



# STILL MOVING EUROPE

Resistance Along The Balkanroute



September 2017

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It was not by accident that we chose *Moving Europe* two years ago as the name for another project of support along the Balkan route. In summer 2015, we did not expect such a long and intensive struggle able to break the border regime, and in the same winter we could likewise not imagine such a quick and strong 'roll back' of the regime in 2016. But we anticipated, at least, that the increasing struggles of refugees and migrants and the immense wave of support and welcoming in the countries of transit and destination would have transformative and long-term effects for Europe – they were quite literally 'moving Europe'. And although today (August

## Introduction

# STILL MOVING EUROPE

2017) the fight for freedom of movement seems to be pushed back into a defensive position, struggles on flight and migration are still vivid on various levels. Contested spaces still exist all over Europe and continue to shape the whole political landscape.

To combine practical assistance with information-services, with monitoring, documentation and publicity against the EU border regime: these were the main aims, when the small Moving Europe network was founded. Our continuous presence along the Balkan route ended in July 2016 - the consequence of a lack of resources but we left with many open questions concerning further strategies. Several of our members have left the project in the meantime, but we, nevertheless, want to continue to contribute to the wider network for freedom of movement. We are still convinced of the necessity of long-term structures to support the ongoing daily struggles against the borders.

Putting together this brochure is one way of keeping the network active and visible. To foster transnational communication within the supporting groups was and remains an important part of our project. As part of the NoBorder Camp in Thessaloniki in July 2016, we helped organize a Balkan route conference. And we were also involved in another networking meeting in Budapest in May 2017: 'Resistance along the Balkan Route - reflections, exchange and future strategies for united struggles.' In reference to this meeting, this brochure provides several updated insights into the situations in various cities along the route, from Turkey up to Germany. We do not pretend to offer a comprehensive overview. Rather, we present fragments of a situation which is still changing.

The texts and articles of the various groups and friends along the Balkan route are some of the main elements of this brochure. In addition, the brochure offers a detailed chronology of 2015 and 2016, in-depth insights from friends in Thessaloniki, and different voices from involved refugees and migrants. It is an attempt to re-narrate the (hi)stories of the extraordinary months of 2015/16 and thus to contribute to a collective memorialisation of struggles around flight and migration. The second anniversary of the historic March of Hope from September 2015 appeared to us as a suitable moment to publish and spread the brochure.

Finally, the brochure includes insights on the wider context of struggles and contested spaces, into which we want to integrate the evaluation of 2015/16 and the updates after (or still within) the racist roll back of the border regime. An excerpt of the recently published 'Report about a formalized corridor', an article on push-backs in the Balkans, a report from Lesbos and a longer article about the last eight years of struggle against the Dublin-regulations, and last but not least

articles about building communities and about the transnational social strike, will illustrate what we mean when we refer to the existence of contested spaces.

### **A few more remarks about our starting points and some general estimates**

Our practices were always based upon an understanding of everyday resistance, a continuous struggle for spaces of movement, and spaces of autonomy. During the Summer of Migration, we saw what has been referred to as the Autonomy of Migration. And yet, the situation along the Balkan route has changed dramatically since the dirty deal with Turkey, and the closure of the Greek-Macedonian border. The demolition of the barracks of Belgrade in May 2017 signified the end of any autonomous movement able to cross the Balkans. Already before, the Balkan route turned back into what it had been in 2014 and in the beginning of 2015: a route mainly managed by smugglers and drivers. There are still several thousand passing monthly, but it is a passage characterised by anxiety and the risk to life, and it is expensive financially. Nevertheless, we should not make the mistake to declare the Balkan route dead. There are all these fences and regimes, but Orbán and all these other regressive structures and tendencies in Balkan politics may just represent an interim nightmare. The cause of liberation and the cause of migration will walk hand in hand.

Our common struggle will survive. After the closure of the Aegean Sea and Idomeni, movements through the passage of the Central Mediterranean route, from Libya to Italy, have increased until recently, and also the composition of migrants has changed, socially and ethnically. Exploitation of migrant labour has, shockingly, increased, but so have forms of autonomous migration across Europe. They have closed down the Jungle of Calais several times, but informal routes and camps pop up all over Europe.

Greece and Italy may become the countries where new ways of solidarity are invented, centred around the Mediterranean. The Palermo Charta is a milestone. Yes, we think that within the Mediterranean European regions stronger connections to the Maghreb and Africa may develop – not by referring to neo-colonial approaches, and not by developing the post-liberal informal labour markets, but by creating strong ties of solidarity from the bottom. We hope and believe that this will crash the European unity as it is enforced by the North.

With this in mind, we have to speak about Germany as the main destination country. There are one million migrants who have reached Germany over the last two years. There are continuous struggles every day, in the camps, at the places of registration, at police stations, and on the streets. Networks of support and mutual assistance are being built. Reproduction in contexts of family and neighbourhood, and communities are most important. Nearly all of the newcomers do have a permanent exchange with their families and friends who are still far away, and there are many who want to follow. One million migrants might be enough to be a basis for chain migration to take place in the near future. We want this and we invite them to come. Europe will be moved in Germany as well, due to the still enduring strength of what was called ‘Willkommenskultur’, and due to the everyday resistance of the migrants. These are the two factors which we refer to when speaking about the legacy of the great migration movement of 2015. Out of this special mixture there may emanate strong Communities and Solidarity Cities. Europe might become a better place to live.

Moving Europe, end of August 2017



## ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DEAL

### ALARMPHONE IZMIR

We are an initiative that has members from various different backgrounds. We are well connected with NGOs and other actors working in the field of migration.

#### Short history after the closure of the route

Turkey has the largest population of refugees in the world. Although some of them are trying to move to European countries, some of them are settled here. Especially in 2015, large number of people passed to Greece from Turkey and then to other countries using the route. This situation for Turkey changed after the joint statement made by Turkey and the EU member countries. The statement stipulates that anybody -except for those whose asylum claims are accepted- will be readmitted to Tur-

key. Moreover, it gives Greece the responsibility to do swift interviews and hold people on the islands and do not let them travel to the mainland. After the statement, crossings from Turkey to Greece dropped very sharply. Not only people stopped/postponed travelling to Greece, more than 1.000 people have been readmitted from Greece to Turkey. Except for Syrians, readmitted people are put into removal/detention centres around Turkey and more than half of the readmitted people are already send back to their country of origin. Syrians on the other hand are send to a reception center and they are taken back under temporary protection system.

There are more than 3 million refugees in Turkey. The government is working on improving its integration and harmonization policies. Yet, it is not enough. Child labor, forced child



Çeşme/Izmir in January 2016 | AP Izmir

marriages, forced marriages, low schooling rates, delays in registration, readmissions from Greece to Turkey and exploitation of the migrant workers are among the main challenges.

### Racism and resistance

There have been a strong resistance against Syrian refugees since day one. There are both left wing and right wing politicians and groups among those who resist. While anti-migrant left wing groups use media and social media, some anti-migrant right wing groups carried out attacks. Unfortunately, this anti-migrant sentiment has been increasing steadily. As top ranking political actors started to discuss in mid-2016 granting citizenship to Syrians, the racist discourse turned into a fully-fledged attack against Syrians; the shops run by Syrians were attacked and so on.

As Turkey has been a transit country rather than a migrant receiving country, there is no strong foundation of migrant solidarity networks in Turkey. Although the number of NGOs increased immensely as well, they mostly focus on humanitarian aid and protection related topics rather than challenging racism. The only groups vocal against racism are migrant solidarity networks in the big cities and some left wing groups. Yet the impact and the outreach of these groups are very limited.

### Building migrant solidarity networks ...

As mentioned before, our group is comprised of people with different backgrounds. While some of us are asylum-law experts, some of us are members of migrant solidarity networks and involved with social centres and some of us are journalists. We are part of the alarm phone network but our actions as a group is not limited with alarm phone. Our members are also part of different initiative which focuses on creating a safe space for migrants in İzmir and carry out workshops, meetings and events to bring migrants and locals together. This initiative focuses on awareness raising and building migrant solidarity network in İzmir; as well as having language and art courses.


### ... and the consequences after the coup attempt

Since the coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016 and subsequently declaration of state of emergency, the pressure towards NGOs, activists, journalists and academicians has increased. Many people are laid off from their jobs and quite a large number of people are detained. It seems that the migrants are not directly affected/targeted from the state of emergency; yet the changes in the law with state of emergency decree made it possible for the government to deport even recognized refugees back to their country if there are deemed as a threat to national security. As the situation of migrants is not on the top of the agenda, migrant solidarity networks are not targeted as much as some other solidarity networks. This gives some space and reassurance to migrant solidarity networks. Yet, borders are the red lines and any solidarity action/activity challenging borders can result in serious results for the activists - which was the case in

September 2015 when migrants and activists marched to Greek land border from İstanbul and foreign activists were deported and were banned to enter Turkey for a year.

### Perspectives and needs

The closure of the Western borders of Turkey after the joint statement has been the main development that halted the migration towards the EU from Turkey. In practice, this statement resulted in many rights violations both in Greece and Turkey. Additionally, Turkey's capacity of detention centre also increased as a result of the cooperation between Turkey and the EU. Yet, these developments are neither known nor discussed in the public sphere as much as it was discussed during the negotiation process and first days of the implementation of the statement. There is a need to keep the statement and its implementation on the agenda.



INFORMATION coming  
out from SOLIDARITY  
NETWORKS about the  
borders had an IMPACT  
on people's choice to  
move or stay

Networking is useful for many different reasons. We have observed that the information coming out from solidarity networks about the borders had an impact on people's choice to move or stay. In other words, it allowed people to make more informed decisions. Secondly, networking and information sharing results in circulation of alternative perspectives on the topic; alternative to the official/state perspective. It is important that the EU actors hear the alternative perspectives as they still produce reports on Turkey and have impact on the Turkish policies. Through networking alternative voices concerning the situation of migrants in Turkey, can be conveyed to relevant actors. Thirdly, knowing the situation in other countries allows us to build our arguments and strategies on a more stable ground - which is important to change the behavior of the policy makers and also to challenge right wing nationalist arguments. Forth, considering the disinformation, tendency to keep developments as hidden as possible and developments untended by the media, networking is vital for us to stay informed about the developments and monitor new policies and practices. Finally, networking is important to share and exchange and build common strategies and actions. There are similarities in the challenges we face, and trans-national action and solidarity not only provides the support we need but also renders our actions more visible, especially in the mainstream media.

## “ALL IS WELL THAT ENDS WELL”? THE ISLAND OF LESVOS SINCE THE EU-TURKEY STATEMENT

Valeria Hänsel

In the long summer of migration 2015, the Greek islands served as one of the main entry points into the European Union. Thousands of refugees arrived in rubber dinghies on the shorelines and were transferred to the so-called “hotspots” for registration – camps surrounded with barbed wire run by the Greek state, and supported by UNHCR also hosting European border control organizations such as Frontex and Europol. While people sometimes had to queue up in front of the hotspots for hours and days under terrible conditions, there was strong solidarity shown by locals and volunteers from all over Europe. After a few days, migrants could continue their journeys to the Greek mainland and beyond by ferry looking for safety and decent lives.

All of this suddenly changed after the EU-Turkey deal from March 18 2016 was made, declaring that “(a)ll new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey.” A one-to-one exchange was intended: For each Syrian sent back, one Syrian refugee from Turkey was supposed to be officially relocated into the European Union up to a limit of 72.000 people. As a consequence, the Greek islands were locked up and transformed into ‘open air prisons’. Refugees were stopped from boarding the ferries and trapped on the islands to wait for their asylum claims to be processed and – as was intended by the agreement – to be eventually deported to Turkey.

The EU-Turkey statement – which the German Chancellor Angela Merkel had pushed for – was celebrated as a “European solution”, supposedly opposing nationalist and isolationist policies and at the same time “solving” the so-called “refugee crisis”. When the Balkan route was closed and the deal with Erdoğan concluded, the German interior minister de Maizière proudly explained in an interview: „*The Balkan Route is finished and shall stay finished. (...) All's well that ends well.*“

### Caught on Lesbos Island

However, since the Dirty Deal was concluded, the crisis for refugees trapped on the Greek islands dramatically deteriorated. People fleeing violence and imprisonment in their home countries can no longer move on to reach safety. Instead, under the constant threat of being deported, they are again held behind barbed wire – some for more than a year – waiting for their asylum applications to be processed.

On Lesbos Island, new arrivals are directly brought to the hotspot camp Moria for registration. A young Syrian arriving on Lesbos explained: “*When the people see Moria, they can't believe it. When you come out of the boat and you're still alive, you think: 'Now I've made it'. But then you stand in front of all this barbed wire and wonder: 'Is this Europe?' And you know that you came back to prison.*”

Directly after the EU-Turkey deal was enforced, refugees arriving on Lesbos Island were locked into the camp Moria without any possibility to leave. Only the few who were considered especially ‘vulnerable’ (e.g. women with children) were transferred to the slightly better equipped camp of Kara Tepe or to the small community based solidarity camp Pikpa. But it turned out to be impossible to keep thousands of people locked behind NATO wire for long: Fires and protests in the camp started and finally, the detainees were allowed to leave Moria camp during daytime.

However, all humans seeking protection held in Moria still live under highly precarious conditions: Every day, they have to queue up for hours in the food line in Moria camp to get small portions of food from the military. Sometimes, there is not enough food for everyone so that people remain hungry, feeling humiliated after hours of waiting. There is also a constant lack of warm water and the possibility for personal hygiene is very limited. People also suffer from a lack of medical treatment and in some cases, even survivors of torture and sexual violence stay without any medical assistance. The number of mental health symptoms is immense and constantly deteriorating. *Médecins Sans Frontières* found that many migrants are already survivors of severe torture and sexual violence on arrival but are not diagnosed as such. An increasing number of people suffer from depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders after being trapped on the island for months.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, in their desperation, many people seriously cut themselves and try to commit suicide. As *Save the Children* reports there are also children among them.<sup>2</sup> An asylum seeker living in Moria explains the situation:

“*Moria is a place where you cannot do anything and where you know nothing about your future. People decide and think for you: It is decided what you eat, where you sleep, what you say and when you are deported. Most of us who arrived here were physically and mentally healthy and strong. But after two or three months, the conditions in this camp make us sick, many*



*people get mental problems, they are traumatized. Children are growing up here and watching people injure themselves and imitate it.”*

In the terrible living conditions in Moria camp, people even lost their lives. Several times, huge fires broke out in the camp, leaving people without shelter and personal belongings. In October 2016, a woman and a young girl died when a gas cooker exploded and their tent caught fire. In winter, at least three more people died in soaked and snow covered tents.

To the current day, many people who came to Europe seeking protection are still detained: In 2016 in Greece alone, 4.072 asylum seekers were officially detained under highly precarious conditions and 21.566 arrest warrants were issued for migrants, 84% of them after the EU-Turkey deal.<sup>3</sup> After arrival in Moria camp, border-crossers irregularly entering the European Union can be held for 25 days behind barbed wire in Moria’s first reception centre. For a long time, children used to be detained for an even longer period, which was justified as “protective custody”. Moreover, some people are simply arrested again after their release from the detention in the registration process, because they are considered “trouble makers” by the police – e.g. when they are blamed for theft or violent behaviour.<sup>4</sup> This “definition” is frequently misused for people participating in demonstrations, making the detention process arbitrary.<sup>5</sup> Protests are

often violently suppressed by the police. Videos are showing police aggressively throwing stones at people who were peacefully protesting in front of the European Asylum Support Office in Moria, also kicking and hitting asylum seekers already lying on the ground with sticks. In the protest, many people were arrested on the basis of racial profiling and were facing exaggerated criminal charges. Almost all of them were black and some were arrested although they had not participated in the peaceful protests.<sup>6</sup> As lawyers report, other asylum seekers are detained simply on basis of their nationalities. Migrants coming from the Maghreb states, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are – according to a police circular – sweepingly considered as “aliens with an economic profile” and arbitrarily detained in the frame of a pilot project during their whole asylum procedure. The coordinator of the Legal Centre Lesbos reported in autumn 2016:

*“Within the pilot project, it is possible to put people in a fast procedure when the government believes that their asylum claim is unfounded – which is legal. But what they do is keeping people detained during this procedure which is arbitrary. They could only be detained if the government for example proved they are at flight risk. But this has to be assessed individually and cannot be done by nationality. You cannot detain people based on nationality; that is basic non-discrimination law.”*





Migrants are also exposed to violence when walking the roads of Lesbos, when they are randomly stopped based on racial profiling and their documents are checked. A young man for example reported:

*“The police came with three cars and stopped me. They asked for my papers. I showed them and they gave them back to me. Then they forced me to undress. I had to take off all my clothes and was only in underwear. I was very cold and they forced me to stand there for about two or three hours. They looked at me and laughed. Then they told me to dress and they hit me and kicked me with their boots in the back and on the legs.”*

Ariel Ricker from *Advocates Abroad* has documented a number of similar reports from people who were abused in camps, the police station or on the open streets and forwarded them to the Greek Ombudsman’s office. However, it remains difficult to successfully challenge the large extend of police violence on the Greek islands.

### **Inadmissible: Reducing the chances for asylum**

As one of the consequences of the joint EU-Turkey declaration, the new asylum law 4375/2016 has been introduced, inscribing relevant EU norms into Greek law and establishing a separate fast-track border procedure for the Greek islands only. People examined under the fast-track border procedure are not allowed to leave the islands for the entire duration of their procedure.

The most important change was the introduction of a so-called admissibility check before the actual eligibility interview where the asylum claims are examined. The admissibility interview is an interim step, introduced with the intention to hinder people to receive a protection status in the European Union. Instead of examining whether an asylum seeker has been persecuted in his or her country of origin, the interview only focusses on the formal question, whether Turkey – as a country that immigrants have crossed on their route – can be considered as ‘safe third country’ or ‘country of first asylum’. If the answer is positive, the respective person is then returned to Turkey without any consideration of their actual asylum claim. Therefore, also people with perfectly valid asylum claims are sent back to Turkey, where there are indications that likelihood of their claim being examined is very low, especially for non-Syrians.<sup>7</sup>

In 2016, only Syrians had to undergo the admissibility procedure, but in 2017 a change was introduced obligating all asylum seekers from a nationality with an average recognition rate for international protection of more than 25% to also participate in an admissibility interview. Furthermore, lawyers reported that in some cases, even asylum seekers who should be categorized as vulnerable or part of the Dublin III family reunification program have been put through an admissibility interview despite the fact that Article 60 L 4375/2016 clearly states they should be exempted from the fast-track border procedure.

