

11/03/2019

## **"WE WERE LIKE ZOMBIES. I DID NOT FEEL ANYTHING ELSE BUT VOMIT AND HEADACHE."**

**Date and time:** March 11, 2019 09:00

**Location:** Zilje, Slovenia, near Zilje

**Coordinates:** 45.4597271 , 15.2956027

**Push-back from:** Slovenia, Croatia

**Push-back to:** Bosnia

**Demographics:** 13 person(s), age: 7-14, 50, unknown , from: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq

**Minors involved?** Yes

**Violence used:** exposure to air condition and extreme temperature during car ride, threatening with guns, theft of personal belongings, reckless driving

**Police involved:** Around 10 officers in different locations. Slovenian Police: Dark blue uniforms with guns, batons, handcuffs and sprays on their belts. Hexagonal or pentagonal emblem with the Slovenian flag and the letters "Policija" on the sleeves. Croatian officers: Dark blue uniforms. Several vans in different locations

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

**Treatment at police station or other place of detention:** detention, photos taken, personal information taken, papers signed, no translator present

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

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

### **ORIGINAL REPORT**

The group of initially 24 people on the move started their journey on March 3, 2019, in Velika Kladuša (BIH). Near Miljkovici (BIH) at the approximate coordinates 45.2027349, 15.8023509, they crossed the Croatian border.

The group walked mostly in the nights and slept in the forests. After several nights of walking, the group ran out of food. The only thing left was some bread, walnuts and raisins. Their approximate coordinates at that point were 45.4240133,15.6283776. Therefore, 11 persons decided to leave the group and to voluntarily go to the Croatian authorities who then took them back to Bosnia. The rest of the group, 13 persons, among them five minors aged between seven and 14 and three women, continued their journey towards Slovenia and tried to speed up as much as possible.

After a total of eight nights and two days of walking, they reached the border between Croatia and Slovenia on March 11. They entered Slovenia around 9 am near Zilje (SVN) at the approximate coordinates 45.4597271,15.2956027. They crossed the Kolpa river by foot, with the water reaching their upper thighs. The father of the reporting family had to cross the river twice because his wife, who had her menstruation and was generally weakened after the long walking, was not strong enough to carry any of their luggage through the river. There was heavy rainfall and they were all wet and cold.

After another hour and around two more kilometers of walking in Slovenia, they were apprehended by two Slovenian officers driving in a Renault Megane police car. One officer was male and young. The other one was a woman. She

seemed very angry, pointed with her gun at the group of 13 and shouted at them. She then put her gun directly at the temple of an Afghani man.

The two officers made a call and shortly after, two vans arrived, each carrying two to three officers. The officers were wearing dark blue uniforms and carried guns, batons, handcuffs and sprays on their belts. On their sleeves, there was a hexagonal or pentagonal emblem with the Slovenian flag and the letters "Policija".

Two officers took the son, aged 14, of the reporting family away from the group without telling the parents where they were taking him.

*"We were so very worried."*

During the interview it was still noticeable how much this experience had unsettled them. The father told the officer:

*"I want to go with my son!"*

But they denied that, took him harshly by his arm and pushed him into one of the vans. All men were told to enter the same van, while the women and children had to get into the other van. The backspace of the vans were windowless and very dark. There was just a small plastic window of around seven centimeters height, through which they could see into the driver's cabin. On the ceiling of the backspace, there were two ventilators. It was very cold in there.

*"The air inside the van was very bad."*

He pointed out that he had never before had to vomit in a car, but during the 30 minutes transfer which followed he had to throw up twice. All other in the same van had to vomit as well. In the floor there was kind of a hole where the vomit would spill in. The father managed to put his nose between the wings of the backdoor and was able to breath a bit fresh air which gave him some relief. He believes that the officers filled some kind of gas into the backspace to make them vomit. He did not recognize a particular smell or a color of the air in the van. The men knocked on the van's walls and shouted to stop the car and let them out. The policemen, however, just shouted back:

*"Šuti! Šuti!" [Engl.: Shut up]*

In the women's car, several people also vomited, but the mother of the reporting family couldn't specify whether most or all of the persons were vomiting because she was so much absorbed by worrying about her son. After some 30 minutes of driving, the vans reached a police station near Veliki Nerajec (SLN), at the coordinates 45.5096867, 15.1864282. Once outside of the vans, the sickness faded soon.

