Syrian brother is mentally disabled.

They group of five left from Velika Kladuša (BiH) and crossed into Croatia before walking for around for three days. On the third day, at around 1:30 am, the group was attempting to sleep in a secluded area in a forest when they were detected by Croatian authorities. The respondents described feeling as if they were in a movie since helicopter hovered above them.

"We aren't criminals, we are just refugees, we have our food and some blankets and want to continue our trip towards a safe place where we can have asylum."

Shortly after, a very bright light was pointed at them and a voice on a loudspeaker rang out in English, saying : *"Raise your hands and don't move."* The group-members raised their hands above their heads for about 5 minutes with the helicopter above them until a group of Croatian police cars arrived to their location. There were three police cars, with seven policemen and one dog in total. One of the officers was described as being called "Marco", and appeared to the respondents as being the leader of the operation. The interviewee described this lead officer as being of average height and being around 40 years old.

The respondent communicated to this officer the ages and nationalities of all of the group-members, voicing that they wanted to seek asylum. He also explained to officer the previous injury which the 13-year-old minor had experience during a previous transit attempt which had required surgery (a result of smoke intoxication). The respondent explained to the officer that there was no adequate medical treatment for this injury as a refugee in Bosnia and that this was why they need to continue. The lead officer told the respondent "No" and that they should leave and not come back again.

“When we said to the police that we need asylum, we just received the answer that they don’t want refugees here anymore.”

Because it was dark and the police officers positioned themselves in front of the lights of their cars, the group-members were not able to notice more specific information and details about the operating officers. Every group-member was made to undress and were searched for weapons, drugs, phones and money.

The respondent begged one of the officers to allow the 13-year-old minor to put his clothes back on as he was worried about the effect that the cold might have on his lung injury. In response, the officer called them “son of a bitch” and “motherfucker”. The respondent described this officer as trying to undress the 13-year-old with a police baton and pushing him back after he was undressed. This process of searching the belongings of the group-members was conducted very thoroughly and lasted for 2 hours. One of the officers threatened the respondent during the search of his bag with the words: *“We will talk later”*, since the police officer had received a voice message via radio on his shoulder saying *“Hajde, hajde”*.

After this, the police officers hurried and ordered the group to enter a prisoner van. After a 20-minute ride they found themselves in a place in the woods with about 60 other apprehended people-in-transit. At this location, the officers put an additional ten people inside the back of the prisoner van. They were then driven with five other vans to a point in the woods along the Bosnian-Croatian border where the small river (the Glina) marks the border. The distance between the prisoner vans and the small river was about 30 meters. The police officers forced about 60 to 70 people (from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Morocco and Algeria) to jump 1.5 meters down into this small river. When all the refugees were out of the prisoner vans, the police officers ordered them to stand in one big group together. One officer shot a bullet in the air screamed: *“Hajde, Hajde!”* Everybody fell into the river and were wet afterwards. There were many Croatian police officers (so many that the interviewee could not provide a concrete number) which stood on the other side of the river, screaming *“Go back to Bosnia”*. The respondent remarked that one of the police officers wore a helmet with a red light on it.

The original group of five were not beaten, however the 13-year-old was pushed by one officer during the process of the search and all of them were pushed when they had to cross the river at the border.

“We don’t have injuries from this push-back, but I am here now since almost 1 year and 14 times pushed back. So me and the minors are witnesses of all the violence that happened in the past, and this scars will stay inside ourselves.”

During the mass-push-back which the group was part of, the respondent described witnessing the pushing, kicking and beating of other individuals

“They beat them, like someone beats his horse. Where exactly, they don’t care, on the head, in the face, on your bag and your arms, they just want to make you scared.”

The respondent remarked that he believed that the Croatian officers were intentional in the way that they communicated violence onto people-in-transit:

“And also the Croatian police is not stupid, they don’t make you visible injuries anymore, now they treat you all the time in such a humiliating way that mark stays inside of you. They know what they do.”

The push-back location was near to Velika Kladuša and after 2 hours of walking they reached the city. During this push-back no fingerprints were taken, no medical treatment happened, no papers were signed, and no pictures were taken.

Towards the end of the interview, the respondent remarked that in his experience, the violent enforcement of EU borders had forced him and his friends into more dangerous transit behavior:

“If we wouldn’t have to do the games and put ourselves in danger because of the laws of the European governments and the treatment of the Croatian police, we wouldn’t have to face so much suffering. At the game where X almost died, I really believed in humanity and thought that the Croatian police would bring us to a hospital, but I was disappointed.”