The admissibility and asylum interviews are conducted by the *Hellenic Asylum Service or European Asylum Support Offices (EASO)*. Asylum seekers report that during the interviews, they are being repeatedly asked the same questions for hours,

subjecting them to a high stress level and in some cases making it impossible for them to adequately present their grounds for requesting asylum. Ariel Ricker, director of *Advocates Abroad* stated: *“What we have seen is that an interview can run for eight hours and only produce a five page transcript which we consider concerning for the information that may or may not have been included in the transcript.”*

## **We have seen that the Greek Asylum Service relied on Wikipedia for making decisions**

In multiple instances, interviews have been postponed several times and the affected person left in a state of limbo. Both EASO and the Hellenic Asylum Service have repeatedly been strongly criticized for their interview practice. In a joint agency briefing, NGOs criticized EASO for a lack of understanding of the asylum procedure, the basics of armed conflict in Syria and political dynamics in Turkey and a lack of cultural sensitivity. In this light they are concerned about the absence of a reliable monitoring system of the interview conduct.<sup>8</sup>

The European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights concluded from their analysis:

*“The conduct of interviews by EASO officials fails to respect core standards of fairness. (...) In sum, the interviews consistently fail to consider the individual experiences and vulnerabilities of the applicants. (...) Given that an inadmissibility decision provides the legal ground for returning an applicant to Turkey, the denial of a fair hearing risks breaching the non-refoulement principle.”<sup>9</sup>*

Similar to EASO, interview transcripts from the Greek Asylum service reveal serious shortcomings. Lorraine Leete, coordinator of the Legal Centre Lesbos, reports:

*“We have seen that the Greek Asylum Service relied on Wikipedia for making decisions. For one of our clients they claimed they could not find his village in Google Maps although it was just a spelling mistake. They use those really minor things to deny people refugee status.”*

In addition, most asylum seekers have no legal assistance and are not sufficiently informed about the asylum procedure, how they can prepare for the interviews and what evidence they need to present in order to get refugee status. Therefore, it is no surprise that the number of rejections in admissibility and asylum interviews in Greece is very high: In 2016, 70,9% of asylum requests in Greece were rejected in first instance and a total number of 1.323 asylum claims was declared inadmissible; a rejection on admissibility grounds of all asylum seekers examined who were not classified either as vulnerable or case of the Dublin III family reunification.<sup>10</sup>

For a few months following the introduction of the new asylum law, the assumption that Turkey could be considered a “safe

third country” was strongly challenged by Greek Appeal Committees who revised the first instance in 97,9% of cases. In other words, Turkey was not considered safe in almost 100% of cases. However, under pressure of the European Union, new so-called “Independent Appeals Committees” were introduced and the appeals success rate dropped to 0,4%.<sup>11</sup>

### Out of sight, out of mind – Externalizing the responsibility

When an asylum claim is rejected or declared inadmissible, in most cases, the respective persons are arrested without warning and will be held in detention until they are either returned to Turkey or deported to their home countries.

Despite the declared goal of returning all asylum seekers arriving after 20th of March on the Greek islands to Turkey, there are still more people arriving than people returned.<sup>12</sup> This is not only due to administrative shortcomings but also because of an ongoing judicial struggle about the lawfulness of sending people back to Turkey. Between March 20th and August 11th 2016, 1.895 migrants were sent to Turkey while in the same period not the intended 72.000 but only 8.533 migrants were relocated into the European Union.<sup>13</sup> Most decisions about admissibility checks especially for non-Syrians are still pending. If they will be considered inadmissible, this might finally open the door for mass-returns – even although it has been found that after their returns to Turkey, all non-Syrians are detained in repatriation centres and most of them eventually deported back to their home countries, where some will again be detained. Only Syrians can be granted a temporary protection status in Turkey, while all other nationalities in practice often do not have the possibility to apply for a protection status.<sup>14</sup>

Asylum seekers held on Lesbos Island waiting for the examination of their asylum applications are kept in a desperate state of limbo. They can only hope for the increasingly unlikely event of being finally accepted for a status of international protection or instead wait for being deported back to Turkey or to their countries of origin.

Under those conditions of hopelessness and despair, a rising number of people decide to give up their right to seek international protection and instead “voluntarily return” to their home countries, even if they are going back to persecution. For “participating” in the return programme of the *International Organization of Migration (IOM)*, they have to sign a paper stating “*I agree, for myself, as well as for my dependants, heirs and estate that in the event of personal injury or death during and/or after my participation in the IOM project, neither IOM, nor any other participating agency or government can in any way be held liable or responsible.*” Afterwards, the respective persons are arrested and detained in Greek pre-removal centres. When returned to their countries, they can only hope that they do not have to continue the non-ending journey behind prison walls – if so, no one is held responsible for their fate.

Other asylum seekers try to escape the life behind barbed wire in Moria through squatting buildings outside of Moria camp, favouring to live autonomously, even if they might be quickly arrested. Many migrants also decide to take the risk

to go on protest marches. For a long time, each Saturday, there was a big demonstration in Mytilene town during which asylum seekers were actively defending and demanding the respect of their human rights. Currently, demonstrations also included frequently blocking the port or the entrance of Moria camp to stop deportations. Some refugee human rights activists also went on hunger strikes, claiming they will rather die than being sent back to imprisonment in Turkey or in their home countries. For the police, it will remain a difficult task to suppress the protests of migrants who have nothing more to lose and will not stop fighting for their right to freedom of movement.<sup>15</sup>

In parallel and increasingly so, particularly since the EU-Turkey deal, the European Union keeps externalizing the responsibility for granting international protection, banning people to islands on the edge of Europe, to Turkey and elsewhere.

On Lesbos, people seeking protection are held in a desperate state of limbo for more than a year, hoping for their minimal chances to find protection and safety in the European Union. Many of them suffer from diseases caused by the precarious living conditions and serious mental health symptoms. They know that the EU does not intend to help them: Since the mechanism of declaring asylum applications inadmissible was introduced as consequence of the EU-Turkey deal, asylum seekers can ‘simply’ be deported to Turkey without having even examined their asylum claim, turning a blind eye on their fate. So, the “refugee crisis” is solved: “*All is well that ends well*”.



Stucked in Greece | Moving Europe





Thessaloniki 2016 | Moving Europe

#### NOTES

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## DIKTIO – NETWORK FOR THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

**N**etwork for the Political and Social Rights (Diktio) is a political organization of the radical, anti-capitalist left founded in 1994. Diktio brought together people being active in different groups, initiatives and campaigns against state repression, for the defense of the rights of political prisoners, against the rise of nationalism in Greece (in the 90's the conflict over the name of the Republic of Macedonia, the Greek-Turkish antagonism and the war in Yugoslavia). Antiracism also became one of the main fields of Diktio's intervention, as Greece was turned to be a country of mass migration.

For Diktio the importance of defending social and political rights is to be found not in general declarations but in defending the rights of those who are actual in need of them: the most oppressed, excluded and scapegoated in the society, as are the undocumented migrants, LGBT, ethnic minorities etc., as well as of persons being criminalized as "inner enemies of the state", especially in cases persons charged under the anti-terrorist legislation. This focus in concrete and "extreme cases" does not mean that we restrict yourself to a thematic policy and in practices of lobbying, but, on the contrary, to steadily reflect on the interrelation of the concrete solidarity, the practical defense of the social and political rights, with the general struggle against exploitation and for the emancipation of society. For this purpose Diktio adapted a strategic perspective of making broad alliances and establishing coalitions (which according to the case included parts of the anarchist movement up to the parties of the reformist left) which could attract broader social attention, initiate public debates and could bring positive results and thereby effect the relations of power in the society.

During the 2000's Diktio's intervention was marked by its participation in the 'antiglobalization movement' and the European and World Social Forum. After the eruption of the financial crisis in 2008-2010 Diktio actively supported the struggles against austerity policies and the Troika, such as the Syntagma Square Movement and the self-organized solidarity initiatives. In this course Diktio claimed a position of critical support to SYRIZA party. After the referendum and the signing of the 3rd Memorandum, those members of Diktio who were involved in SYRIZA left the party.

In the field of antiracism, during the 90's, Diktio raised the campaign for the legalization of all undocumented migrants, together with migrant communities and trade unions. It also created the Migrants Social Center 'Steki Metanaston' and organized the Antiracist Festival in Athens, antiracist initiatives which spread in many different cities in the following years. After 2000 Diktio focused more in campaigns against repression, detention and deportation of migrants and participated in

international networks on migration, through the European Social Forum and the No Borders network. In 2009 Diktio organized the Lesvos No Border camp together with various local and European groups.

Diktio is active in Athens, Thessaloniki and Volos and is coordinated by weekly assemblies.

### Summer in Greece, 2015

In the Summer of 2015 we experienced a unique moment in the recent history of migration, in which the borders were temporarily opened and migration towards the core EU countries was partly 'de-criminalized'. In Greece the period was characterized by extreme contradictions and was shaped by the election of Syriza, the development of EU/greek crisis on the one hand and the emergence of a massive migration movement towards western/northern Europe on the other. In this conjuncture the repressive apparatus of migration control in Greece was set out of order, under the pressure and the determined struggles of migrants. Repressive state practices, as the illegal push-back operations at sea, police operations against undocumented migrants in the cities, as well as the policies of mass detention of refugees were almost stopped or remained marginal. In early September, after Germany suspended Dublin Regulation and accepted the majority of refugees fleeing through the Balkan Route, migration was temporarily 'de-criminalized', making the use of 'smuggling networks' almost redundant and decreasing radically the life risks of border crossing. The effect was that between August and November 2015 the number of incoming migrants in Greece raised in numbers never experienced before.

During the 'long Summer' of 2015 the practical solidarity with refugees on their migration route became the most important issue for the solidarity movement, among them also for Diktio. Athens was at that time merely a transit space of migration, a short-term halt for refugees arriving from the east Aegean islands and a pause in which refugees could organize their further trip towards the Greek-Macedonian borders. The most important intervention of that time was the initiative for supporting the informal refugee camp of 400-600 persons in the 'Pedion Areos' park in the center of Athens in July and August. The initiative took the form of an open assembly, attended by different groups and individuals of the left and anarchist spectrum, which established a self-organized solidarity structure of support (food, health, hygiene, clothing, children activities, security etc.). This initiative managed to initiate and to attract the support of thousands of people, which became a



massive spontaneous solidarity current not seen before in our interventions. Pedion to Areos Camp was an experience which paved the way for other militant initiatives during September and October 2015. Most important were self-organized reception and support initiatives for the newly arrived migrants at the shores of Aegean islands, the interventions in the informal camps in Pireaus Port, in Idomeni etc., and after October the initiatives of squatting buildings in the center of the city for the accommodation of refugees.

### After the Closure

The closure of the Balkan route was a long and complicated procedure where the Greek state and the EU tried to regain the control over migration. This project involved attempts to re-impose militarized border controls at the sea and the land borders (with the involvement of Frontex and NATO at the Aegean), to issue an effective and Europeanized system for the “management” of migrant populations at the entrance and exit points (hotspots on the islands, mass camps in the mainland Greece) and, last but not least, to restrain the field of action of the solidarity movement, which not only actively supported migration but also monitored, publicized and controlled the practices of state authorities.

In the period after November 2015, repression against migrants and solidarity groups increased radically, targeting even NGO’s conducting rescue operations at sea. It took the form of targeted repression and public scapegoating of groups and persons, of constant pressure by police controls, threats and arbitrary prosecution, which even led to the prosecution of rescuers and politically active refugees with the felony of “migrants

smuggling”. These means were used in order to discourage solidarity and to clear up the field for the implementation of the new European/governmental policies. The adoption of the EU-Turkey Deal on March 18 2016 marked this change of the border regime, which characterizes the conditions we are facing today.

The border regime that emerged after the EU-Turkey Deal is characterized by the implementation of a geographical restriction of movement for newly incomer refugees – that is an inner border between the east Aegean islands and mainland Greece. This inner border also reflects to differentiated rights acknowledged for refugees being at the islands or mainland Greece. Refugees at the islands are subjected to ‘fast track’ asylum procedures which lead to massive denials of asylum based on the safe third country clause for Turkey. A system of mass detention and deportation of newcomers is also established.

Refugees being at mainland Greece before the closure of the borders and the EU-Turkey deal were between 50.000 and 60,000 spread in different refugee camps (old military camps, industrial buildings, more than 10.000 at Idomeni) or being homeless in the cities. The majority of them is registered and has a temporary residence permit with a formal (but not real) access to the basic services and rights. Nevertheless, the EU-Relocation program and the housing program of UNHCR is restricted to refugees of Syrian nationality.

### Solidarity and Resistance

The closure of the borders lead to spontaneous resistance of refugees claiming for the re-opening of the borders. For the solidarity movement the new conditions urged a politicization of its



Demonstration for Family Reunification Athens 2017 | w2eu

intervention, a move from practical solidarity to the organization of resistance to the closed borders and to struggle for the freedom of movement and the right to stay. Nevertheless, the imposition of the “inner border” also led to differentiated conditions and policies at the islands and in mainland Greece and therefore to a segregation of demands. On the islands the movement had to react to the implementation of the hot spots and the

new established deportation system, as well as to the disastrous living conditions of refugees. In mainland Greece the solidarity movement focused more on struggles for the right to stay and for the social rights of refugees (right of housing in the cities, of health, education etc.) as well as against the policy of isolation of refugees in the massive army-led refugee camps.

In the last year the deportation system issued by the EU-Turkey Deal and the hot spots was not functional, it succeeded though to restrain the border crossings at the Aegean. The entrapment of refugees in Greece and the deterioration of living conditions of refugees in the

camps were the main instruments for the EU policy of “discouraging migration” (which led to 5 deaths in a week in the hotspots of Lesbos and Samos from the cold and lack of medical treatment). A roll back to policies of mass detention of refugees is now at stake and new detention camps are constructed at the 5 “hot-spot islands” Lesbos, Chios, Kos, Leros, Samos. Deportations to Turkey conducted by Frontex are also increasing and we estimate that they will continue in the next months, unless the EU-Turkey relations will dramatic escalate.

Policies of segregation of rights and of division between ‘refugees’ and ‘economic migrants’ serve the criminalization and scapegoating of specific nationalities and categories of migrants. This official policy serves and is a part of the racist ideologies. Extreme right and fascists after a period being isolated in the public discourse are now trying to regain space: campaigns against migrant children being enrolled in the schools, media speculation on migrant criminality, ‘Islamic danger’, public health etc. create the background for the increase of racist attacks.

### Coping with the Backlash

After the closure of the borders and the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal Diktio involved actively in the squat of an abandoned hotel in the center of Athens. This project, along with other radical solidarity initiatives and squats, has as its main claim the right on housing of refugees in the cities, a life in dignity and with their basic rights secured -- in opposition to the governmental policies of the massive refugee camps and the exclusion of rights. Housing squats are intended to create

spaces of freedom and security for refugees and to enhance the common struggles of locals and refugees. They constitute a paradigm of how social needs and rights can be fought and reclaimed from below, based on principles of self-organization and equality. Whilst they stress concrete demands to the state, they don’t restrict to it, but they factually produce the rights of which refugees are deprived of. City Plaza refugee accommodation space became in the one year of its function also a hub of international solidarity and called to the international day of action on March 18th (<https://solidarity2refugees.gr>).

After the closure of the borders repression against migrants is increased and the radical solidarity movement also faced some pressure and in some cases direct criminalization (evictions of squats in Thessaloniki in July and in Athens 2 months ago and prosecution of some locals and people of the international solidarity). At most criminalized are the migrants whose asylum claim is rejected: at the “hotspot islands” they are arrested on the streets and in houses and are detained until their deportation to Turkey. In general we believe that Greece is now in a transitional period that will lead to increase of racism and state repression. A wave of evictions and increased repression is therefore possible.

### Call for Solidarity

International solidarity against repression as well as donations for the everyday needs of refugees are very important for our projects in Athens and in Greece in general. At the same time after the closure of the borders we face very different local conditions. Therefore groups in different regions of Greece seem to have different agendas, demands and perspectives (repression, integration/social rights, practical solidarity etc.).

The situation at the islands is at most emergent. Raising awareness for right abuses, monitoring of the state and European agencies and spreading of information is very important. It is crucial the Aegean islands to be seen by the transnational solidarity movement as the very places where the European anti-refugee policies are implied and the right abuses to be scandalized in every European country as part of the policies of their own governments. For the next period is very important to reflect on the situation at the sea borders, both in Aegean and central Mediterranean, as a new mass migration movement will face repression not seen in the Summer of 2015.

#### DONATE FOR THE BEST HOTEL IN EUROPE

With your donation you ensure the continued existence of the City Plaza Hotel project and provide space for refugees stuck in Greece.

Donations are handled through the Plateia Allileggyis – Initiative of Solidarity to Refugees e.V. non-profit charity registered in Munich, Germany.

Account owner: plateia allileggyis e.V.

IBAN: DE07 7015 0000 1004 7894 81

BIC: SSKMDEMXXX



City Plaza | w2eu

## CITY PLAZA, BEST HOTEL IN EUROPE

„City Plaza is not a hotel, it is our HOME.“

„It was a big FAMILY of different nationalities.“

„I hope I can return to City Plaza, when I get my papers. In  
SOLIDARITY with others, who are now there.“

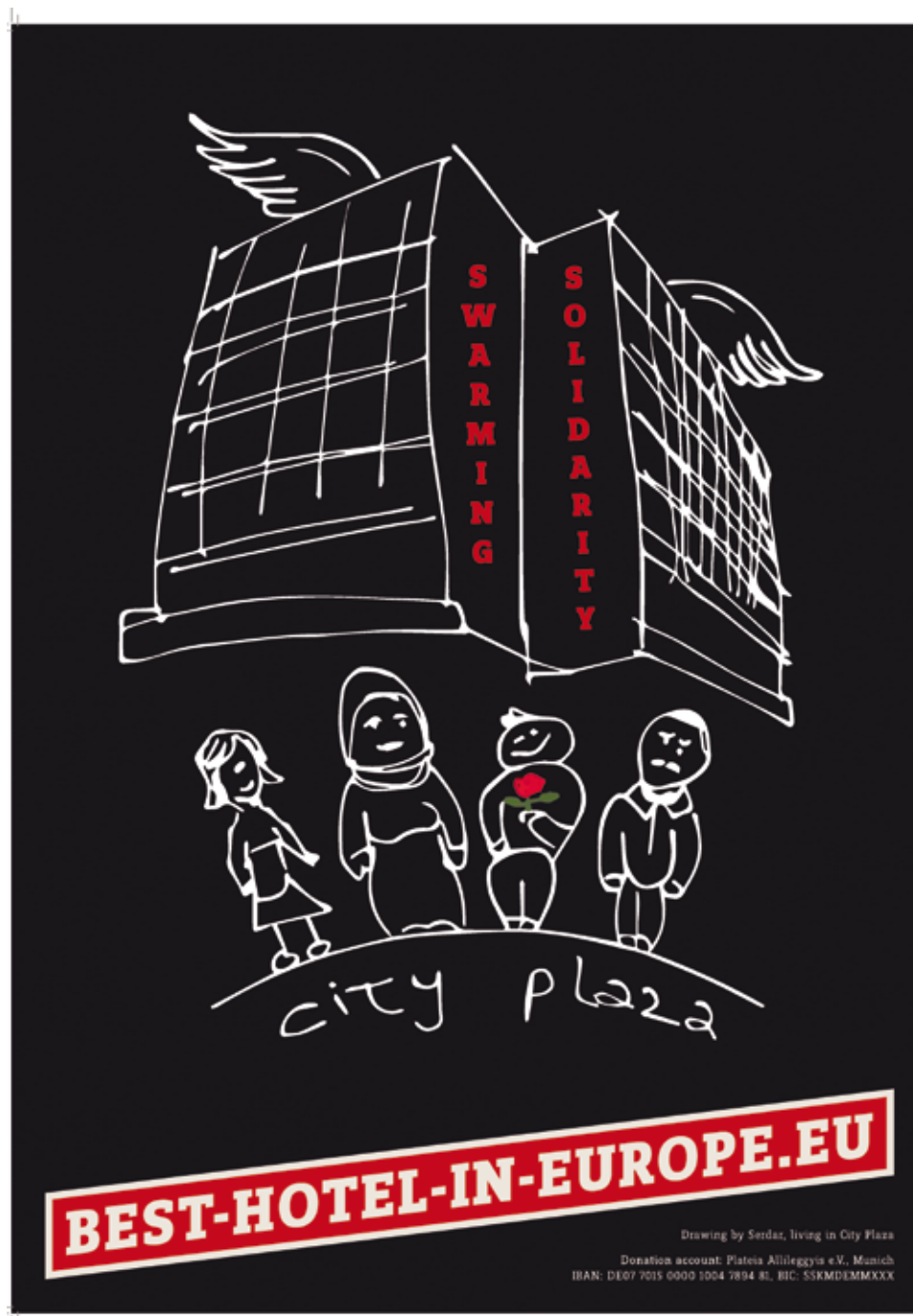
We lived together, we struggled together. Cooking and protesting, learning languages and cleaning, hair cutting and discussing. Some of us for six months, some of us nine months or more. In City Plaza Athens. With 180 children and 200 adults. From various nationalities and background. Seven floors with different hopes and dreams. But it worked. As the best hotel in Europe. Our home in transit. A place to build up our network.

