

11/11/2018

## **"[...] THEY WERE EXPECTED TO JUMP OVER THE OBSTACLES IN ORDER TO GET THROUGH THE OFFICER LINE AND REACH BOSNIAN SOIL"**

**Date and time:** November 11, 2018 19:00

**Location:** River side of Kolpa, Croatia

**Coordinates:** 45.460779 , 14.826531

**Push-back from:** Croatia

**Push-back to:** Bosnia

**Demographics:** 9 person(s), age: unknown , from: Syria

**Minors involved?** Unknown

**Violence used:** beating (with batons/hands/other), kicking, insulting, theft of personal belongings

**Police involved:** Dark blue / black uniforms, wearing ski masks

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

**Treatment at police station or other place of detention:** detention, photos taken, papers signed

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

**Reported by:** No Name Kitchen

### **ORIGINAL REPORT**

The group of nine left Velika Kladuša (BIH) in November 2018, with the intention of crossing through Croatia to Slovenia and from there to Italy. During their journey across Croatia, the group encountered a group of five bears as well as a number of hunters, which they begged not to inform the authorities . After about one week of walking, the y approached the Kolpa river bordering Slovenia in the early morning hours. When they arrived, they found the river to be flowing much stronger than they had anticipated. The respondent tested out the feasibility of crossing the river. As the rest of the nine were already tired, they decided to light a fire to make tea. Soon after, just when the respondent returned to the group, they saw flashlights coming down from the mountain and inferred that someone had seen their fir e and informed the authorities about their presence. They immediately put out the fire. While several officers passed close to their campsite, they remained undetected and the officers proceeded past them unaware of their presence. At this point, an argument broke out between the eight about what they should do next. S ome of them wanted to attempt to cross the river immediately, whereas others wanted to pass the river closer to a waterfall downstream. An elderly man in the group decided he wouldn't be able to cross the river in any case and would wait for the officers to find him. His son also decided to stay.

As several individuals were preparing to inflate plastic bags to use as flotation devices on the river, they turned their heads and saw again several officers coming down from the mountain with their pistols drawn. They ordered the group of eight to stop, which they did.

They were then taken to a nearby police station where they had access to an Arabic translator via phone, were photographed, and made to fill out papers, written in Arabic. One of the respondents remembered that their paperwork was titled "Declaration of Refugee". Several group members asked for asylum, but the officers responded negatively. They told the group that if they had presented to the police station, then perhaps they

could have given them asylum, but since they were caught in the forest, they could not offer asylum.

The group stayed in the police station for roughly three hours before they were put in a van which drove them back to the Bosnian-Croatian border.

One of the individuals has a hearing device implanted in his ear as a result of the injuries sustained from having been close to two suicide bombings in his home town in Syria. As he had heard, that beatings at the border are the usual procedure, he was afraid someone could destroy it. On the way back to the border, he told the officers in the van about this injury. The officers told him that they wouldn't beat them up, but that they would chase them to the other side of the border. When they arrived at the destination, the door to the van was opened, and they were told several times by the officer:

*“ This is the road to Kladusa.”*

The eight of them had to get off two by two, and after each two the van doors would be locked again. Upon stepping out of the vehicle, the couples found out that there were other cards and other officers waiting for them behind the vehicles with balaclavas, gloves, and batons. The Croatian officers were situated in two lines which ran from either side of the van down the road leading to Bosnia, meaning they had to run in between them to get to the Bosnian side of the border. What surprised the group, however, was that in between the lines of officers were obstacles which they described as similar to the types of fences horses jump over in competitions. The group explained that they were expected to jump over the obstacles in order to get through the officer line and reach Bosnian soil.

*“ When you want to pass, they start beating you up, when you run away you find an obstacle where you have to jump. When you jump you find another, they start beat you up, beat you up, until the second obstacle, when you jump on the second obstacle, you find another two [police officers].”*

After the eight of them completed the obstacles, two final officers, equipped with big batons, started chasing them across the border. One of the individuals ran through the line of officers, fell down while jumping over an obstacle, and immediately several Croatian officers began to start kicking and beating him. Although this individual wasn't present during the testimony collection, the respondents remarked that the middle of his face had been hit particularly badly.

Further, two phones and two power banks were stolen from them during this process.

After the eight of them made it to the Bosnian side, they walked back 5 km to Velika Kladuša and treated their wounds.