Meanwhile, the officer who had taken the son, asked him to show them where and how the group had crossed the border. By using the proper road instead of the way through the forest which the group had taken, they reached the river within some 30 minutes. The officer asked the teenager:

*"Would you like to stay in Slovenia?"*

When the boy replied yes, he asked him why.

*"Because Slovenia is in the Schengen area and the economic and the work situation is better than in Bosnia."*

The officer answered with ok. The teenager asked him:

*"What can we do so that we can stay in Slovenia?"*

The officer just replied:

*“ You can’t stay in Slovenia .”*

The teenager asked him several times why they could not stay, but each time the officer just answered:

*“ I don’t know .”*

Then, they took the teenager to a police car, a Volvo, and he was driven to the same police station as the rest of the group where he was finally reunited with his parents.

In the police station, the people on the move was given fast food. Then, one by one was asked a series of questions, i.e. where they come from. The father of the reporting family told the officer that he wanted to stay in Slovenia. They asked him:

*“ How do you want to live here?”*

He replied:

*“I will work.”*

After that, they just said:

*“ No, you just go back! ”*

After a while, the officers took all their bags, put them into a plastic bag and searched everyone, including the children. They also took away their money and phones.

*“ They took everything except the clothes we were wearing. They took even our shoes and gave us slippers instead. ”*

All belongings that contained metal, such as their razors, nail clippers, scissors, needles and earrings, were thrown in a bin.

The father of the reporting family then had to sign three or four papers, all written in Slovenian. There was a translator present, however he did not explain what was written on the papers. The father didn’t know why the translator didn’t give any explanations. He also didn’t get a copy of the papers he had signed.

After around three hours at the first police station near Veliki Nerajec, the group of 13 was told to enter two vans again. Inside the van, they again had to vomit.

They now drove for around 20 minutes, until they reached another police station, where each family had to share one room with a toilet inside. The room was warm, they were given food, blankets and sheets. They stayed there for one night.

In the morning, two cars brought them to a Croatian border crossing on a highway where no river was visible. The Slovenian officers returned their bags and handed the group over to the Croatian authorities who were wearing dark blue uniforms. They told the whole group of 13 persons to enter one van together and to take their luggage with them. During the following transfer, they had to vomit again.

After approximately one hour driving, the van stopped at a Croatian police station at an unknown location. The two employees inside were wearing civil clothes and told the people on the move to write down their names on a paper and to hold it in front of their chest. The officers then took photos of them. This was done one by one, also with the children.

After this short stop, they continued their trip in the van. Again there was vomiting. The father of the reporting family described this transfer as follows:

*“ I just wished that nobody would speak to me, my head was hurting so badly and I was feeling so sick. I was feeling as if I would be dying. ”*

His son reported that there were no seats with seat belts in the van, just a board at the wall where they could sit. Some children and also his mother fell down on the van's floor.

*“ We were like zombies. I did not feel anything else but vomit and headache. ”*

After some 1,5 hours driving, the van stopped again, this time at the border between Croatia and Bosnia, east of Velika Kladusa. It was in the mountains, nearby some villages, and there was just a small road for agricultural vehicles. The respondent located the push-back to have taken place around the coordinates 45.218623, 16.011921, near Veliki Obljaj (HRV). Once they arrived there, their phones and money was returned, but not the metallic items which the Slovenian officers had put into the bin. The Croatian officers said:

*“Hajde! Ideš, marš!”*

On their way to Velika Kladusa, they noticed dozens of broken phones on the roadside. After an estimated 25 kilometers of walking, the enfeebled mother of the reporting family fell down. It was already dark, but they were able to reach a restaurant and asked for help. The people inside called the Bosnian authorities, who then took them to a hospital and acted friendly. After some two hours in the hospital, the mother was given a serum and the family went to the Miral camp in Velika Kladuša. From there, the IOM brought them by car to the camp in Bihac, where they arrived around 3 am on March 13.

In the end of the interview, the mother of the reporting family stressed that she will never forget this experience:

*“ Our deportation from Slovenia is one of the worst experiences I have ever had. This journey is a very difficult memory for me. ”*

The father nodded and added:

*“ And nonetheless, we will have to try again. We do not have another choice. Where else should we stay? ”*