In the meanwhile we reached our relatives and friends in our destination countries. In Stuttgart and Ulm, in Bordeaux or Lyon, in Magdeburg and Berlin, in Geneve and Zurich, and in many other smaller cities. But we will never forget the common time in Athens. When all of us were stuck and desperate. And when we opened the doors of the abandoned hotel with our greek friends. For a great period of coming together.

We are now all over Europe. But we are still in contact and we are still the people of City Plaza. We swarm out and we wish, every city has a City Plaza. Solidarity is spread like seeds we carry in our small luggage. To continue our struggle for equal rights everywhere we'll go. Solidarity will win.

Former inhabitants of City Plaza Athen

Abu Fadi, Adnan, Bashar, Dania,  
Ezat, Jwan, Kholoud, Mohammad,  
Mohamad, Morteza, Nidal, Nour, Reza,  
Serdar, Subhia, Wael





## “WE EAT, WE CLEAN, WE LIVE, WE STRUGGLE, WE BUILD TOGETHER, THAT HELPS US TO STAY TOGETHER

Interview with Y. and A., both former inhabitants of Orfanotrofeio squat in Thessaloniki

**Y**ou lived for several months in Orfanotrofeio: can you briefly summarize the story and what this project meant for you personally, your group, your coming together?

**Y:** I spent like 8 months in Orfanotrofeio, it was a great project, it was hosting migrants and refugees from different nationalities. Being there for 8 months was very great. I was rescued after spending two or three weeks within the Greece and Macedonia border –it was very-very unpleasant, I can say. That was in the toughest year, in 2015. The people from Orfanotrofeio rescued me by hosting me, giving me food, access to medical care, ac-

cess to legal aid in order to get my asylum, as it was supposed to be. During my stay there I got some experience, I was closely working with the solidarity people, attending the assemblies. Staying there with different nationalities I was able to learn many things, there were people there from Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Gambia, Senegal, Mali... Being with different nationalities I learned a lot, it meant a lot to me.

**A:** I lived for more than 4 months in this house. I had a house where we lived as a family and in the same time it was a place to fight, that is fight for freedom and equality. We struggled



Orfanotrofeio squat in Thessaloniki | Open Borders Osnabrück



against the borders, against racism and fascists. This house meant to me a lots of family, friends and perhaps a group of people from several countries gathered around one idea.

*What was your first feelings/impression, when your squat was evicted? How have you experienced the days after the eviction?*

**Y:** Like I said, we were working very close with the solidarity people and my fellow refugees, we participated in the assemblies, we participated in demonstrations, protests against the decisions taken by the EU. Before the eviction we were very-very united. After the eviction of the squat it was really-really tough, it was not a good feeling at all, it was something that I will never forget in my life. Orfanotrofeio people were doing their best for the refugees and then, after the eviction, which was immediately after the No Border Camp, we refugees were displaced all over the place, a lot of refugees did not have place to sleep, but solidarity people were doing their best trying to host people, some of them in their homes, trying to find houses for them. It was really-really tough for us, we became fewer in number. It was a bad feeling, it is something that I can never forget. It was a bad feeling despite the fact that solidarity people were trying to hold people together.

**A:** After the evacuation, we were sad and we did not stop just because they wanted to stop us and disperse our group. We stayed on the same struggle. We didn't give up. We had to answer to them, because they destroyed only the house, not us and we will continue the struggle to destroy the system and the borders ...

*But you did not give up! How it was possible for you to keep your group together? And in this transnational composition? What exactly do you think helped you to continue together?*

**Y:** We were having assemblies, we were trying to gather money for our problems in that moments. From the assemblies we made plans to find something to host refugees. We are now working on this but then it was really hard time, it was a surprise, we were not expecting the eviction, people were displaced, but never the less, we didn't give up. We had a very strong relationship with the solidarity people, we met altogether in assemblies every week to talk about our various problems, trying to find solutions, trying to make a new project to host refugees. This is how some of the refugees were able to continue together. After the eviction of Orfanotrofeio some of the refugees left Greece but the ones who stayed in Greece we are still coming together, we were having assemblies every week and finally we got ourselves a house which is legally rented, lawyers were involved, the solidarity people committed themselves to sign, we got a house and we are working on it, to renovate the house. We are working there, refugees and solidarity people together.

**A:** Yes we did not give up because they destroyed only stones and they cannot stop us, because we are not only a group of people with the same political thought, we are also friends, broth-

ers, family, we eat, we clean, we live, we struggle, we build together. That helps us to stay together.

## REFUGEE CALL CENTER [R2R]

In the summer of 2016, the Refugee to Refugee Call Center (R2R) was established in Thessaloniki:

<https://callcenter.coop>

<https://web.facebook.com/Refugees-to-Refugees-R2R-Solidarity-Call-Center-1039101139520127>

*What are your main projects and ideas for the next future?*

**Y:** When we finish with the house I will continue with the project I am already involved in, which is refugees2refugees call center. Just to put in short, it is a project to help refugees, trying to coordinate them, help them find lawyers, in medical aspects, accommodation, clothing and some vital information, and this around the clock. For the moment I am concentrated in finishing our house.

**A:** In the future we have to be more careful to fight for the papers and against deportation from the islands and to fight for a work for better life and dignity.

*What do you think are the main challenges for the movement for equal rights and for open borders?*

**Y:** We can say that we are in a different situation now. People who came here before the EU-Turkey deal, some of them have already applied for asylum, some of them were lucky and got asylum, but this is a small percentage. People who came after the EU-Turkey deal are in a more complicated situation. The authorities have started building new detention camps for some of them. Also people who were rejected two times the asylum, will be closed in other detention centers or returned to their countries. This is the different situation that we are facing right now. People have to come together and fight the struggle for papers for all, organize public meetings. That's the main challenge now and off course accommodation also always remains a problem. We need to involve solidarity, to help refugees meet their needs.

**A:** The challenges in my personal opinion are to take the society on our side to fight and struggle against governments and borders.

## THE THESSALONIKI NO BORDER CAMP IN RETROSPECT

No Border Camp 2016 Organizing Assembly

On the 24th of July 2016 in Thessaloniki, Greece, a ten-day No Border Camp came to an end. It was one of the largest in the history of No Border Camps, and one of the most discussed in the bourgeois media. It also stands out for being followed by the most brutal and vengeful State repression.

The Thessaloniki No Border Camp had been attacked by the mass media even before it had started. Two days after it had finished, a grand scale police operation targeted the social movement and specifically the structures of migrants' self-organization. Three occupied migrants' homes were evacuated. Indeed, it was made perfectly clear that practical solidarity and communities of struggle where locals and migrants fight together

are most threatening for the authorities and the dominant order.

If it had not been for this police operation, in this announcement we would be limiting ourselves to a description of the 50 workshops that were realized during the camp, of the networking meetings and discussions amongst people from Europe, North Africa, Turkey, of the demonstration at the detention centers in Paranesti and Xanthi, of the march against the Evros Fence. If it hadn't been for the police operation, we would now be recounting the march of solidarity to migrants in the streets of Thessaloniki of several thousands of people, led by a bloc of 500 sans papiers. We would be discussing the protests at the consulates of France and Germany, as well as the first international action of solidarity to the social movement in Turkey, a demonstration to the Turkish consulate against militarization and repression now spreading throughout Turkey under the pretext of the "response to the coup". And we would add that there were organized and spontaneous meetings and discussions at the No Border Camp by people who were active across the "Balkan Route" during the last year in structures of practical and political solidarity on the islands, in the cities and at the borders of Greece and other Balkan countries. And we would underline the most essential feat of this No Border Camp, namely the deepening of relations between locals and migrants, and –most crucially– the realization of migrants' autonomous assemblies and discussions – sans papiers living in the city, migrants living in Europe, refugees staying in the detention camps.

We had not realized how threatening these relations and these assemblies are for the powers that be. Now we have, we are determined to confirm this threat by continuing our strug-

gles. This, of course, is a matter of practical actions and of collective organizing. It is not a matter of words. However, this retrospective text consists of words only, so let us add a few more.

First, let us say a few words about the government's total humbug about the detention camps around Thessaloniki, which it calls "organized structures", while calling the squatted homes "caricatures of structures that create insecurity". The minister Toskas spoke of "8.500 refugees being hosted by the State in acceptable conditions after they fled the disgusting situation in Idomeni, while these occupied places only hosted 32". He lied. There are not only 8.500 "invisibles" in State custody. There are another 8.000 in Cherso and Polykastro (in the area of Kilkis), 1.500 in the area of Pieria (Iraklis and Petra Olympou), 1.340 in Yannitsa and Alexandria, as well as 750 in Kavala and Drama. At a short distance from Thessaloniki, 30 to 60 minutes in a car, there are 16.000 invisibles, crammed in industrial buildings or in camps in the middle of nowhere. If we expand the radius, the invisibles' number reaches 20.000.<sup>1</sup>

This is obviously a large number. And it is obviously much better for the State for this number to remain vague or secret and for these people to gradually become ghettoized, rather than for them to come into contact with the locals who are fighting against injustice, to join their struggles, or, worse still, to organize their own resistance. As we had expected, those of the migrants who had been transferred to the "hospitality centers" of "State solidarity" after their brutal evictions from the squats, immediately wanted to be taken away. Indeed, not one of the migrants could tolerate the "acceptable conditions" Toskas boasted about. Whoever had had even one day of experience at the evacuated squats, had found medical and legal aid there, had created relationships of equality with the locals and the Europeans, had joined their protests. Some moved on, others became integrated in the fabric of the city, some chose to participate in communities of struggle.

Perhaps the residents of this city do not know that after the evacuation, the police had exact orders as to the number of migrants it could arrest, so that Toskas could then be able to speak of "32 people". The police had exact orders as to what kinds of people it would arrest, so they were careful not to touch families and children, because images of crying babies in police vans would then speak louder than the talking heads of State propaganda. The residents of this city did not see the gleeful smile on the faces of riot cops as they were denying entry to the evacuated Orfanotrofio squat to a person who wanted to bring out from the debris the medication for a diabetic migrant who had



just been arrested. These reality snapshots might be buried under the tons of dust of the bulldozer, but all the dust and detritus in this city cannot cover up the brutality of the authorities. And now a few words about the university authorities. They can take pride in having paved the way for the police operation with their hysterical condemnations of a couple of damaged locks and a few graffitied walls... But more than this, they are the arch-accomplice of the State in the recent orgy of repression. These sad hypocrites have now made complete fools of themselves... They couldn't get enough of bashing the No Border Camp, for days they warned students against criminality and disease, but everybody knows they have never done a thing against the organized drug smuggling on the university campus, a practice that spread and became fully established after the special "asylum" status of the university grounds (= an old custom according to which the campus was a no-go area for standard police intervention) was lifted a few years ago. What clowns indeed.

And a note on this latter point: We happen to be living in the real world, and not in social media networks or ministries and shady dealing bureaus, so we know that the networks of drug smuggling that are now doing business at the university and the Rotunda square are also active in the State's "hospital-

ity centers" that the minister of Public Order is so proud of. In other words, solidarity groups cannot enter "refugees camps", but drug dealers can and should. Using drug smuggling for public space management (university campus, Rotunda square) or for population management (first in Idomeni at its final stage, i.e. before its eviction, now at the "hospitality centers") is a well-worn method of governance: It destroys communities, it increases insecurity and it encourages violent behavior amongst the disenfranchised. It destroys any collective process, replaces social networks by mafias and authoritarian structures, and turns these detention centers into ghettos under the control of micro-gangs.

Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury to worry about the hurt feelings of Syriza members: They can hardly believe the shift of the Syriza government from the allegedly uncompromised anti-austerity "ant-memorandum struggle" towards "State-managed charity for refugees" and now suddenly to the full monty "dogma of law and order". Whatever these disappointed members feel, the government has chosen to continue the repressive policies of the right-wing Dendias period, in the broader context of both a material devaluation of life here due to a global capitalist attack, and a total moral devaluation of people through the official treatment of migrants as subhumans.



No Border Camp in Thessaloniki | Moving Europe



All the government wants is to remain in government - and how able it is indeed to preserve social peace.

Left governmentality preserving social peace – this is where authoritarian left rhetoric meets the para-State mafia, the priesthood, the fascists, the snitches and collaborators. A bulldozer pulling down a haven of freedom is now the shameful emblem of their law and order. They had to resort to raw and brutal repression and to preposterous lies. This proves their weakness and embarrassment.

With the common struggles of locals and migrants for freedom and dignity we will make their worst fears and nightmares come true.<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

[1] July 2017 – update on migrant camps around Thessaloniki  
During the No Border Camp, 41,5% of the country's total recent migrant population was "living" in some camp in Northern Greece (23.697 migrants out of 57.325 in total). Now, in the same area, the percentage is less than 6% (3.333 out of 62.270). Last July, more than 90% of people that were stranded in Greece were living in state-run "open camps", now this percentage has dropped to 53%, the rest (most of them initially "living" in camps around Thessaloniki), now live in apartments, hotels etc. run by NGOs. We don't know if this was the government's initial plan (to move migrants away from Greece's northern borders) or how decisive the unusually heavy winter was for the evacuation of the camps around Thessaloniki. Whatever the case, we think that migrants' mobilizations in the camps and in the city of Thessaloniki after the No Border Camp definitely encouraged these evacuations.

The almost 15.000 migrants currently stranded on the Greek islands after the E.U.-Turkey deal are facing the worst conditions, especially the 9.475 of them "living" in detention camps. Undeniable proof for this are the recent July 10 and July 18 (2017) migrants' revolts in Moria/Lesbos "closed camp".

[2] July 2017 – update on migrants protests

At the end of summer and the beginning of autumn 2016, migrants from camps around Thessaloniki organized themselves and coordinated various protests: On July 29, there was a protest in Thessaloniki by migrants from Softex camp, on August

8 there was another protest in Thessaloniki by migrants from the Softex camp, while other migrants were on hunger strike, on September 1st there was a vibrant demonstration in Thessaloniki by migrants from various camps, on September 10 there was protest in Thessaloniki by migrants from Oreokastro camp. These protests and many smaller incidents created an atmosphere of turmoil and resistance that the authorities could not control, despite their many efforts. The participants in these protests were often questioned, arrested by cops and threatened by the cop-controlled refugee "bosses" in the camps, so that the struggles wouldn't influence the whole camp population. In September/October 2016, while public discourse on migrants was dominated by the allegedly "brave" governmental efforts to have "refugee children from the camps", well, not attend, but at least visit public schools – after having "heroically" fought some orchestrated fascist reactions – the camps' officials started moving people from Northern Greek camps to Athens, usually for some asylum procedure related interview, with the majority of them never returning to the camps. Now all these camps are either completely empty or just "host" some dozens (or 2-3 hundreds at the most) newcomers.

[3] August 2017 – update about the trials after the No Border Camp

100 people were arrested in Thessaloniki after the No Border Camp.

- The nine people arrested at Nikis squat had their first trial, were convicted and are now waiting for the revision trial.
- The five people arrested at the Orfanotrofeio squat received heavier sentences in their first trial, but were found not guilty in the revision trial (May 2017).
- The 26 people arrested during a protest at the Thessaloniki's archbishop church (Metropolis) were found not guilty both in their first trial and the revision (January 2017).
- The 60 people arrested in the Hurriya squat will have their first trial in November 2017 (it has been postponed three times).

All cases were handled by the Thessaloniki No Border legal team. So far, the costs of all legal procedures have been covered by the movement. You can read more about these and other cases in the webpage "You can't evict solidarity" that was created in the autumn of 2016: <https://cantevictsolidarity.noblogs.org>

## Booklet No Border Camp Thessaloniki 2016

<http://noborder2016.espivblogs.net/2017/08/02/a-collection-of-texts-presented-at-the-thessaloniki-no-border-camp-july-15-24-2016-updated-by-their-authors>

A collection of texts presented at the Thessaloniki No Border Camp. Most of the texts were afterwards updated by their authors. The Thessaloniki No Border Organizing Assembly was dissolved in October 2016. All of its members continue to fight for migrants' rights, the way each of them consider most appropriate. Publishing the papers presented during the No Border Camp was one of the tasks of the Thessaloniki No Border Camp Press Team and this collection is its final activity. The Thessaloniki No Border Camp facebook page is still being updated: <https://m.facebook.com/NoBorderCampThessaloniki2016>



## WHAT IS AGRIOGATA?



Presevo 2015 | Open Borders Osnabrück

**A**griogata is an open kitchen/workshop space for everyone, located in the center of Thessaloníki. It has an open kitchen, a free internet-space as well as tools, sewing machines and other material that can be borrowed and used by everyone who needs it. The idea is to provide basic needs by organizing collectively and in this way reducing the costs of daily life for everyone. We are regularly recycling food on the local markets, turning them into a free meal that is cooked every evening and sharing the food we found with people in the neighborhood.

*Agriogata* is not just a social kitchen and space but is trying to set up a community in which the daily problems and concerns of everyone participating are heard and solved together. We are trying to help people with problems concerning their legal status, finding medical assistance, accommodation, clothes, language classes etc. This is especially important given the fact that many people currently living in Greece are facing a system, where they are systematically denied a legal status and thus criminalized and threatened with deportations and detention in their everyday life.

The society we currently live in needs papers in order to categorize people into “legal” and “illegal” residents, “refugees” and “economic migrants”, which leads to a situation where those, who are refused such a paper are silenced and made invisible. Building up a community where these problems can be addressed, is a tool to fight against these forms of state control and oppression by counteracting the invisibility forced on people. We are fighting for a world without states and borders,

where everyone (not just those blessed with a EU passport) can decide how and where they want to live. We deeply believe that this goal can only be reached if we understand that different forms of oppression as well as our liberation from these are connected and that we therefore need to connect local and global struggles. This can only be done by trying to understand the various perspectives people from different backgrounds have on these issues and by sharing our daily tasks and problems, we are also trying to understand each other and the system we are fighting against better.

