

15/04/2019

"YOU MUST NOT SPEAK. DON'T SPEAK, DON'T ASK. IF THEY ASK YOU, YOU JUST ANSWER "YES" OR "NO". IF YOU SAY SOMETHING, THEY HIT YOU."

Date and time: April 15, 2019 00:00

Location: Korenica, Croatia

Coordinates: 44.7431 , 15.70631

Push-back from: Croatia

Push-back to: Bosnia

Demographics: 15 person(s), age: 6, 17, 17, 16, 17 and 20-39 years old , from: Libya

Minors involved? Yes

Violence used: pushing people to the ground, insulting, destruction of personal belongings, theft of personal belongings

Taken to a police station?: yes

Treatment at police station or other place of detention: detention, fingerprints taken, papers signed, denial of access to toilets, denial of food/water

Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?: Yes

Reported by: Border Violence Monitoring

ORIGINAL REPORT

It was a group of 15 persons, 8 men (20-39 years old), 1 family with an 6 year old child and 4 minors (17,16,17,17 years), all from Libya (one of the minors was born in France and has papers for that, the mother has papers from Libya). Croatia has a good relationship with Libya.

They started in Bihać and walked over the mountains to cross the border. The family wanted to go to Slovenia and joined the group of 12 people. *"We took them with us, but they couldn't really walk in the forest/Jungle. It was too much for the 6 year old child."*

When they reached the border they were exhausted, so they rested for a bit on the Bosnian side of it. Suddenly there were 2 Croatian special force police officers in green uniform and big guns in their hand from 2 sides coming towards them, shouting: *"Stop, stop! Police!"* But the group kept on walking and crossed the border to the Croatian side together. *"They didn't say that we should go back to Bosnia, they wanted to catch us."*

When they reached the Croatian side, the mother of the 6 year old child collapsed to the ground because she was sick. Then 2 other special force police officers came and surrounded the group and called the police. After some time, 6 police cars with 7 Croatian police officers in dark-blue uniform came and some officers took the family into a separate car, to drive them to a hospital. The rest of the group was forced to stand in a line and the officers yelled at them: *"Don't look me in the eyes!"* Then they ordered them to knee down on the ground and searched them one by one.

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They searched all their bags and clothes, also the shoes, socks and underwear. The police took some things out of the backpack, what they the officer thought the people will not need and threw it in the woods. The money, phones and power banks they put into a white bag. *"All of us were silent, because we were afraid to get beaten."*

The police officers were insulting them in Croatian language and acted very disrespectful towards them. After that, they forced them into a transportation (prisoners) van, to bring them within 20-30 minutes to the police station in Korenica. *"This is the worst police station. All policemen there are brutal and racist."*

There they took them into "the garage", which is a place without toilet, beds or blankets only bare concrete ground and one water faucet. After some hours they brought them upstairs to the second floor, where one woman and one man in civil clothes from the integration office gave them about 20 documents in Croatian language, which they had to sign without any translation. One person said: *"I don't sign, I have to understand the documents. Maybe it's for deportation!"*. One police officer just responded: *"No, just sign! It's the same if you sign or not, it doesn't change anything."* They also took fingerprints of every finger from every person. Afterwards they took 3 persons of the group in a kind of a hospital for immigration very near (5min by car) to the Korenica police station. There a Palestinian translator asked them in Arabic language: "From where are you? What are you doing here? Where are you going?" and doctors took a blood sample for analysis of 2 persons from them. This information/result they apportioned among everyone of the group, so they filled in the data from the 3 persons for everyone else.

After 30 minutes they brought the 3 persons back to the garage. After this the 4 minors were separated from them and brought out of the garage. *"There were two women coming in a silver car who were from an organization, that takes care of minors. We wanted to speak with them, but the police didn't let us. 2 of the minors were brought to Zagreb, one to France, because he was born there and one to Germany."*

The rest of the group, 8 persons, spent in total 48 hours in the garage. *"They brought us also some food. They did this, because the association, I think the UNHCR, knew, that we are here. They heard about us from the family in the hospital. Normally they don't give you anything there. We had a special treatment because they put a sign, like a cross, on our hands, to mark us for transportation to the camp in Trilj. On this day they let 10 men from Pakistan wait in the van, that was standing in the yard all night and all day. Then they pushed them back directly."*

The 2nd interviewee was already detained in "the garage" in Korenica two times before the described detainment. He pointed out, that there was a significant worse treatment and more people inside "the garage", when he was there in winter.

