

23/02/2019

## **"I SAID IS IT POSSIBLE TO STAY HERE, THEY SAID NO, NO CHANCE."**

**Date and time:** February 23, 2019 16:00

**Location:** Gradets, Macedonia, close to Gradets

**Coordinates:** 41.3413533 , 22.4479712

**Push-back from:** North Macedonia

**Push-back to:** Greece

**Demographics:** 9 person(s), age: 20, 24, 26, unknown , from: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India

**Minors involved?** Unknown

**Violence used:** handcuffed

**Police involved:** Macedonian police officers, caught by 2 and joined by 2 male officers (blue uniforms, pistols, pepper spray, insignia of Macedonian police, blue-white police jeep), some police officers (blue-white van) from a police station and IOM office, one officer in IOM office (in plain clothes)

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

**Treatment at police station or other place of detention:** fingerprints taken, personal information taken

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

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

### **ORIGINAL REPORT**

Late February 2019, between February 23 and 27 , a group of three crossed the border from Greece to Macedonia by crawling under a barbed wire fence. Afterwards, they walked for around seven hours until nightfall. By that time, they were around two kilometers far from the town of Gradets (MKD). To their right were grape farms and a train track to their left. Suddenly, they saw two to three flashlights on the right side and supposed they might come from the authorities, although they weren't able to see anyone in the dark. Then they heard someone shouting at them, but couldn't understand anything. They started running to the left side , through the grape farms and some officers started chasing them. One of the three got separated from the others , and they later found out that he was caught during the chase and pushed back. The two others continued running for around 30 minutes, first fast, then slower and slower. When they turned around, they could see the flashlights in a safe distance and knew they had escaped successfully.

The group of now two walked for around two kilometers, until they found an abandoned building close to the town of Gradets ( MKD ) at the approximate coordinates 41.3413533, 22.4479712. As they were very tired, they decided to sleep there. The building was very small, with a single story. Both of them slept in sleeping bags. Around 12 am, they woke up as someone walked into room and saw two officers.

*"Where are you from?"*

*"Pakistan."*

Then the officers talked in Macedonian, which the two individuals didn't understand. The respondent asked if they spoke Russian, one replied 'yes', the other 'no', but both officers spoke English.

They handcuffed both men together with fabric binds and then called someone with a radio phone. The two of them had to wait until two more officers arrived with a blue-white police jeep. All officers wore blue uniforms with the emblem of the Macedonian police on it, pistols and pepper spray. It was around 4 pm, when they had to enter the backspace of the car and were driven for around 20 minutes to a police station.

Inside, they were told to sit in a waiting room. One officer came and asked them again, where they were from, but no other questions were asked. After 10 minutes another officer brought them outside, and they had to enter a blue police van.

They then drove to an IOM office, potentially inside a camp as the respondent saw children playing and a number of temporary cabins. At the office they had to wait for around 5 to 10 minutes and were then asked for their names and nationalities. They further had to give their fingerprints without being informed about the purpose of it. The respondent expressed his wish to stay in Macedonia but was told that this was not possible.

*"I said is it possible to stay here, they said no, no chance. I said what will you do with us, will you send us back, they said yes of course."*

Afterwards, they got some food and water by a Red Cross staff. A man in plain clothes, who might have been an officer, then asked for their phones. He then left the room and went to another cabin.

*"After 5 minutes he comes back in and tells me 'come', then he took me to a different cabin and then asked me 'whats the code for your phone?' I gave it to him and then he told me to leave."*

The two of them had to wait for 30 minutes in the first cabin with five officers. At this point there were around eight other people on the move, four from India, two from Pakistan and two from Afghanistan. All had to hand over their phones and disclose their passwords. None of them was informed about what exactly they checked on their phones, but the officers asked each of them questions about the people on their photos. The respondent was asked questions specifically about a photo he had of the one of them who got separated from the other two on the previous day. He told the officer, that he had already been pushed back.

Afterwards, the phones were returned to the people on the move. Around 40 minutes later, the same blue van arrived again and they all had to enter its backspace. They were driven for five to ten minutes to the Greek border, around the coordinates 41.1282935, 22.5177522.

At 6 pm the following evening, they were taken out of the van and told to walk through a gate in the border fence. On the other side there were no police officers.