*Agriogata* is organized after non hierarchical principles. All decisions are made in the weekly assemblies that everyone, who is agreeing with our basic principles, can join. *Agriogata* is supposed to be a space that is free of every form of discrimination : racism, sexism, nationalism, homophobia and other bullshit are not accepted here. However, acknowledging that people from various background might have been socialized differently, especially when it comes to the role of men\* and women\*, we are trying to not approach these issues dogmatically by issuing restraints, but by entering into a dialogue and by discussing problems that came up in the weekly meetings. We want to be a space where everyone involved can be empowered to understand and fight against the violence and oppression the system of capital and nation is forcing upon everyone of us. We want to do this by sharing our time, our resources, our problems as well as our anger and frustration.

*We live together, we struggle together.*

## TRAVELLING GROUPS

This brochure has a centre of gravity on the networks that Moving Europe has had contact to, and who took part in the discussions on the conference *Resistance along the Balkan Route*, Budapest May 12 – 14, 2017. But there were a lot of other people without nation whom we have met on the route and during the No Border Camp Thessaloniki.

On this page a few of the groups are to be mentioned who stood up, organized some structure and materials, and travelled down the route in order to support the people on the move. For most of them this was an impressive and lasting experience. Yes, certainly there was some lack of self reflexion, and some thoughtlessness of Germans dealing with „the locals“ (Moving Europe not exempted), but also there was a lot of serious commitment, responsibility, and endurance.

For a good example, look at the report from groups from Halle and Leipzig (in German only), [http://antiranet1sa.blogspot.de/images/BalkanberichtHalleLeipzig\\_2015\\_10.pdf](http://antiranet1sa.blogspot.de/images/BalkanberichtHalleLeipzig_2015_10.pdf), and you will see young people from the north confronted with realities that we up to then thought to belong to the Global South, but staying strong and in action. Or have a look at <https://openborder.noblogs.org> and the materials documented there. Not unlike Moving Europe, groups like these tried to combine material aid, spreading information, and documentation.

In the context of No Borders, Calais Migrant Solidarity is certainly a major point of reference (<https://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com>)<sup>1</sup>, but there are various smaller groups who were on their way as well, like groups from Göttingen (<http://sokigoe.blogspot.de>, <http://reisegruppe4.blogspot.de>, <http://travellingbureau.blogspot.eu>), and many other cities.

Groups from Jena and Leipzig have meanwhile set up a formal network (<http://rigardu.de/2017/03/06/situation-entscheidungen-plaene>), and their attention combines Belgrade, Idomeni, Šid, Subotica, and Northern France. They have recently documented a series of push-backs from Croatia: <http://rigardu.de/2017/07/26/go-back-to-serbia-dokumentation-polizeigewalt-mai-bis-juli>, also available in English.

And there were numerous Kitchen projects, e.g. from Hannover (<http://grenzenloskochenhannover.blogspot.de>), the Chai groups in Belgrade, and there are still projects on the route, like the No Name Kitchen in Šid, and the No Border Kitchen in Lesvos (<https://noborderkitchenlesvos.noblogs.org>), which is situated on this extraterritorial island where presence and observance are ever more necessary.

[1] For a broader theoretical view, see Natasha King, No Borders, London 2016



Dimitrovgrad 2015 | No Borders Osnabrück

Let us here just cite one call out of this scene that refers to the next station on the route, Macedonia. And let us say Thank You for that.

*Dear everybody,*

*we urgently need support in Macedonia where the situation for refugees and supportive groups is getting more and more repressive and refugees and supportive structures are being illegalized. Currently, we are eight people who will be leaving in the next days and urgently need to handover the structure before that because it is very important to keep the information flowing and to maintain the knowledge.*

*In the past months we have built up a support structure for illegalized refugees. Due to their criminalisation by the government they cannot access any means of legal help and are exposed to mistreatment by police and so called “mafia”. Besides offering unbureaucratic and independent help (food, water, cloths, first aid/medical help and information) we aim to build up networks and structures for supporting these people on their way from Greece to Serbia. According to Macedonian law any kind of support towards illegalized people can be seen as criminal act itself. Therefore local supporters risk to go to prison for up to 5 years, if they help these refugees. This is why illegalized refugees depend especially on help from international supporters.*

*There’s a place where you can stay. If you could make it, please email us and we will provide you with further information.*

*It would be really great to hear from you*

*Solidarity*

*Macedonia crew*



## Irregular migration in Macedonia

6 months outreach report  
in Lipkovo Municipality  
(villages Vaksince and Lojane)



Legis is a Non-Profit Civil Society Organization that provides necessary humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, irregular and detained migrants and people in need. Legis was the initiator for the law amendment of 2015 which allowed for the decriminalization of refugees, that is, they could use public transport instead of walking on foot across the country.

Legis was active in supporting refugees on the route with humanitarian and legal aid, as well as in the camps. Currently, Legis is present in the official camps of Gevgelija and Tabanovce, as well as the “unofficial” camp of Lojane where irregular migration occurs. They are not admitted to the Asylum Center in Skopje.

### No more independent Activists\*

During the Summer of Migrations, Legis worked together with independent activists, who have meanwhile withdrawn. There

had been threats from the police and the special intelligence service, both against activists and refugees. The main reason why the activists are no longer on the scene is that refugees don't want to stay in Macedonia. These activists\* want to transform things in their place, but unfortunately they can not ground their perspectives on the presence of refugees. And there is another reason:

Many people are still crossing, but the activists that could help before cannot do it now because of extreme criminalization and mostly because of the fact that the refugees do not go on the highway or through towns like before but they go through woods and mountains. The only contact NGOs or activists can have with irregular refugees is in Lojane village, where Legis has good understanding with the local authorities, which are not from the extreme right (in the south they are).

### New Government, and old crisis

Meanwhile, there is a new government which is more open to human rights issues. But still everyone is preoccupied with the political crisis, the growing poverty (Macedonia and Bosnia are the poorest countries in Europe), so even when awareness-raising campaigns are organized, there is not that much interest from the local population because the political and economic issues are the main issues for the locals. The international EU police is still in Macedonia, since more than a year ago and Macedonia is following the rules of the international forces.

Politically, meanwhile the former government (now opposition) wants to

*“fuel fear stating there is a danger of a flow of refugees who will turn Macedonia from a transit country into their home. ... The opposition accused the government of cutting funds aimed at the citizens in order to build flats and open new jobs for refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.”<sup>1</sup>*

So Legis reminds politicians not to use refugees for political purposes, stating that

*“Macedonia has never been a target destination of the Middle East refugees, only a part of the transit route. It will continue being one as long as our own citizens leave Macedonia and go to the EU because of economic issues. There is no reason for fearing tens of thousands of refugees settling in Macedonia.*

*Declaring an emergency situation at the borders is unnecessary and inadequate.”<sup>2</sup>*

## Irrregular migration, and push-backs

Out of the experience of two years of monitoring irregular migration, Legis has published a report on irregular migration, with focus on the Lipkovo area in March 2017.<sup>3</sup> Since the closure of the Balkan route the Lipkovo area was again overcrowded with people on the move.

*„It's been more than 7 months of LEGIS' humanitarian response in Lipkovo, through our field office and assistance point in Lojane village. During this time we provided humanitarian aid in food and non-food items on daily basis to the population using irregular ways to travel towards Western Europe, referred cases towards specific services provided by other organizations or the authorities, but also noted and mapped the risks, violations and abuses that vulnerable population is facing during irregular migration on this part of the Western Balkan Route.*

*For the period of 25th of August 2016 to 31st January 2017, LEGIS Field teams managed to reach out and provide assistance to 3486 people in transit in the Lipkovo area, 22% out of which are women and children.“*

The report, on the one hand, writes about the denial of asylum procedure in Macedonia, with various excuses, e.g. that the reception center was full, but it also documents push-backs and expulsions from Serbia:

*“According to our database, starting 25th of August 2016 to 31st of January 2017 LEGIS has registered 770 push-backs and 620 expulsions, a total of 1390.*

*The highest number of push-backs were registered in November 2016 with 176 refugees who on one or several occasions were denied entrance to Serbian territory. The highest number of expulsions from Serbian Territory to refugees staying 3 days up to 5 months in Serbia, registered in camps in Sid, Subotica, Belgrade, Presevo etc. was registered in November 2016, with 304 expulsions.*

*Many of those were firstly rounded up in reception and accommodation centers in Serbia and then transferred with buses to the reception center Presevo, or directly taken to the border-line area with Macedonia and expelled on green border zone, in the middle of the night ...”*

The Legis Report can be downloaded:

<http://legis.mk/uploads/6%20MONTHS%20REPORT%20on%20IRREGULAR%20MIGRATION%20OUTREACH%20in%20MACEDONIA%20Legis.pdf>

## NOTES

[1] <http://legis.mk/news/2382/the-opposition-distracts-the-public-the-ngo-sector-believes-they-demand-that-the-government-change-the-plan-on-dealing-with-the-refugees>

[2] <http://legis.mk/news/2387/do-not-use-refugees-for-political-purposes>

[3] <http://www.legis.mk/news/2282/irregular-migration-in-macedonia>

We tried to CROSS THE BORDER and to reach in the first village of Serbia when the SERBIAN POLICE caught us and they said to us: if you come one more time in Serbia we will KILL you



## SOCIAL CENTER 'FABRIKA AVTONOMIA'

**F**abrika Avtonomia (Factory Autonomy) is a free, public, non-commercial and independent social space. It is located and operates in Sofia since April 2017. It's run on horizontal principles by a self-organized antiauthoritarian collective. We share visions of radical social change and support for all the oppressed groups in Bulgarian society.

As a collective our purpose is to create an environment that will help connect different social struggles and promote the values of justice, solidarity and self-management. We do so by hosting various activities, such as: free language and educational courses, solidarity economy exchange, migrant support initiatives, law advising (upcoming), film screenings and discussions, meetings and events of other collectives with shared ideas (AFA Sofia, LGBTQ HHH Collective, Bulgarian Prisoners' Association, Anarres Books etc.)

For the last few years, Bulgaria was present in the reports on asylum seekers and migrants as a not very welcoming country.

Evidence of *police violence, illegal detentions and disrespectful treatment* are provided by numerous institutions and activist groups working in the field. Widespread xenophobic attitudes are propagated by some media outlets, and hate speech is not uncommon in the language of Bulgarian alt-right political groups. During the last six months these negative trends in the official discourse of power have become more pronounced, hence the situation of asylum seekers and migrants is even more vulnerable.<sup>1</sup>

### 2013 – 2015

The state policy towards migrants was brutal from the beginning. Bulgaria never opened its borders officially. The authorities kept saying that refugees can come through the official border check-points and not pass through 'illegal ways'. After the first big waves of migrant passage in 2013, there was a huge



media campaign, presenting ‘people from the Middle East’ as a threat. Some far-right groups created so-called ‘citizen patrols’ in the areas of Sofia where migrants were most present. After the ‘strengthening of the borders’ by both Bulgarian state and EU (including Frontex) and the next wave of migrants crossing Bulgarian-Turkish border, in the autumn of 2015 ‘self-organized’ vigilante groups started patrolling the border area. The border police forces have been collaborating with members of these groups, part of whom are with criminal records.

These groups of ‘refugee hunters’ were reported in the mainstream media to exercise robbery, physical violence and degrading treatment against migrants. Initially members of the government even praised them for their activity, but after an international outcry denounced them. Only one member of these vigilante groups was subjected to trial. Meanwhile one of these ‘migrant hunters’, Petar Nizamov from Perata was found not guilty in the court.

The so-called Balkan Route was never existing in the eyes of Bulgarian authorities. But migrants who are trying to pass Bulgaria still continue to use it. So, after the official closure of Balkan Route, there were not big changes, according to the situation of migrants in our country. They still continue trying to pass through Bulgarian-Turkish, Bulgarian-Serbian, Bulgarian-Greek and even Bulgarian-Romanian borders (the last case: 53 migrants were arrested at border Ruse – Giurgiu, Danube bridge, on 23 April). But there are no visible camps of refugees at Bulgarian borders, comparing with the cases at Greek-Macedonian or Serbian-Hungarian borders.

For further Information on the time since November 2016 please look at the report *Trafficked or Detained*. At the moment, about 1.600 persons per month still manage to cross the Balkans to Austria, and many of them are said to come through Bulgaria. And while the Government is militarising the border to Turkey (see below), there are again some boats with refugees crossing the Black Sea and arriving at the shores of Bulgaria and Rumania.<sup>2</sup>

### Racism and chances of common social struggles

The public opinion in Bulgaria is dominated by a traditionalist version of nationalism, based on the doctrine of the nation state inherited from the 19th century. It is an ethnic version of nationalism seeking the roots of the nation in blood ties, orthodox Christianity and the Bulgarian language. It is this canonical version of nationalism that is instilled in the education system, as well as propagated by mainstream media as source of national pride and honour. Moreover, as the historical enemy of the Bulgarian state is the Ottoman Empire, the traditionally negative feelings towards the Turks are transposed to all Muslim people. These nationalist and xenophobic feelings are exaggerated and exploited by alt-right parties.

The only possible allies for our common struggles are more liberal minded NGOs working in protection of human rights, who have a negative image in the overall society. So, the actual main issues of the group is to directly get in touch and establish stable relationships with people from the migrant communities

in Sofia, with activists from their self-help groups. Another line of cooperation are the self-organised groups of Bulgarians who provide help (such as Friends of the Refugees). A third and very important direction to work upon is collaboration with lawyers who can provide legal help to asylum seekers in Bulgaria. Thanks to the work of some self-organised volunteers, in July we had many refugees from the one of the open camps in Sofia in our social center for 1 evening. We hope they will continue to come when Bulgarian free classes will be back in September.

Fabrika Avtonomia has opened on 8 April 2017. It has not been subject to repression, criminalization so far. Our perspectives are to maintain the physical space of Fabrika Avtonomia where we stage various social and political events, to broaden the circle of potential audiences for these events, to find more supporters and develop more interventionist activities. Our main goals is to strengthen the links between the groups and to help find more supporters and thus grow a stronger movement in Bulgaria.

### NOTES

[1] For information regarding changes in the political situation (1), policies of the relevant state institutions (2), the work of NGO's (3) and the conditions in the refugee centres (4) from November 2016 to April 2017 consider the report attached.

[2] <http://ffm-online.org/2017/08/21/das-schwarze-meer-eine-neue-fluechtlingsroute/>



Opatovac 2015 | No Border Osnabrück

# TRAFFICKED OR DETAINED A CRITICAL REPORT OF THE STATE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS IN BULGARIA

For the last few years, Bulgaria was present in the reports on asylum seekers and migrants as a not very welcoming country. Evidence of police violence, illegal detentions and disrespectful treatment are provided by numerous institutions and activist groups working in the field. Widespread xenophobic attitudes are propagated by some media outlets, and hate speech is not uncommon in the language of Bulgarian alt-right political groups. During the last six months these negative trends in the official discourse of power have become more pronounced, hence the situation of asylum seekers and migrants is even more vulnerable.

Some important events have contributed to this negative evolution. Changes in the *political situation* (1), as well as the policies of the relevant *state institutions* (2), but also the *work of NGOs* (3) all affect the *conditions in the refugee centres* (4) and undocumented or illegal *traffic of people* (5). These five factors will be considered in separate sections in the present report.

## Political situation

During the campaign for presidential elections in the autumn of 2016, the language of xenophobia and national security was widely used by the candidates of all the political parties and coalitions. The ‘migrant thread’ and strategies of coping with this menace were a central moment in the program of the winner – the candidate of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (and a central left coalition of minor parties) air-force general Roumen Radev. Soon after the election, words transformed into acts. On 31st March 2017 president Radev and his mid-term cabinet repealed the Decree on the Integration of Refugees (voted by the previous cabinet on 12 august 2016), thereby denying legal rights and putting migrants with legal humanitarian or refugee status in vulnerable position.

At pre-term legislative elections held on 26 March 2017, the coalition of extreme right nationalist parties ‘United Patriots’ won 9,07 % percent of the vote (third political force), and with their 27 MPs enter the coalition in government. The three alt-

right parties who are now incumbent, are known to have staged several protests against the centre in Harmanli during the last two years, and orchestrated the evictions of (at least) two Syrian families with legal status from the municipalities in Elin Pelin and Belene in January-March 2017 (as reported in the media).

## State institutions: Ministry of the Interior, The State Agency for the Refugees (SAR), the National commission for combatting traffic in human beings (NCCTHB)

The Bulgarian Border police officially works with mixed groups for patrolling the Bulgarian-Turkish and the Serbian-Bulgarian borders where most cases of traffic occur. For several years and with intensifying alarm, numerous human rights organisations have stressed the widespread push-back practices and denial of access to state territory for asylum seekers. These practices involve the exercise of violence, intimidation with dogs, searches and confiscation of goods, verbal aggression.

During the last two years, the border police forces were collaborating with civic vigilante groups. These groups of ‘refugee hunters’ were reported in the mainstream media to exercise robbery, physical violence and degrading treatment against migrants. Only one of these vigilante groups were subjected to trial and recently declared innocent due to lack of evidence (the case of Petar Nizamov – Perata by the Bourgas regional court, resolved in March 2017).

Despite the construction of the wall on the Bulgarian-Turkish border, numbers of migrants entering through this border have increased during the last six months. According to the evaluation in the annual report for 2016 of the Bulgaria Helsinki Committee, the numbers of the official asylum seekers (people who officially filed for refugee status in Bulgaria) as compared to the official statistics on people who have crossed the border (as provided by the border police), clearly indicate that there are significant numbers of illegal entrances. This latter fact points to the importance of an *organised network for human traffic of migrants and asylum seekers*.

The different subdivisions of the Ministry of the Interior, such as Border police and the Direction on ‘Migration’, do not have the right to exercise the legal function of evaluating status and providing protection for asylum seekers. These authorities have a window of 3 to 9 days to transfer migrants and asylum seekers to the structures of the State Agency for Refugees, who are in charge to undertake legal procedures, provide housing, food, social assistance and medical care. The problem, underlined in the reports of a number of human rights organisations, is that these two institutions work in concert and often *transfer asylum seekers to detention centres*, where people are deprived

Widespread push-back  
practices and denial of  
access to state territory for  
asylum seekers



of freedom of movement and often lack legal protection, and are forced to stay for indefinite length of time.

Although the National commission for combatting traffic in human beings (NCCTHB) recognizes the traffic of asylum seekers as the most important problem in human trafficking (in its annual report for 2016), this institution is working predominantly and almost exclusively with the organised traffic of women (for sexual exploitation) and to a lesser degree with the traffic of migrant workers. To this date, this *state institution (NCCTHB) has not developed a mechanism, nor identified potential partners to protect the victims of human traffic* who identify as asylum seekers.

All of the problems identified so far clearly indicate that the state institutions in Bulgaria, as well as the incumbent politicians, do not work effectively to protect migrants and asylum seekers, but on the contrary – represent a threat to live and the rights of asylum seekers.

In August 2017, there are reports about further militarizing the Bulgarian-Turkish Border. Now 600 soldiers are to be deployed to protect the borders, because the police is said to be inefficient. Video cameras and Drones are also to be applied.<sup>1</sup>

### The work of NGOs

NGOs monitoring the work of state institutions and providing legal help: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Bordermonitoring Bulgaria, Detained.

NGOs providing humanitarian aid: UNHCR, Bulgarian Red Cross, CVS, Caritas, Council of Refugee Women, Centre for Legal Aid.