"The floor is all concrete, it is cold, we have to sleep on it. There is only one water faucet and a small heater on the wall. The door is blue and there is very much written on it in many languages, like dates, names, and from where, like Pakistani, Algerian, Moroccan, Arabic, Iran, Syrian, from everywhere."

"We could go only 2 times per day to the toilet, in the morning and in the evening. For this they take us outside to the yard, where there are 3 plastic toilets. If you want to get something out of your backpack, you have to ask a police officer, who comes once a day and maybe you get it. If you knock on the door, they don't hear you. People have to piss in a bottle."

After 2 days in the garage, they let them out and drove them within 3 hours in a van to the closed detention prison in Trilj. There the situation was better for them, they got food, clothes, could wash themselves and there were also toilets. *"There was a new relation between us and the police in Trilj. They know that we are good and most of them were nice to us. But one of them, a tall, very fat guy with blue eyes and bold head was very rude and racist. He was the worst of all."*

After 15 days in the camp, when they were not able to call anyone, because they had no money, one police officer and the director of the camp came to them. They showed them all the papers, which included information of where they

were caught, personal facts about themselves and what they said, when they were questioned. After that, they gave the about 20 documents to another police officer. They had to sign all of them but never received any of them. Also there was a paper that described the “Exit” of Croatia. *“One document also said, that we are going to justice (the judge).”* After that the director and the one police officer drove them in a car 3 hours back to the police station in Korenica. There in the bureau, the director handed over the documents to a police officer from there. He also said: *“These people are good, they need to go back to the camp.”* To the group of 8 he said: *“It is a 50/50 chance, either you go to Zagreb or you go to Bosnia.”* They were sent again to this small hospital next to the police station and after 15 minutes the officers decided to deport them back to Bosnia.

As a result, one police officer from the police station of Korenica and one officer from the camp brought the persons in a van to another small police station in Donji Lapac, which is next to a huge hospital.

“There is very dangerous police. All with big batons and all very racist.”

When arriving there, one police officer opened the back door of the van and the group saw another van, who was directly standing in front of it, already with open doors. So they were forced to walk 5 meters from one car into another.

“When the police of Trilj handed us over to the border police they said: “Don’t hit them!” And the police really didn’t hit us. But when I was alone with them, they hit me.”

Then they drove them near the Croatian/Bosnian border on a forest road. When they were let out, one policeman came and asked harshly, while threatening them with a baton: “Who has a phone? You are 8 people, so bring me 8 phones, I want to see 8 phones! If you don’t give me your phone, I will hit you!”

“He tried to scare us with this, of course, not everyone of us had phone. So we gave all we had and he destroyed the charging area with a screwdriver and put it in a white bag. In the forest there is a huge pile of things they steal from people, like food, backpacks, phones, power banks, everything. The sleeping bags they burn.”

Then they walked with them about 100 meters from the road through the forest towards the border, one police officer in front and one behind them, insulting them. After they walked some small forest path downhill they gave the white bag to one person of the group and told him to run so far, that they cannot see him anymore. When this person was gone, they ordered the rest of the group to walk further down the path to the Bosnian side of the border. There was a big rock, that marks the border, then a fence and the river. After crossing the river, they walked about 30 minutes back to Bihać.

One of the Interviewee is in contact with the family, who was separated from the group, when they were caught. He knows, that they are now in a closed camp in Croatia, next to the Serbian border.

“One of the minors, who was brought to Zagreb told to the UNHCR about us and they tried to contact us in the camp, but because we were deported after 15 days, they couldn’t find us.”

Coordinates of the Push-back: 44.7318, 15.9084

Police Station in Donji Lapac: 44.55299, 15.96031

Detention-prison in Trilj: 43.6222, 16.7339