### The conditions in the refugee centers

Overall, the number of asylum seekers in 2016 has decreased by 5% compared to those applying for protection during 2015. The main countries of origin of asylum seekers were Afganistan (8.827 persons, 45%) followed by Iraq (5.348 persons, 30%) and Syria (2.639 applications, 13%), Pakistan (1.790 persons, 9%), Iran (451 applications, 2%) and 1% from other nationalities, according to the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee's Annual Report of Human rights in Bulgaria.<sup>2</sup>

In the middle of August 2016 the border authorities of Serbia have taken measures to completely block and close the border with Bulgaria in response to previous closing of the borders with Hungary and Croatia. This resulted in gradual increase in the number of asylum seekers in the territory of Bulgaria and the second half of 2016 the refugee camps were completely full.

This in turn increased the time that arriving asylum seekers had to spend in detention centers before they were moved to open camps (from 3-5 to average 9 days).

The overcrowding of refugee camps in the end of summer 2016 demonstrates once again the deficits of the national asylum system, whose capacity to work is over at an influx of people exceeding 2/3 of the currently available 5.490 accommodation places.

Such situation usually leads to deterioration of the sanitary and hygienic conditions in the camps, from which 2016 was no exception. The conditions in the refugee camps in Ovcha Kupel and Voenna Rampa in Sofia, as well as the camps in the village of Banya and some of the buildings in the camp in the town of Harmanli were particularly bad.

In addition, asylum seekers didn't receive monthly financial assistance, as it was canceled as of 1 February 2015, although this is in contradiction to the national and EU law.

### The riots in Harmanli

On 24th of November, after more than two days of quarantine, a massive riot broke out in the biggest camp in Bulgaria, located in the small town of Harmanli, some 30 km from the Bulgarian-Turkish border. The migrants protested against the closing of the camp and for freedom of movement. Without any prior information or warning, more than 3000 people were locked inside. The closing of the camp had been already planned by the authorities after local people, stirred up by nationalist and fascist parties and organisations, protested against the centre claiming it was a source of diseases.

Hundreds of migrants clashed intensely with the police. The riots lasted for hours. It was reported that rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas was used to break it. After entering the camp the police used physical violence even against people who were not part of the riot. After the riots 325 people from Afganistan were moved to camps of closed type or detained with no actual charges. Charges have been raised against 16 people.

### Detention of children

The unlawful detention of unaccompanied minors is one of the most serious violations caused by the migration authorities. In 2016, the number of unaccompanied children arriving continued to increase. It has been reported by human rights organizations that in order to bypass the prohibition of detaining minors the authorities assigned unaccompanied children to non-related adults.

Legal aid was also not guaranteed. From March 2013, foreigners seeking for international protection were included in the categories of people entitled to legal aid, funded by the state. However, in 2016, no legal assistance was provided to asylum seekers, including legal aid and assistance to children, and in particular unaccompanied children.

### NOTES

[1] <http://ffm-online.org/2017/08/17/bulgarien-setzt-auf-drohnen-zur-fluechtlingsueberwachung>

[2] Правата на човека в България през 2016 г. (Human Rights in Bulgaria in 2016)

## FORMER NO BORDER SERBIA

Here we will copy parts of texts that were published by a group that was active under the name of No Border (Serbia) from 2012 to 2017 working with direct actions and support for migrants, locals and prisoners, publishing on a blog as well as organizing events on a local level. The following is taken from the blog [noborderserbia.wordpress.com](http://noborderserbia.wordpress.com)

NO BORDER SERBIA was a collective that shares the views of the already known grassroots No Border network, which is based on the idea of freedom of movement. We are an informal, non-profit, non-hierarchical, self-organized group that advocates freedom of movement and settlement for all, against the regime of borders and the migration policy of the EU. We see our ideas and actions as embedded in the context of a broader anti-capitalist struggle.

„This is exactly the hypocrisy of the capitalist Europe, with its tradition of wars and exploitation that was established on the big lie of humanity as ‘the core of European value’. We ask ourselves, what these humanistic values are, when colonialism, land grabbing and the oppression of ‘others’ have always been justified by these same values. Only if we overcome the image of the superior Europe and start to make real bonds of transnational solidarity, we can start to talk about values again.“

October 2015

„It has been clear to many of us since long time ago and now is even more obvious than ever: Europe – as a cooperation of capitalist states – is not meant to give people help and a safe life. There is a interest behind the ‘humanitarian passage’ that was set up this autumn. A total control of the movement, selectivity, segregation, the eu member states only see useful human capital, a working force that any moment they can decide to send ‘back’ [...]



Serbian Border 2016 | Moving Europe

As well as in our home countries, that also have a system of division and discrimination, people are divided when being put under oppression by the fortress Europe.

But out on the borders and in the camps, and in the prisons, and in the streets of the big cities: we see many encounters of comradeship, people whose stories are differing from each other but have the same goal: to live in dignity, not to be dependent on a paper in order to be seen as a human.“

December 2015

„It is not surprising what the media writes about, and what they don't write. Media outlets write that 'groups such as No Borders and anarchist groups' are behind this march. They don't write about the self-organised struggle of the migrants for the freedom of movement and a life of dignity (as well as all other social struggles, as they are substantially the same struggle). Horizontally organised, anti-authoritarian collectives are the target of state propaganda and repression because they raise their voices against state violence and the power of capital, and because they show solidarity with the oppressed. They write about the need of mobilising military forces at the borders, but not about the everyday police repression. They write about this march as the continuation of the so-called 'migrant crisis', but they do not write about the European border regime which causes deaths, suffering and misery. The crisis is Europe's racism, the crisis are the borders, the crisis are the (renewed) fascisation of society. This march is not the crisis, it is rather the resistance to the crisis. [...]

Due to illegalisation and criminalisation as well as a growing anti-migrant propaganda, people are enduring daily repression, humiliation, the threat of arrest at any moment and subsequent imprisonment; the space in which one finds oneself is like a big prison surrounded by barbed wire, police, and military forces, a space which people want to leave and look for the chance of a normal life, education, work, instead of waiting in queues for charity.“

October 2016

„The so called 'refugee crisis' has disappeared from the news. The crisis is the normality in which people who attempt to cross the militarized border are being stopped, tortured, humiliated and pushed back on the border. In this the hungarian border hunters and police as well as the croatian border police have shown a new levels of masochism in the last months.

The torture – that we have reported on before, publishing pictures of injuries – often consists of forcing the people to take off their clothes, putting cold water on them and then forcing them wait 3 hours in the snow or cold. Additionally there is severe beating that is hard to show proof because the border police takes away people's phones and smashes them, then the beatings start. With iron sticks or other tools. One specially disgusting way of beating is taking off the shoes of people and beat the bare foot. After the procedure the phones are given back. Except if there is a better phone than of course it disappears.

Also in the city of Belgrade and the other cities around Serbia, the state has to prove itself as the master. Gendarmerie is

circling in big EU-financed-cars useless around the city center or staying in front of the migrant-squats next to the train station. In their terms this is an “operational support to neighbouring non-EU countries who ask for assistance at their border and share intelligence on cross-border criminal activities with national authorities”.

As our comrades from musaferat-group have once put it: Armies in the streets of metropolises came once more to prove the obvious: that 'peace' is an integral part of the military process.“ [...]

All this makes it more important than ever for us to stick together locals, passengers, newcomers and share the spirit of revolutionary solidarity. This means fighting for dignity! Abolishing a military system of power that affects all of us and the individualization of all of us. Standing together with people who resist and sabotaging the capitalist infrastructure is and must be our priority.

February 2017

**The land is for all of us!**

**Speculators and Investors: get out**

**Solidarity and Community: stay!**

Nowadays we are showing our resistance against the eviction of the squatted warehouses behind the train station in Belgrade. Our resistance: this is a common one, because all of us – locals from this city, inhabitants of the squats, passengers, students and people passing by or working in this area – we are longing for the end of a world in which our lives are oppressed by capital.

Most of the people squatting these buildings for months moved away from their living spaces because of war. There is another war here in Serbia: the war against the poor that results in hundreds of evictions every year. And the war on the borders, the war that is creating those of us without papers (or not the right papers) as second class humans, as enemies.

Yes we are enemies, enemies of a system of borders that takes away people's freedom to move, and enemies of those who want to turn the cities into places that are only for the rich.

But we are here today. And we are everywhere. You cannot evict all autonomous and self-organized spaces. Even if these squats are demolished and Belgrade waterfront construction is progressing – other self-organized spaces of resistance will occur.

The camp system in Serbia which is being extended by the state (and its business friends) in a fast way, is copy-pasted from other EU countries. Huge profits are being made from the fact that people are put in a place surrounded by walls and fences. The industries around those 'humanitarian' prisons are mostly run by organizations that try to make the life in the cage 'a bit nicer' by providing food or hygiene material. This is only necessary if people are being put in the position when they are treated as objects which can not decide for themselves.

No more displacement! Social Spaces and Autonomy is what we need! Freedom to move! Freedom to stay! Freedom not to be moved!

May 2017



## VOICES FROM MIKSALIŠTE

Voices from two young men, 18 and 22 years of age, who were interviewed for the Yallah!? project in the Miksalište Center in Belgrade.

**A:** In the Name of Allah the who is most merciful and most compassionate. I am refugee of Afghanistan here for 9 months in Serbia. I spent here nine months. So when I came to Serbia the border was a little bit open. So we tried but we had bad luck. The police caught us and pushed us back to Serbia. So after that, after one month I tried up again on Hungary. But then the Hungary border was closed. And now I am here and I tried a lot on Croatia, on Hungary, I think I was, I tried on Croatia four or five times and on Hungary it was too many times, I think 12 and 13 times. But no positive result. On Croatia it has too many problems because if someone wants to reach the border the police catch them and push them back to Serbia. So before that the police would beat the people, beat the refugees and take everything from them like mobilephones money everything they take from every refugee. So after that they deported back to Serbia. So all this was the big problem for us and now we are in here in Serbia. This is a bad situation. We were in barracks. So after police told us that go go to every different camps so they went

to destroy these barracks. So police came early at the morning I think it was seven o'clock. The police told us just go and they beat every refugee. [...] So now we are in camps and the barracks are destroyed. But we were happy in the barracks. Because we could afford it we could cook for ourself everything.

### Afghanistan to Serbia

**A:** I came from Afghanistan by walking to Iran. In Iran we were in the car I think for 12 hours to the border of Turkey. After that again walking to the border of Turkey, we crossed the border and we went over to some place where we were for 2 days. After that we got the ticket for Istanbul. After that we came to Bulgaria. I think we were four day on the way. We walked to come through Bulgaria. But nowadays every police catch the refugees and they take their fingerprint in Bulgaria. But we had a good luck. So I didn't have any fingerprint in Bulgaria. So that's why I have good luck.



But other refugees, 95 % refugees had fingerprint in Bulgaria. So they spend four months five months in Bulgaria. After that they came here. When I was in Bulgaria I tried to come to Serbia. We reached the border in five days. But the SIM card was destroyed and we could not call to any car to come and push us to Serbia So the police came and catch us and deported us back to Bulgaria. But not back to Sofia. Because we didn't have any fingerprint of Bulgaria, that's why. We could stay near the border and so we made it to Serbia.

So when we came back to Serbia three days later and we found our selecting point and the car came and we sat in the car and could hear Serbia. So my ninth night was in Serbia. I was totally finished on the way because no eating no food no water on the way and raining. It was raining on the way and at the selecting point we were totally wet. It was cold. Cold weather. So now I think no one wants to leave their family by no purposes. I think everyone have their own purpose. Everyone have their own personal problem. You know. Our big purpose and our main purpose why we come to Europe is having war in our sweet country Afghanistan. So that's why we are leaving our family, mother father sister brother, everyone. So now we are here and why why are we here? Hungary is loosing their humanity. Why they close the border for everyone? The border is closed for Syrian Afghani for Irani for Iraqi for everyone. Not just for Afghani people.

**B:** First we were crossing Bulgaria. Bulgaria is back to fascist people. They didn't help us. Even they were killing us on the way and even when we were living in some official camp, they were coming in our camps. They would attack all of us. It is a big issue in Bulgaria, in Sofia. One year before now we were in this jail there. Maybe next year we will arrive to somewhere that we want. [...]

### In the Barracks

**B:** I have been 8 month in here. Before I was in barracks for 6 or 7 months. Now from barracks they sent us to the camp. Before we were in barracks. Before 8 month, when it was winter then we were freezing in this hard situation around 25 degrees minus. We were dying from this weather, but they were not helping us. They are saying they are helping refugees. but they are not helping refugees. they destroy our places because they are helping Mafia, Dubai Mafia. They sell this place where we are living. this was a kind of our home. They are not helping us. They are only misusing us. Why they are not coming 8 month before? When it was 25 minus.

There were a few Spanish people making No Name Kitchen. They really helped us. they wanted to help us. They clean our place, they have done something for us. You know the bodiless, we were full bodiless. They saw the situation. they couldn't do anything for us but they were coming and they started with cleaning and then together we were cleaning. I have a lot of photos of these our barracks and in which conditions we were living. [...]

Now our face is a little bit clean. Before if you saw us you wouldn't believe. The kind of wood we were burning was all of poison [...] If they were working for us, they would have done something better for us 8 month before. We were not dying. Everybody was sick because of that. Because of that poison. Smoke. A lot of dust in this place. I gave my own interview to some German TV. They were showing everything what kind of situation that we were in. But they are not coming to help us. Do you think that they are helping us? I don't think so. They would just help Dubai Mafia. Our Muslim brothers. Eagle Hills and Belgrade Waterfront. They are selling this place to some Dubai Mafia, Arab people they are selling this place. They are destroying our place for those people. They are not helping us. There were around 1.500 people living there. They destroyed there places. Now they are making rules for us.

### In the Camps

**B:** They are making rules for us for that if you are going longer than 3 days, they would not allow you back to the camp. Its not possible for everybody to succeed in 3 days to cross the border. its not possible. I spend 9 days, 8 days, 6 days, 5 days in the forest. So if we come back, they would not help us. They will say we will send you to Presevo, which is 300 km more than far from here near the border of Macedonia. OK who can give us guaranty for that they will not deport us than to Macedonia? Everybody knows we are not coming here for enjoy, and also we do not want to stay in Serbia. They say that we have economical problems. Who has economical problems? Nobody. we have a life problem. This is the biggest problem. If they had not shoot me, would I have come here? No never. because I had a good live a good job a good business. Why should I have come here? This is second live. and I want to be save. but people are just talking shit about us.

These people are saying that they are helping people. If I would give them my problems they won't solve it. OK. So the UNHCR. why they don't give us paper? They should give us paper. Because now we are in Krnjaca they are just giving us that Caritas paper for giving us food. We don't want our food. This is our paper. If someone is police arrested we are showing our food paper. this is our paper. This is written Krnjaca, nothing else. This organisation is nothing work. This Caritas people only give us food. One day one time which is not for eating. They give you 2 bred 1 tuna for 4 people. I lost my phone, otherwise I would show you some pictures what kind of situation there is over there. We were not allowed sleeping after 8 o'clock. After 8 o'clock not allowed to go outside to sit in front of the barracks.

### Borders Closed

**B:** The problem is that that everybody knows that we don't want to stay here. If you want to close the border so do it from the beginning. Why leaving people in the middle of the route? They are only playing. They are not helping us. They are making more and more problems for us. We used to pay 1000€ for crossing

border. now we are paying 5000 or 4000. They are not helping us. They are making more big problems. If you want that nobody comes to Europe so you should close from beginning. Let them die, from beginning.

Everybody wants to go forward. But Hungary has lost humanity. This is another problem. If they will catch you 9 month jail otherwise maybe they deport you back to Bulgaria if you have fingerprints. I heard that they also deport back to Afghanistan. Yeah it would be better if they deport back to Afghanistan. Yeah its better that we die in Afghanistan. Its better than someone would take our body to grave here. They want to send us back to Afghanistan. OK. we don't want. Finish. Close the border. forever.

Last time we were in Sid, if you have heard about this place. That situation is like that our faces were black and we were coming from game and everything was horrible. Nobody knows you were spending 5 days in forest and after that you come back to the place where you was sleeping before and don't get for sleeping good bed, nothing. No blankets. Just sleep down on the street. When we were crossing the borders they were taking us everything. When we come back there is nothing for sleeping. And we are tired of life because of that. When we are coming back one is hunger a lot second is sleepy and this is not what we can bear over the time.

**A:** So now we want some help from the super country. I heard that Germany is super main country all over the world. So I heard that Germany can help us. So we want some help from Germany to help us to try to do something for us to try to open that Hungary border. Because we have a lot of problems here. We spend a lot of money. We cant go back to Afghanistan. We cant go forward. You know 9000 Euro we have spent up to here in Serbia. So that's why we cant go back to Afghanistan. And we cant go forward to Germany France Italy. So this is the big problem for us.

### Stuck in the Middle

**B:** Now we are stuck in the middle. Now we cant go back. If we go back so we are facing Bulgaria. if they arrest us there maybe they give us 9 month jail. If we go forward, Hungary will catch us. If Hungary catch us its another problem. What should we do? Who will help us? Nobody! Now I stand here. Did you see this pink coloured girl? One day I was standing here and that time I had no shoes I had no money, nothing. Can you give me shoes? I have no shoes, she said: Go. otherwise I will call police. OK this is the situation, they are calling police for us. I never forget a bad word if someone said it to me. I never forget. I never did anything bad. I just said that I need shoes. But why you calling police?

They wanted us to take part in this demonstration. There were two groups. One group against us. Another is with us. Those who are against us, they are misusing us. We were not allowed to do anything ... They wanted to fight with us. We are little fed up with fighting we only fucked up with fighting. We are tired of this fighting. But the people always want this and

each refugee. Especially from Afghanistan if you touch him he will touch you. He must touch you. Because they don't think about anything. They are uneducated people. If you are give him some clue, go there and do this, and they are going. Even if they know this way is wrong for them, they are going. They don't know this way is wrong but this way is wrong from them. There are a lot of people who are using these refugees for this.

Ask refugees they will tell you everything! I know everything is in here which is good which is bad. The people who are distributing food for us they are also misusing us. The people who are starting demonstration there are also misusing us. There are a few volunteers who worked here they are really helping. They are really helping, they are not misusing people. They never say Keep the line! Stand up! Straight! OK I am tired I don't want to stand up so I can sit here. Not line up one hour before that food is coming. One hour before we are standing in the line, so if you go forward, 1.500 people are standing behind you. When we were in barracks, 1.400 people were staying there. Then we were sitting and no need to stand up.

You ask me how old I am? Me? I am 22. Not exactly 22, 20 but mention 22. I have no idea about my birthday. Most people say they don't know about their birthday dates.

I will go on. Our back is always ready. refugees backs are always ready just waiting for departure. Yes we have a hope one day we will succeed.

These interviews will be part of the new and mobile exhibition

### YALLAH!? ÜBER DIE BALKANROUTE

This exhibition will show the LONG SUMMER OF MIGRATIONS as a political and historical event of importance. The refugees will once again be in the foreground, with fotos and interviews, audio and video recordings, and works of art.

WHO IS SPEAKING? The exhibition focusses on a refugee's perspective. The material was collected while supporting refugees on the Balkan route. Already in 2015, while on the route, those who make the exhibition were clear about this: that the voices of the refugees must loudly and genuinely be heard in Germany.

YOU CAN ORGANIZE THIS EXHIBITION to be shown in your town. If you are interested please write to [AUSSTELLUNG@YALLAH-BALKANROUTE.EU](mailto:AUSSTELLUNG@YALLAH-BALKANROUTE.EU). Technical questions can be answered individually. We would be pleased if other events would be organized accompanying the exhibition.

THE EXHIBITION IS ONLY IN GERMAN.



## UPDATE ABOUT THE SITUATION IN SERBIA FROM AUGUST 2017

After the insensitively performed evictions and demolitions of abandoned barracks in the centre of Belgrade where up to 1800 migrants lived in horrible conditions from autumn of 2016, most of them were settled at some of the 18 refugee camps (5 asylum centres and 15 so-called reception centres). Under threats of deportations and other sanctions, many have been taken by buses to a camp in Obrenovac, unfinished at the time. Couple of hundred of them still have no accommodation, and drift in the forests around the cities where camps are, also around the borders of Croatia and Hungary.

Due to these circumstances, and parallel to the warmer weather appearance, number of border crossing attempts increased (Croatia, Hungary). They were exposed to violent responses and illegal push backs of police units and other border officials of these countries. There are many testimonies where it was described that people were severely beaten by fists, wooden sticks, police batons, belts, kicked. Mobile phones have been stolen from them or destroyed. Among them, there were many unaccompanied minors. Some had attempted to cross the border more than 10 times, mostly unsuccessful, because of which they suffer physical and mental consequences. Majority continues to try, eager to reach their preferred destination.



Horgos 2015 | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig

The violence occurs on Croatian territory along the border, as well as deep within the country, which proves that the people's right to asylum seeking is not respected. Even those who reach the police quarters in Zagreb, with the aim of seeking international protection, are misguided and manipulated by false promises that they would be taken to camp Porin. Instead of that, police drives them near the Serbian border where they use dreadful violence and humiliation. Even though there are many reports of such cases, there are no substantial reactions of European Parliament and other significant institutions.

Soon after the demolitions in Belgrade, the concentration of migrants who were staying at the barracks previously is greater at the city Shid, near the Croatian border, who live in inhuman conditions in cornfields, woods and abandoned factory space. Food is provided to them twice per day by the collective No Name Kitchen, which also provides them psychological support after the push back violence. Although authorities are allegedly affirmative towards migrants and still use welcoming rhetoric, there are examples lately of non sanctioned fascist attacks and protests of ultraconservative public. For instance, in Sombor, after several gatherings of citizens opposing to the presence of migrants in the city camp, there was a case of attack by knife to one migrant, committed by the local 7-member group of extremists, inside of camp, without adequate response of police and without responsibility of camp officials, who stated as their only concern providing shelter and food.

From around 8000 in March, there is a decrease of number of migrants in Serbia to 5500 officially recognized in June, consequently to almost impossible crossing to the countries of European Union. Attempts of crossing the territory of Romania are more present than before. There is less and less new arrivals.

The relation of Serbian establishment to these issues is best noticed in the fact that that in the first half of 2017, no one was granted asylum. Migrants do not recognize Serbia as a country of refuge, because of poor asylum procedure implementation, poverty and mechanism failures. Most of them want to continue life in the European countries with more developed asylum systems which provide better conditions for the integration. This should not be an excuse for lack of efforts in establishing a fair and efficient asylum procedure, and providing necessary conditions for a life in dignity to endangered.

According to newly conducted integrative workshops of certain NGO's, there are signs of possible positive change in approach, speaking of asylum policy.

## MIGSZOL [MIGRANT SOLIDARITY GROUP]

<https://www.migszol.com>

### Together with refugees and migrants

Migszol is an informal, independent, consensus based group of Hungarians, migrants and refugees, that advocates the realization of migrant's and refugee's political and social rights in Hungary. The group was formed in 2012, when a group of Afghan refugees started to protest for better and decent integration policies in front of the Hungarian parliament. Migszol was founded out of the solidarity coalition between the initial protesters and people from Budapest in solidarity. Until now it is important for us that we do not speak for migrants and refugees, but together with them. As Migszol, we contribute to social change by campaigning against deportation, detention and physical violence, by raising awareness for rights of people on

the move and after settling in Hungary. We currently work on a campaign against the violence on the Hungarian-Serbian border and together with other groups we support the accused of the Röszke trials (Freedom for the Röszke 11 Transnational Campaign). In the Migszol school we offer free Hungarian language classes for migrants in Budapest, and the Open Learning Initiative (OLive) that we have in cooperation with a university to support migrant's access to higher education.

### From the first fence to „border hunter units“

Since the start of 2015 the Hungarian state continued to use migration as centre of its politics. In September 2015 Hungary finished the first fence on its Southern border, and with new



Hungarian Border | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig

laws irregular border crossing became a crime that can be punished with several years of prison. Since then the state basically abolished the asylum system: it cancelled the integration support (languages courses, integration financial support, health insurance, housing etc) for recognised refugees, restricted the asylum application policies (including regular reassessment of refugee status, and waiting times over a year to legally enter into asylum procedure) and legalised push-backs to Serbia from the whole territory of the country. The functioning (open) camps around the country were closed and instead people are held in two closed container-camps (the so called transit zones) at the Hungarian-Serbian border where all asylum seekers entering legally to Hungary are detained for the whole period of their process. The state established a new police unit called “border hunter” unit, which – together with the army, and other officials – patrols the border. In the last year many people who were trying to cross testified about beatings, humiliation and theft that were committed by Hungarian authorities during pushbacks.

### **Media monopoly and „referendums“**

It is important to point out that while asylum seekers became nearly invisible in the public (due to imprisonment, force to leave the country and detention centers far from cities), the state continues to present migration as the ultimate threat with the help its almost complete media monopoly and massive public campaigns. In the autumn of 2016 a referendum took place in which the refusal of the EU relocation scheme was propagated. The referendum was preceded by a huge poster campaign that connected migration with terrorism, rape, as well as the attempt of EU to interfere in domestic affairs. The propaganda posters of April and May 2017 called to contribute to the so-called “national consultation”, which is a questionnaire sent to every citizen and as a pseudo-democratic tool aims to legitimate future laws and legislations. The huge posters with a hand showing stop sign warns us: we have to “stop Brussels!” from its conspired activity of bringing the unwanted migrants to Hungary.

### **Against the demonization of Roma, refugees and migrants**

The right-wing government of Hungary, the Fidesz-KDNP and the notorious prime minister Viktor Orbán with its “state of emergency” politics presents itself and the Hungarian society constantly under threat from alien elements. Before the migration summer of 2015 Roma were the most frequent targets of the rhetorical and physical attacks from sides of the government. Being portrayed as “social parasites” they were accused of being the biggest threat to the “healthy Hungarian society”. Subtle, often open, antisemitism was and still is persistent. In 2015, migrants were identified by Orbán repeatedly as terrorist invaders” or “the biggest threat to European societies”. Since then the state is conducting aggressive propaganda campaigns, which intend to demonize and dehumanize migrants and refugees. The effectiveness of state propaganda can be felt even among the left political groups and vulnerable populations, making com-

mon struggles rather difficult. On the other hand, especially in Budapest, there is a certain spectre of activism in the fields of homeless, Roma and migrant solidarity, which unites under common topics of precarity and marginalization.

### **Imprisonment of all asylum seekers nowadays**

The situation in Hungary since the group started to work has completely changed. In 2012, when Migszol was formed, migration was a marginal issue, while since the summer of 2015 it is systematically kept in the centre of attention. We have witnessed the complete destruction of the asylum system, and the criminalization of migration. The enclosure of migrants started with the eviction of the open camps (Debrecen, Bicske) and culminates with the imprisonment of all asylum seekers in the transit zones, where almost none of the NGOs can access. Before the dramatic changes Migszol could contact and visit people living in the camps and inclusion and direct involvement of asylum seekers and refugee was the leading principle of the group. Nowadays their imprisonment and criminalization makes direct contact with asylum seekers impossible and the contact to people with status very challenging. The government directly connects migration to the elimination of political enemies, including political groups and NGOs. The main issue of the group is how to continue its political activity in a country where the state has almost a complete media monopoly, the courts and law making are highly under political influence, and the concept of migrant and migrant solidarity is equated with being an enemy, not just in the state propaganda but also in the public opinion.

### **Criminalization and state campaigns „against the enemy“**

Taking part in migrant-solidarity efforts in Hungary is certainly not a prestigious or well received activity. People are receiving constant threats (though mostly online) and are being designated as traitors. Criminalization attempts are frequent, especially outside of Budapest. It is hard to decide if one should laugh or cry at the absurdity of the accusations and techniques the authorities use.

In its paranoid will to eliminate every enemy, the state has recently started a campaign against the “Soros-financed” civil society, i.e. against its political opponents (in the Hungarian context). The heavily anti-semitic campaigning argues that the Jewish billionaire George Soros, who regularly donates money to civil society groups in Central and Eastern Europe, is behind all anti-government work. This argumentation allows the government to frame all anti-government groups, NGO’s and initiatives as “foreign funded by evil forces”. As such, the state media presents the destabilization of Hungary as the only will of the civil society and targets it with sanctions, misrepresentation and intimidation. The state takes particular interest in migrant solidarity groups and NGOs, since in this view it is Soros’s way of pressuring the Hungarian government into opening the borders to refugees and migrants to “destroy the independence of Hungary”.



## FREE THE RÖSZKE 11 CAMPAIGN

### WHY THE RÖSZKE 11?

Europe, September 2015: People who are protesting at a border fence demanding to pass freely – as before, thousands have been able to do – are being brutally attacked by the police. Eleven of them are arrested and end up in custody. Ten of them are then charged with “illegal border crossing within a mass riot”, one is charged with “terrorism”. These are the Röske 11, named after the Serbian-Hungarian border crossing where the events took their course.

The Röske 11 cases are remarkable in various ways. They enunciate the first backlash after the victory migration movements had achieved: the opening of the Balkan corridor. It was the first attempt by an EU member state to re-establish control over the migration movement across and within its territories. Hungary has long since been at the forefront of right wing authoritarianism. It curbed up its anti-immigration rhetoric in 2015 and was the first country on the Balkan route to unilaterally build a border fence and stop people from moving through its territory. Hungary displays itself as the guardian of the EU outer border, similar to Bulgaria. The EU does not complain, although these measures are implemented with brutal violence against refugees. As a matter of facts, Hungary seems to simply be leading the way towards border fences and criminalisation of migration for the EU to follow. Such tendencies can

be observed widely across Europe. The EU Schengen-internal borders – such as for example the Italian borders to France and Switzerland, Ventimiglia and Como – embody a similar tendency including police brutality, arbitrary push-backs and the deprivation of rights.

Another deeply troubling aspect of the Röske trials is the suspension of the rule of law. The convicted have not received a fair trial at all. No evidence was needed in order to find them guilty. The trials are nothing but show trials. When people who identify as Arab or Muslim are under general suspicion and a pilgrimage to Mecca is proof enough for someone to be linked with radical Islamism and terrorism – as in the case of Ahmed H. – the rule of law is abandoned.

In the use of racist discourse, more or less merging refugees with terrorists, the rest of the EU is not far behind Hungary, with right-wing populists gaining power across Europe. And yet, the use of terrorism laws in Europe as in Ahmed H.’s case is highly worrying and a threat to everyone, not only to minorities. Where today, such a radical injustice might seem unlikely to happen elsewhere than at the interface of migration, exceptional lawless authoritarianism and precarious right statuses, sooner than we think it might endanger our very own precious freedoms.



Horgos/Röske September 2015 | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig

It appears that mainly radicals are concerned with the criminalisation and rightlessness that many migrants face today. However, everyone who believes in the upholding of individual/human rights should devote themselves to this topic. We have to embrace the famous quote by Lilla Watson and understand that our liberations are bound up with each other.

### ... Until all are free

Yamen found himself free all of a sudden in June – after 18 months of jail and 3 more months in a closed detention center.

#### Yamen A.'s statement after his release

*I am Yamen Al Khateeb, from Syria, I was a sociology student at the first year. After war has destroyed our country, I decided to leave to Europe seeking a secure, safe, and decent life, but unfortunately, I faced a problem and brutal violence at the Hungarian border, and I have been arrested and beaten at the border and inside the prison, and I have been detained in a single cell for 42 days, and accused of terrorism, and after a while they told me that there is no proof of this accusation, and that it has been dropped, and after that I have been transferred to a central prison with accusation of entering Hungary illegally, and I have been imprisoned for 21 months. But I have a question: how as a refugee would I enter Hungary in an "illegal" way? And how did millions of refugees entered Europe? Was it in a "legal" way? I was detained from 16th of September 2015 until 1st of June 2017.*

*Finally, I am now in Germany and looking for a happy life, and a better life, and I will do my best in order to continue my scholastic procession, after the loss of 21 months in the Hungarian prisons. My best greetings to everyone who was supporting me the time I was detained. I repeat my thanks to you people, my brothers and sisters, I am going to write a longer text about everything what happened to me.*

*Thank you. Salam. ( Peace)*

#### It's a Question of Power. Ahmed H.'s Trial

On the 15th of June 2017 in Szeged, Ahmed H. had his second instance trial, after being sentenced to 10 years of prison on the 30th of November 2016 for committing an "act of terrorism". In the trial the prosecution emphasized that the first instance hearings followed European law guidelines – clearly referring to a statement, Orbán gave a couple of days before, when he responded to the criticism of the EU parliament regarding the trial of Ahmed. Orbán said that "the obvious lies of Ahmed H." are more important to Brussels than the security of Hungarians. "Brussels is openly on the side of terrorists". Accordingly the prosecutor demanded an even higher sentence for Ahmed H., close to 17,5 years. The new lawyer, P. Bárándy, former minister of justice of the socialist-liberal coalition, questioned many contradictory interpretations of the first instance judgment. The evidence, according to the defense, was used selectively to support the argument of Ahmed H. being a terrorist.

The judge decided to refer the case back to the first instance court, claiming that although the evidences were properly established, there was a lack of reasoning and interpretation. The judge also suggested, that the first instance court needs to set up if Ahmed H's acts (especially the alleged stone throwing) were a "deliberate attempt of forcing the state" or an act of "despair" or "anger" in order to determine if the terrorism accusation is correct.

Media and organisations celebrated the new court decision as a first step towards justice. Yes, it is necessary to doubt in the first instance court-decision and support the efforts of Ahmed H's defense. But should we rest our hopes in the Hungarian legal system and believe in their independence? Didn't the whole Röske trials expose the Hungarian legal system as the willing servant of the government's ambitions? Ahmeds case plays a more and more important political role in Hungary now – the state media even broadcasted nearly the complete trial. We think that the "new" first instance trial will be as much dependent on the political atmosphere as the previous ones. In the end it is not a question of "law" and "objective reasoning" but rather a political struggle.

Let's go on fighting.

We believe in a world of equality, dignity and freedom for all. We will keep on fighting until Ahmed H. is free and we will not fall for the attempts of creating a fiction of legality.

Please help Ahmed to finance his legal assistance and other expenses!

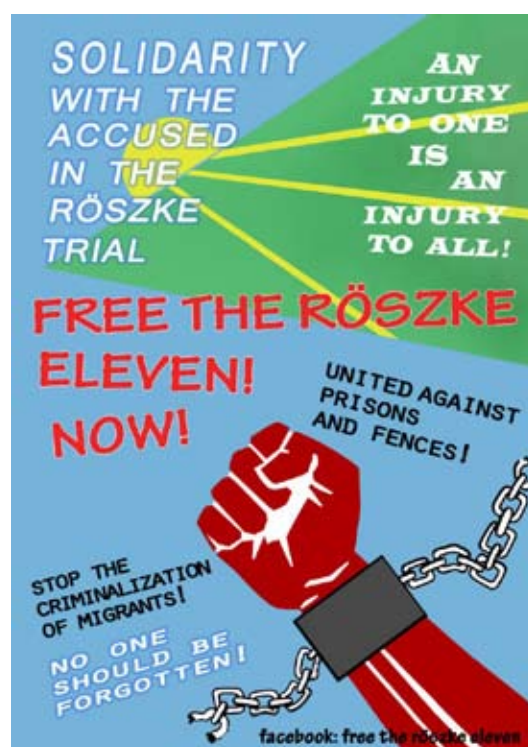
Account holder: Rote Hilfe e.V. Ortsgruppe Frankfurt

Catchword: Röske 11

IBAN: DE24 4306 0967 4007 2383 90

BIC: GENODEM1GLS

More information: <http://freetheroszke11.weebly.com>



## INITIATIVE WELCOME!

**I**nitiative Welcome! gathers individuals and civil society organizations with the aim to support refugees on the ground but also to make political pressure on the Croatian and EU institutions to change restrictive migration policies.

When the Balkan Route was open, Initiative gathered more than 60 civil society organizations, one football club and more than 400 volunteers who gave support to the refugees on the ground on everyday basis – from humanitarian support and coordination with local organizations, but also providing information to refugees about current procedures regarding entering and leaving Croatia. On the ground, Initiative was also working in coordination with Croatian Red Cross, the Coordination for Asylum and institutions. In addition to that, because of better communication with the public, the web page was also published – [welcome.cms.hr](http://welcome.cms.hr) – which displays news from the ground and publishes useful information for refugees as well as anyone else who finds it useful.

Initiative Welcome! insists that the Republic of Croatia needs to strongly advocate urgent harmonization of positions on EU level and political agreement in the UN for common approach to stop the war in Syria. Because of that, the Initiative is expecting from the Croatian government to take the political initiative and to advocate finding sustainable and adequate solutions for this humanitarian crisis, which are based on international humanitarian law, protection of human rights, intergovernmental cooperation and solidarity.

Welcome! Initiative invites all citizens to express solidarity without fear and to help people in distress. We remind our citizens that refugees have been experiencing violence and were often denied access to the international protection system over the past months and longer. As a direct consequence of their poor experiences, refugees lost trust in Croatian police and often seek civic support while applying for international protection. We encourage all citizens to help those in need - without fear.

### Supporting Refugees against Push Backs and Humiliation

Volunteers and activists of Initiative Welcome! support refugees in their integration on daily bases by various activities in and outside reception centres, legal support in asylum procedure, advocate for better conditions and rights for refugees in croatian system.

Activists of Are You Serious? and the Welcome Initiative visited Serbia (Belgrade, Šid, and other locations) several times in the past months and conducted interviews with refugees who were located in refugee camps or in abandoned warehouses in

Belgrade. This helped them to gain broader and deeper insight into numerous ways in which illegal and forced push backs are conducted, thus evidencing non-compliance with national and international legal obligations of Croatia, as well as behaviour contrary to universal human values such as the inviolability and protection of human life and dignity. According to our findings, the police has pushed back families and individuals of all ages, mainly from Afghanistan, but also from Iraq, Pakistan, Syria and other countries, from the croatian territory. Many of these people have on several occasions (in different locations in Croatia) explicitly sought international protection or asylum, sometimes even in a self-abasing way (by begging and kissing the hands and feet of police officers). The people interviewed after the dangerous crossing of the Croatia-Serbia border experienced systematic verbal and physical abuse instead of exercising their right of access to international protection in one of the EU Member States. The violence occurs on Croatian territory along the border, as well as deep within the country.

Majority of people who succeed to cross the border are pushed back, and minority of them who reach Zagreb have a chance to enter the asylum procedure, but only if they are accompanied with activist from NGO's, otherwise they are usually pushed back to Serbia.

Because of this kind of behaviour, during the last month, more and more refugees contacted the Welcome Initiative asking for support while seeking asylum in the police station because of the fear of being pushed back. Also, we established a phone line where refugees could contact us and report a push back.

The reports and witness testimonies refer to the same pattern according to which Croatian police officers take refugees found inland to the place near the Croatia-Serbia border in vehicles, after which they are transferred to another vehicle, a van, and taken to a place at the very border. According to numerous reports, they are there taken out of the van one by one, after which they are hit with fists, sticks and belts, as if they “were playing football” with their bodies, according to one message we received.

In addition to numerous reports of violence related to push-backs of refugees trying to cross into Croatia from Serbia, we also received a reports of violence against unaccompanied minors who tried leaving Croatia where police employees slapped them, beat them, pointed a gun to their heads and threatened them, seeking information on smugglers and the amount of money they paid.

All together, from the beginning of the year, Are You Serious? and Initiative Welcome! published three reports<sup>1</sup> on push



backs and police violence and continue to monitor the situation as well as assist refugees in claiming their right to seek asylum.

### Reception Centres, Dublin Deportations

Asylum seekers are situated in two reception centres - Kutina (small city one hour from Zagreb) and Hotel Porin in Zagreb (in Dugave). Centers work as open model institutions with capacity of 700 (Zagreb) and 100 (Kutina). Croatia has one detention centre - Ježevce near Zagreb. Unaccompanied minors younger than 14 years are placed in institutions for children with behavioural problems and children without proper family care and those over 14 years are in institutions for delinquent minors with behavioural problems.

## The most recent ATTACK was the most brutal and shocking as it involved CHILDREN who had asylum status

Many families from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have been deported, mostly from Germany and Austria, under the Dublin regulation to Croatia during last year and a half, after the so called Balkan Route closed. All of them are in procedure of seeking asylum, situated in reception centers, facing integration which is not working. Further problem for some of the returned people is that after applying for asylum in Croatia, they receive negative decisions which only prolongs their uncertain situation.

### Rejections of Asylum Applications

Throughout the last couple of months, particularly in April 2017, civil society organizations including Center for Peace Studies (CPS, which coordinates Initiative Welcome) have observed a sudden increase in the number of rejections of applications for international protection made by applicants from Syria and Iraq, as well as rejections of requests to regulate foreigner status in Croatia (citizenship, temporary or permanent stay). What is common to all of the rejections<sup>2</sup> is the Ministry of Interior (MOI) invocation of the Article 41 of the Security Vetting Act (Official Gazette 85/08, 86/12), i.e. the rejection of the request due to a so-called 'security obstacle' based on the assessment of the Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA).

SOA does not provide explanations of the reason for the safety obstacles to MOI. Further the applicants, as well as their attorneys, are not being informed of the reasons either. Based on the SOA opinion, the MOI dismisses the applicant's application. However, because of the lack of access to the relevant

SOA files, the plaintiffs' (asylum seekers') attorneys cannot represent them effectively, which consequently leads to inactive participation in a legal dispute and the violation of the right to fair trial.

The second report has shown more than 100% increase of the number of documented negative decisions based on the undisclosed SOA opinion, within a significantly shorter period of time (April 30 – July 11 2017). This is especially important since it also affects the rights of the most vulnerable group among the asylum seekers: children and minors. In the first period we documented 24 persons, including 5 children, while in the next period (spanning a little more than 2 months) we documented 33 persons, including 9 children with this variety of negative decision, which means the increase is 138%.

### Intolerance is growing

With the growing right-wing rhetoric we are witnessing the growing intolerance toward the different minority groups in Croatia. We can also see this on the political level, where the government decided to not pass the already finished Nacional plan for combating discrimination and to make a new one with a lot of measures to stop the discrimination removed.

In the new year's eve as well as later we recorded attacks on asylum seekers or people granted international protection in Zagreb. The most recent attack was the most brutal and shocking as it involved children who had asylum status.

Activists of the Welcome! Initiative often face accusations and anger of police officers while providing support to refugees in procedure of seeking international protection at the police stations. We as activist and volunteers are still not affected that much when it comes to criminalization but with what we see in other countries in EU it is just a matter of time when criminalization of solidarity will start to be enforced in Croatia. There is more and more repression as well as animosity from the institutions since the rhetoric has changed a lot- from welcoming to closing the borders and securitization. As mentioned before, we can see this in an attempt to amend the Foreigner's Act that criminalizes solidarity as well as on Act on State Border Protection, but also in our everyday work in supporting refugees.

The positive development in this is that after more than a year of warnings about the possible consequences that criminalization of solidarity could have for the whole society, and after series of discussions involving a large number of citizens, the Croatian Parliament had finally considered civic voice and legalized acts of solidarity and help to undocumented migrants in Croatia. A compromise solution now legally defines that no punishment will be imposed if someone gives help to a person with an irregular status due to humanitarian reasons and without the intention to prevent or delay the deportation of that person.

### Priorities of Initiative Welcome!

#### 1. Daily support to Refugees and Asylum Seekers and integration policies

With our presence in Reception centre in Zagreb and Kutina, primarily through Croatian language classes, we map needs of asylum seekers who are additionally supported through our legal aid provision, social inclusion and support programmes. Whilst legal aid is provided by CPS lawyers Centre for Peace Studies), other support is mainly provided by KVOC – Volunteers' Club of the CPS, gathering some 50 volunteers, who run programmes for asylum seekers but also provide daily support to refugees in their integration, once they gain international protection. Integration support consists of search for accommodation, issuing documents, enrolment to schools and universities, searching for a job, issuing health insurance, etc. In the upcoming period we plan to have regular working visits to Reception centre in Zagreb three times a week (until now we only had two) and two visits to the Reception centre in Kutina (until now we had one). We provide legal aid twice a week in our premises and occasionally in the Reception centres. Also, we organize regular monthly meetings with our volunteers combined with supervision sessions, both groups and individual. Volunteers are also given daily support by CPS staff.

In cooperation with some 30 civil society organization that compose non-formal Coordination on Integration, we provide additional support in integration by advocating for quality integration policies at national and local level, as members of governmental working structures on development of integration policies. We usually hold several meetings a year and several public events especially those during Refugee Week and therefore we are aiming to schedule four meetings in the upcoming period as well as two public events, one marking World Refu-

gee Day and another one on the occasion of the International Migrants' Day.

On local level in Zagreb, we have been campaigning for establishment of the Social intercultural centre (information sharing, education facilities, employment counselling, psycho-social counselling, social entrepreneurship programs, etc.) together with the platform Upgrade (Campaign: Zagreb – an open city?). Just before local elections which will be held in May 2017 our campaign will have another phase involving refugees living in Zagreb as well as two refugee-migrants collectives – Taste of Home and DAH – Croatian Society of Africans living in Croatia.

Volunteers of the Welcome Initiative, previously engaged in providing support in the transit camps, now regularly work with refugees outside of the Reception center in Zagreb. For this fall, we are planning to start weekly workshops with women refugees, and we plan to host lecturers from women's organizations which are part of the Initiative who would then hold workshops related to female refugees related topics once a month (health, care, education, empowerment, domestic violence, etc). We also plan to hold some local events, like flea markets, football games, cooking workshops, which would encourage communication between refugees and local people.

## **2. Relocation and Resettlement of Refugees (Italy, Greece, Turkey)**

Within this priority, CPS monitors implementation of 'quota decision' by the Member states of the European Union, specifically in Croatia in terms of preparation of infrastructure, adminis-



Botovo September 2015 | Moving Europe



Tovarnik, September 2015 | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig

trative procedures, access to services and protection of human rights. Also, we provide legal aid and other types of support to those refugees who were relocated to Croatia. As member of the Working Group on Relocation and Resettlement by the Government of RoC, we have participated in creating an operational plan on integration of those refugees. We continue advocating for adequate policies that will ensure full integration of refugee individuals and groups.

### 3. Criminalization of Solidarity

We stand against any policy or legal practice trying to criminalize refugees or those supporting people's rights to life, freedom and safety. Our legal advocacy work has lately been focused on amending Foreigner's Act that criminalizes solidarity with refugees equalizing it with smuggling and trafficking as well as on Act on State Border Protection which recent changes have enabled military forces to receive police competences and protect borders immediately by putting wires, fences and walls as well as using weapons. When it comes to criminalization of solidarity, we combine campaigning, legal analysis and advocacy, media work and other methods. We believe there will be few more solidarity public campaigns by us within a year's time since public speech, political practices and social distance have been creating deep polarization among domestic people and refugees.

### 4. Detention

We stand against detention of people and therefore we have been advocating for an open movement for all. We have been

organizing regular visits to the Detention Centre in Ježev, close to Zagreb, and have been documenting our insights as well as producing monitoring reports that are often used as a warning to institutions if human rights violations are noticed. To the detained people we provide free legal aid. We have been advocating against detention of children in particular which has been a common practice in Croatia. Since recently, Croatia operates with a specific unit for detention of children which we're planning to visit soon. Also, there is an alternative to detention measure implemented lately for refugees who got stuck in Croatia after closure of borders on Balkan Route and we are planning to further campaigning for developing functional alternatives to detention.

### NOTES

- [1] First report: <http://welcome.cms.hr/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Izvje%C5%A1taj-o-nezakonitim-i-nasilnim-protjerivanjima-izbjeglica-iz-RH-AYS-i-Inicijativa-Dobrodo%C5%A1li.pdf> Third report: <http://welcome.cms.hr/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/REPORT-ON-THE-NEW-WAVE-OF-VIOLENCE-AGAINST-REFUGEES-ON-CROATIAN-BORDERS.pdf>
- [2] First report: [http://cms.hr/system/article\\_document/doc/403/CPS\\_and\\_AYS\\_-\\_Report\\_on\\_arbitrary\\_and\\_unlawful\\_practices\\_by\\_the\\_Ministry\\_of\\_Interior\\_and\\_the\\_Security\\_and\\_Intelligence\\_Agency\\_related\\_to\\_non\\_approval\\_of\\_international\\_protection\\_or\\_status\\_of\\_foreigners\\_in\\_Croatia.pdf](http://cms.hr/system/article_document/doc/403/CPS_and_AYS_-_Report_on_arbitrary_and_unlawful_practices_by_the_Ministry_of_Interior_and_the_Security_and_Intelligence_Agency_related_to_non_approval_of_international_protection_or_status_of_foreigners_in_Croatia.pdf) Second report: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B\\_oKR2QQNUiPY1BZRm5fNFdRyZg/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_oKR2QQNUiPY1BZRm5fNFdRyZg/view)



## MORE BORDERS AND GROWING NUMBER OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

Text from activists from Second Home / Autonomous Factory Rog

Our group is consisted of local and international activists, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and sans-papier.

### Short history

As a part of Social center Rog we have been engaged in migrant struggles for more than a decade. Since August 2015 we have been actively working with mass migrant movement issues on Balkan route and integration practices for asylum seekers and refugees in Ljubljana, Vrhnika and Logatec. After closure of the Balkan corridor and later in July 2016 we established a new self-organised migrant community space called Second Home, located in occupied since 2006 Factory Rog in Ljubljana. It works as a social centre and caravansarai with daily and evening activities for asylum seekers, refugees and sans-papier.

### Closed borders and lack of any integration

The challenges we are facing at this moment are: closed borders (fences on the border with Croatia, border controls on the Schengen border with Austria etc.), restricted crossing possibilities, long-term asylum procedures, lack of any integration program. There is no possibility to get integrated through established diaspora economy alternatives, diasporas are young or non-existent, almost zero job opportunities, language barriers, lack of additional legal help. There is no legalisation possibilities for undocumented migrants (rejected asylum seekers). The number of undocumented ex-asylum seekers is growing fast, in most cases police grants a sort of tolerant temporary permission to stay, which is called police protection. In August 2017 there is a tendency from the side of police to reject even this opportunity to stay in the country. Police protection is a mere permission to stay at the territory without any rights: no right to get employed, no social allowances, no social housing, no health care. The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office counts approximately 30 people without documents, and we count at least 30 more, who are not registered anywhere except police.

Claims of asylum seekers from Afghanistan are systematically rejected and people from Afghanistan are strictly considered economic migrants. In 2016, 416 Afghans (more than from Syria or Iraq) applied for asylum in Slovenia. Yet, no refugee status was granted to adult applicants or families from Afghanistan. Only unaccompanied minors are granted subsidiary pro-

tection. For that reason, regardless efforts given by different activist groups or NGOs most of Afghani families with children left the country during summer 2017.

Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants have only restricted access to health care (only emergency health care cases). Many have health problems with their teeth and many women have gynecological problems. But, they can not take care of such health issues, since they are not considered emergency health problems.

During the asylum procedures, asylum seekers are entitled to free legal help. However, after the asylum claim is rejected and this negative becomes final, a person does not have any free legal help anymore. This is even more problematic, since rejected asylum seekers end up in detention facilities. There is one detention center in Slovenia, in town Postojna. There is a detention unit in Asylum home in Ljubljana. Refugees call asylum homes in Slovenia as open camps.

### Strict Dublin III regulation

Slovenia strictly follows Dublin III Regulation; authorities do not want to process asylum claims, if application is considered by other member state responsible for processing these applications. It is extremely unwilling to apply sovereignty and humanitarian clause in individual cases.

Slovenia won an important case at the EU Court in Luxembourg to reinstate Dublin rules: EU Court ruled that refugees must continue to seek asylum in the first European country they reach, even in exceptional circumstances like the last migrant crisis of 2015 (even for refugees who enter EU via the "official" Balkan corridor). The court's decision opened up possibility of Dublin deportations of many asylum seekers who arrived in Europe in 2015 and early 2016.

The number of border crossings have significantly increased since last year, mostly people from Afghanistan are entering Slovenia. Yet, many (including entire families with small children) do not decide to stay in Slovenia, but move to other EU countries.

For individuals, who get refugee status, the state provides financial support for two years (for accommodation and social welfare). Social welfare is actually a permanent right given under a certain conditions. It is 297,53 eur per month. However, if a refugee finds a job/employment during these two years, his

social welfare and subsidy for housing is taken away. To rent a room or app in the city one must pay 10 euro / per m<sup>2</sup> per month. In that way, refugees are demotivated to find employment during two years after granting a refugee status. This situation contributes significantly to their deskilling and non-inclusion into the labor market.

### Increasing Homelessness and Racism

There is a growing number of homeless migrants in Ljubljana, capital city of Slovenia. Homeless migrants are mostly those who have been denied refugees status in last months or years and afterwards their status have not been legalised in any other legal terms, thus their situation is getting worse from case to case, from month to month. We are also witnessing an increasing problem with renting apps or rooms for other migrants too, reasons are unemployment, racist real estate market and



Second Home / Autonomous Factory Rog Ljubljana | Rog

shortage of affordable or socially oriented living capacities in the city of Ljubljana. We estimate that by 2018 when most of refugees with statuses from the so-called Balkan corridor, especially refugee families with many children will become subject to poverty and homelessness.

Racism issues are popping up at every sphere of social life: housing, renting apartments, racist media presentations; there is an exponential increase of hate speech, production of fear and security discourse produced by state and right wing political entities.

Residents from smaller slovenian towns or villages often protest against decision of the state to install accommodation or integration facilities for asylum seekers or refugees in their hometowns. They even reject, under-aged unaccompanied minors who want to go to school with slovenian children.

### Actual main issues of the „Second home“ for refugees and sans papiers

- More active community work with refugees, asylum seekers and sans-papier

- More political work to build migrant power and migrant struggles
- Strengthening legal help beyond the resources provided by state and a few non-governmental organisations
- Access to asylum seekers before the second interview takes place, i.e. educational classes how to define one's case in order to obtain more chances to be successful during the most important interview, the second interview
- Need to have more capacities to accomplish service facilities (searching for apartments, helping with the basic bureaucratic procedures, translations, possibilities for employment etc.)
- Find a way to establish possibilities for alternative economy, "income generating" activities would empower not only asylum seekers, refugees with status but also long term unemployed migrants
- Long term need for a space to continue with community work and community building
- Burn out of local activists

Repression depends on the intensity and forms of actions. At last action against deportation of a Syrian family to Croatia (Dublin III) almost all participants were registered, one was taken to police station. The total amount of bills for fines issued at the place of protest will be enormous. Animosity is actually appeared in social and mass media, in oral way, but in daily life, examples of strong hostility towards refugees or migrants are not so often. More than animosity we face "everyday" racism and neglect.

<https://www.facebook.com/FrontaBrezMeja/posts/1555574967848176>

### Networking and common actions

Networking would be very useful regarding the common future actions on the European level and also it is important on experience sharing, especially in regard with alternative economy, legal issues and transnationalization of struggles for freedom of movement and right to stay.

Common actions against deportations, Dublin regulations.

Common actions for regularisation of sans-papier for open borders and safe crossing, i.e. for freedom of movement and right to stay.

There is an urgent need on EU precedent concerning Dublin/ Push backs that took place during the "official" Balkan corridor period. Mutual support is needed to maintain the basic infrastructure for people running away from a certain EU country after receiving negative decision and settling in another EU country.

### Address of Second Home

Autonomous Factory Rog, Second Home  
Trubarjeva 72

1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Our main page: <https://facebook.com/secondhomeljubljan>

Another important page: <https://facebook.com/FrontaBrezMeja/>

## ACTUAL SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN AUSTRIA

Individual report by a member of the transnational network Afrique-Europe-Interact

### I DEPORTATION PRACTICES

Soon after the challenges against the migration regime in 2015, the Austrian government started to carry out strong efforts to deport more people. Austria, by now, is known to be one of the EU countries with the highest rate of deportations, which is also exploited in present election campaigns to satisfy racist sentiments within Austrian society.

In their ruthless efforts to show “strength” by intensifying deportations, the Austrian authorities have gone as far as putting even old and sick people into deportation charter flights, claiming that “needing medical assistance is not a sufficient reason to stay, unless there is an acute danger to the person’s life”.

#### a) Dublin deportations

On the one hand, we have seen a rising number of “Dublin” deportations to Italy and Croatia, but also to Bulgaria and Romania. Dublin deportations to Hungary presently don’t work very well for them, due to the lack of cooperation by Hungarian authorities.

Deportations to Croatia can temporarily be slowed down by court decisions in favour of asylum seekers, due to bad conditions in Croatia. With the latest EU court decision, saying that Dublin rule also applies for exceptional situations, like the massive border crossings and temporarily opened borders in 2015, asylum seekers and supporters fear a new intensification of Dublin deportations to Croatia.

Besides this, there are strong efforts to carry out Dublin deportations to Italy, as Austrian authorities are strongly focussing on controlling and preventing irregular border crossings from Italy to Austria.

#### b) Deportations to (supposed) home countries

Austria is one of the EU countries who started deporting people to Afghanistan on a regular base since March 2017, and who ruthlessly stick to this policy, no matter what happened in Afghanistan since then.

Several deportations were carried out by charter flights, in cooperation mainly with Sweden. As these charter deportations were repeatedly met by visible public protest, the authorities switched to deporting people to Afghanistan individually, by normal airline flights. Besides Afghanistan, several other nationalities are strongly under deportation pressure, for example Nigerian and Pakistani people, but also other nationalities.

Charter deportations to Nigeria and Pakistan are carried out on a regular base. Those who are threatened by deportations to (supposed) home countries are mostly asylum seekers whose asylum application has been effectively rejected by court decision or who missed the deadline to make an appeal against the first negative decision by the BFA (Bundesamt fuer Fremdenwesen und Asyl).

Up until now, there are no deportations from Austria to Syria or to Somalia. We also haven’t heard about any deportations from Austria to Iraq during the last years.

#### c) Imprisonment for deportation

People can be arrested on order by the authorities without judicial arrest warrant (“Festnahmeauftrag”) for maximum 48 hours, and it often happens that people are deported right away within this deadline. For longer imprisonment in deportation custody (“Schubhaft”), there needs to be a judicial arrest warrant (“Schubhaftbescheid”). Deportation custody can take several months. Deportation custody is generally carried out in police arrest centers (“Polizeianhaltezentrum”). Due to latest changes of Austrian laws, people can be taken in deportation custody more easily than before and kept there for a longer period of time.

#### d) Resistance vs. police violence during deportations

There are a lot of cases of deportations that could successfully be stopped through active resistance by the person concerned of being deported, sometimes with the help of solidary passengers. On the other hand, people who got deported repeatedly reported about physical violence, forced medication or violent threats inflicted on them by Austrian police in order to break their resistance. Such practices are illegal, but seem to be part of common police practices.

### II CLAIMING ASYLUM

#### a) The procedure

The BFA (Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl) is the authority responsible for handling asylum applications. Asylum applications can be made at asylum reception camps – or at any police station.



According to present Austrian asylum law, refugees can be kept in practical custody for a few days during the reception procedure. If asylum seekers get a negative decision following their application from the BFA, they have the right to make a court appeal against this decision within a limited delay - otherwise the negative decision becomes legally binding. Asylum seekers are safe not to be deported to their (supposed) home country until there is a legally binding negative decision on their case. Positive decisions on asylum applications can mean to be granted the full right to asylum as a refugee for being persecuted individually in one's home country. The other option is to be granted "subsidiary protection" for being a victim of generalized, non-individual threats through situations of war etc. People whose asylum application has been effectively rejected have the chance to apply for a "humanitarian stay", if they have already been living in Austria for a longer period of time, can present proofs for German language skills and "integration" and have a job or a job offer to earn their living.

Reasons for being granted the right to asylum based on individual persecution can be persecution by state forces, but also by non-state forces. Besides persecution for political or religious conviction, persecution and human rights violations based on ethnicity, gender - especially violations against women -, or sexual orientation (persecution of homosexual-, queer and trans persons etc.) also count as reasons to apply for asylum.

#### **b) Typical problems with the authorities' ways of handling asylum applications**

Even if it is well recognized that the general situation in a refugees' home country (for example Afghanistan) is dangerous, asylum is often denied with the argument that the person is not concerned of "personal, individual persecution", but only facing general safety risks like anyone else living in that country.

Asylum is often denied with the argument that there are "relatively safe areas" within one country (for example Afghanistan).

Residents from certain countries still have comparably high chances to get a positive asylum decision - especially people from Syria. Up until now, also many Afghans are still getting positive asylum decisions, while those who get negative decisions are facing severe deportation threats. For residents from many other countries, for example for people from most African countries - for example Nigeria, Senegal, Algeria, Morocco - the chances to be granted asylum is generally almost zero. This is based on declaring countries to be "safe", on claiming that there are sufficient options to move to safe areas within one country, and also on the racist bias to generally consider people from certain countries to be "liars".

People often go into their first asylum interview without having proper information about the way how the procedure works or what facts are important to tell. Later, it is difficult to demand corrections or to add missing information that is in fact crucial for the case.

Many asylum seekers complain about unproper or biased translations during the asylum interview.

#### **c) Access to legal support for the asylum trial**

According to Austrian law, asylum seekers in Austria have the right to get legal assistance. This means that after applying for asylum, people are automatically assigned to one of the two big NGOs who are mandated by the Austrian state to provide legal assistance: Either the *Diakonie* or the "*Verein Menschenrechte Österreich*" (VMOE). While the former is generally known to provide a good quality of serious legal support, the latter is infamous for working in favour of the authorities, instead of providing proper legal information for asylum seekers. Many people lost their asylum case and ended up with deportation due to deliberate mishandling of their case by this pseudo-NGO called VMOE.

### **III LIVING CONDITIONS IN AUSTRIA**

#### **Access to housing and welfare system**

After the initial procedure of the asylum trial, asylum seekers are usually distributed to housing facilities in the different provinces of Austria. These can be refugee camps, but also smaller housing facilities. Receiving the basic social welfare for asylum seekers ("Grundversorgung"), which is less than regular social welfare for Austrian residents and paid out sometimes in cash, but sometimes also in the form of material goods like food parcels, is generally tied to the communities of residence. Asylum seekers generally have the right to leave their housing facilities and settle down with friends or family members, but in many cases this means also to lose the access to the basic social welfare for asylum seekers ("Grundversorgung").

#### **The development since 2015**

With the arrival of thousands of people within a short period of time since summer 2015, the Austrian Authorities showed themselves to be unable and "overcharged" in handling basic needs for housing and daily supplies. At that time, considerable numbers of refugees were left homeless - or had to sleep in gardens and yards of asylum facilities. In addition, emergency shelters were set up in stadiums and certain public buildings. Many estimated that at that time, the poor performance exposed by Austrian authorities was a deliberate move to produce the image of a so-called "refugee crisis".

Since then, much fewer numbers of people arrive in Austria, due to harshly restricted border controls along the migration routes.

On the other hand, for those asylum seekers who actually stood in Austria, daily living conditions have improved to some extent - with big differences depending on the local context: More housing facilities have been created, there is more routine in providing basic needs and education projects and school facilities for mostly young, under age refugees have also been created. In all these efforts, local civil societies as well as migrant communities have played a crucial role.

One could say that in Austria, there is a kind of ambivalence between hard, repressive and ruthless deportation and border policies on the one hand, and a certain amount of practical integrational efforts, based largely on civil societies and migrant communities, on the other hand.

#### IV ACCESS TO WORK ...

... has been a very frustrating topic for asylum seekers for years. Based on a ministerial decree ("Bartensteinerlass"), asylum seekers are banned from most jobs and job training positions. Exceptions include, for example, sex work, but also agricultural seasonal work.

#### V FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Up till now, asylum seekers do have the right to move freely within the territory of Austria. But even here, changes to the worse are on the way: Due to the new Austrian immigration law, the freedom of movement of asylum seekers shall be restricted to the respective local provinces. At times when in Germany considerable steps towards an abolition of movement restrictions have been achieved, Austria is presently implementing new movement restriction laws.

#### Racism and chances of resistance

On the one hand, widespread racism in considerable parts of the Austrian population. Hostility against refugees and mi-

grants as a presently dominating political discourse, also fuelled by election campaigns. An extreme right-wing fascist party (FPÖ) running high chances to be part of the next government. But also a conservative party (ÖVP) whose ministers and whose candidate for chancellor have adopted ruthless anti-migrant deportation and border policies as their big issue. And a Social Democratic party (SPÖ) in parts enthusiastically adopting these very policies and in parts remaining opportunistically indifferent on that issue.

On the other hand examples of practical solidarity partly within small activist circles, partly within migrant communities, partly within local civil societies. In some cases significant examples of powerful, and in some cases successful practical local anti-deportation struggle, mobilising sometimes whole village communities to protect people against deportation.

Also tendencies of new upcoming self organised refugee struggle against deportation - especially from the side of afghan communities facing presently severe pressure of deportation threat.

#### Focus on deportations, and Africa

Struggling against deportations - Dublin deportations as well as deportations to (supposed) home countries - is presently an important focus issue for anti-racist and refugee solidarity struggle in Austria.

On the other hand, mobilisation against the rise of right-wing and fascist powers is a crucial challenge for all progressive-minded people in Austria.

For my own group – Vienna group of the transnational network *Afrique-Europe Interact* – predominant topics in this context are:

- Protesting against deportations, esp. to African countries. In this sense: Protest against charter flight deportations to Nigeria and spreading warning calls to people potentially concerned.
- Trying to create awareness against ruthless and murderous border regime policies imposed by the European states on African states. In this context, Austrian government, though being by far not a main destination for people arriving from African countries, has adopted a hardliner position within the EU and is pushing for "closing the Mediterranean migration route" in collaboration with Libyan proxy-state and for implementing detention- or "reception" camps for migrants and refugees on African soil.

#### Repression

It is very likely that new restrictions of Austrian demonstration laws, as well as a general thrive towards more repressive "security"-policies will also more and more effect anti-racist and refugee-solidarity protests.

Against active migrants and refugees, there have been attempts of criminalisation through accusations of "human smuggling", with people locked up in jail for months during the investigations.



Spielfeld September 2015 | bordermonitoring.eu

## ACTIVISTS FROM SWITZERLAND

We are involved in the following groups: Moving Europe, w2eu.info, Autonome Schule Zürich (Autonomous School Zurich). Capacities are currently low for the people working on the welcome to Europe platform, this is mostly due to people having jobs which take up a lot of time. It is a common problem in Switzerland that we find it quite difficult to organise in a national way, because procedures are different in each region. We also suffer from the language barrier. Despite this, there was a recent update of several categories on the w2eu Switzerland web page.

### SWITZERLAND is becoming more of a TRANSIT COUNTRY for people on the move

As it has become more difficult to travel from Greece, most people arrive in Switzerland do so from Italy after having crossed the Mediterranean. This means that *Switzerland is becoming more of a transit country* for people on the move towards Germany and Scandinavia. But on the Southern border with Italy, Swiss border authorities repeatedly try to block people from entering and send them back. Most people crossing by train get controlled. We see a great need for information about how to travel from Italy onwards, towards Northern Europe.

On the other hand, refugees in Switzerland struggle a great deal with the Dublin regulation. We made the experience that most of the people could not avoid giving their fingerprints in Italy. *Switzerland enforces the Dublin regulation very strictly.* Depending on the canton, there are different groups fighting the Dublin regulations. Activist groups doing so, face different obstacles. Very broadly speaking it is easier in the French speaking West of the country than in the German speaking East. For example, the option of church asylum is more difficult in the east, because the authorities will try to prolong the Dublin deadline to 18 months. More and more though, the central government is trying to outweigh the decision power of the more progressive cantons, and trying to make it more difficult for them to be more lenient on deportation decisions (for example, the central government is now fining the cantons if they aren't enforcing the Dublin regulations strictly enough).

For *claiming asylum*, it really depends on the country of origin. Lately Swiss authorities have made it much harder for people coming from Eritrea (after people from Afghanistan, they are the second largest group of claimants). For people that are denied asylum, the situation has worsened. Often they are detained for up to 18 months while the state tries to enforce their deportation. Afterwards, if they are not deported they only receive «emergency aid», barely enough to survive. Many rejected asylum seekers live therefore as «Sans-Papiers» in Switzerland or chose to go to another country.

In Zurich the Autonome Schule is an important meeting point and a safe space to start the *resistance against structural racism*. It is well connected to other networks in Zurich and Switzerland and an important base for broader mobilisation. For different projects and campaigns there are good contacts to NGOs focusing on legal aid, lawyers and also leftwing parties. In Lausanne, there is quite a strong struggle around church asylums and a strong connection to the city municipality. Solidarité sans Frontière and different Right to Stay grassroots groups are organising a national campaign against the multiplication of borders within Switzerland for asylum seekers and refugees and growing restrictions to their freedom of movement. On the 2nd of September in response to the international call-out for actions to commemorate the Keleti events/ breakthroughs of summer 2015, the first national day of mobilisations of the campaign will focus on the questions of administrative detention and administrative measures of containment.

In Switzerland, there is a *desire and need to foster more collaborations and coordination* between local groups, on a national level, especially with local struggles running out of steam and losing ground to the central government. More international contacts with Italy and Germany to work on the southern border and Dublin-resistance would also be needed.

More connections with Italian groups would be useful, in order to have more contacts when people suffer Dublin deportations. It would be great to think about ways in which to strengthen the struggle against Dublin.

The issue of pushbacks at the southern Italian border also needs more collaborative efforts on both sides of the border. It would also be good to think about distributing shareable information about how the interviews for asylum work. This, in order that people go to their asylum interview more prepared, or at least seek help more systematically in the preparatory steps before their interview.



## NO ONE IS ILLEGAL FROM SEA-RESCUE TO SOLIDARITY CITIES, FROM DAILY STRUGGLES TO THE WE'LL COME UNITED MOBILIZATION

### Local activities against deportations and for a solidarity city

Local counselling cafe for refugees, twice a week since 25 years in our small squat. Since 2013 strong contacts and „right to stay“-activities with refugees from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia in the group „Lampedusa in Hanau“ including a lot of de-monstrations but also church asylums to protect people from „Dublin“-deportations to Italy or other countries.

Just started a new campaign for „citizen asylum“ with afghan community for afghan refugees, who might be under deportation threat to Afghanistan – and as part of a „solidarity city concept“, which includes „bridges“ from refugee support activities to wider social struggles like social housing; local alliance with unionists and others in an initiative called „solidarity not division“.

### High speed procedures for newcomers and increasing housing crisis

First months of 2016 still many many refugees arrived in Germany and pushed the government to enlarge all capacities. But because of political reluctance and bureaucratic delay thousands of refugees were left long time in tents or other very bad accommodations and they had to wait long time for their interviews and next steps in the asylum procedures.

The whole apparatus managing the asylum system was extended a lot, but still not able to deal in a proper way with older cases (from 2012/13!), but latest since Autumn 2016 pushing now the newcomers of 2017 (mainly refugees, who come via Italy) into very quick procedures without chances to be prepared for their interview or even to establish contacts with local structures.



Hanau, Social Center Metzgerstraße 2014 | No One is illegal

Since autumn of last year we saw over-capacities in a lot of camps and in the meanwhile many were closed down again. As nowhere in Germany the urgently needed social housing programs were tackled, rather the gentrification process in most inner city went on, most refugees have to live in camps probably for years, even after getting recognition or other status but never able to pay the rents.

### **Record number of residence permissions despite roll back – division in ‘good and bad’ refugees (brief overview)**

According official statistics for Germany in 2016 more than 430.000 refugees succeeded to struggle for their residence permission, in the first six months of 2017 another 190.000! Most of them arrived in and after the summer of migration. This number was never reached before in Germany. And this fact and all the experiences of ongoing struggles hopefully will characterize the future situations.



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Latest since the beginning of 2016 – and still going on – we are confronted with a racist rollback on various levels: from government by a series of new restrictive and repressive asylum- and foreigner laws, inside the society and in medias by right wing populism and agitation. The rollback includes the reorganizing of the Dublin system (which collapsed in the summer of migration) and the start of charter deportations to Afghanistan (still in symbolic numbers but as a deterrence campaign). Strong main stream discourse on „good and bad refugees“ to divide and rule the migration movement and the solidarity. Most affected group of deportations are Roma and other citizens from Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo), but it is in the continuity of several years and antiracist movement could not develop effective resistance. Also maghreb refugees and migrants (from Morocco, Algerian, Tunisia) are under more and more pressure of deportation as they are presented also as „economical“ – thus bad – migrants. The same is working with many westafrican refugees and migrants as well as with people from Pakistan. But for several countries – like Pakistan – it is

difficult for the authorities to deport people as the embassies are not collaborating in a way they wish.

Afghan refugees are confronted with a determent campaign and first charter deportations. But the numbers of deportations remain very limited and with Welcome to Europe we worked on an info flyer „against the fear“: explaining all the options of resistance for afghan refugees. Although the rate of rejections in the first instance are higher and higher, most of them have a good chance in their court cases. After the bomb-attack in Kabul at 31st of May 2017 (in which the German embassy was destroyed) and because of increasing protests, the charter deportations are suspended now again.

Syrian refugees get less and less a full refugee recognition, but mostly a subsidarian protection (with no more right for family reunification). Refugees from Eritrea are in a similar situation, while people from Somalia and Ethiopia more often get negative decisions (and have to make appeals) but cannot be deported to these countries.

Also in 2016 we see more active selforganisations of refugees and migrants and many protests, but still a problem of high fluctuation and thus less stability and continuity inside these groups. „Multiplicity but fragmentation“ is also characterizing the situation in the welcome initiatives and in the antiracist movement. Still many groups and initiatives are active and often effective on a practical and local level – „from sea rescue to solidarity cities“. But a wider coordination is missing and the public visibility and the political articulation is much too weak (in comparison to the daily involvement).

### **Polarization in the society**

Strong polarization in the society, dominance of right wing populism in medias and as above mentioned a more and more restrictive asylum system inside Germany while the same government is the driving force of externalization at the external borders (for example EU-Turkey-deal, EU-Afghanistan readmission agreement, externalization of border control to northern Africa...). But the other pole - composed by refugees and migrants and their selforganisations, by welcome initiatives and the whole spectrum of antiracist movement - seems to us strong as well, at least stronger than in earlier years (like 2014). And in many cities (like ours) campaigns and initiatives have been started to interconnect the refugee struggles with wider social questions like in social housing- or „right to the city“-activities.

### **Actual main issues and perspectives for the group**

Anti-deportation struggles (Dublin and Afghanistan) in the frame of a wider local initiative for a Solidarity City; continuous networking in the above mentioned transnational networks from daily (often invisible) struggles to public (more visible) mobilizations and events; new campaign (We'll Come United) for transnational action days in September 2017, starting with local activities on 2nd of September and a germanwide demonstration and parade in Berlin on 16th of September.





Röske 2016 © Warren Richardson



## THE CREATION OF THE BALKAN ROUTE [2014-2015] WITHIN THE STRATEGY OF CONTROLLED CHAOS

### A State-sanctioned strategy

Even though it has not been announced or discussed as such, the State of Greece has been following a specific strategy for the management of migrants on its territory. This strategy of *State-sanctioned and sustained chaos* is being carefully executed over the last few years, forming a seamless continuity with the management plans of the “migration issue” of Greek governments since 1990, with some adjustments, mainly after the war in Syria broke out.

The main aim of this strategy, *within which we must also understand the creation of the Balkan Route*, is to encourage the passage through and exit of migrants from Greece, and to discourage their staying and settling in the country. Within the context of the financial crisis and the rapid devaluation of the population (decreases in wages and pensions, sudden pauperization, extreme unemployment amongst the young and the middle-aged, selling cheaply to investors real estate, ports, railways, natural resources, compromising and destroying welfare, jobs and workers’ rights), the strategy now relies on keeping in place and perpetuating three conditions:

1. The first condition is that the SyrizaANEL left-majority coalition government produces, no matter what it does, *a rhetoric that is left wing and humanitarian*. After signing more memoranda, there is no other area of media discourse that the government can show a progressive profile. The myth of the ‘foreigner-friendly Greek State’ (which, however weak and fleeting, was dominant during 2015 and the beginning of 2016) was actually built upon the fact that *most new migrants did not want to stay in Greece*

anyway, since, with the setting in of the financial crisis by 2010, there were no jobs and no security for them here. The creation of the Balkan Route is directly connected to the financial crisis in Greece. The absence of work and perspective is why the majority of migrants who had arrived in the 1990s and the 2000s left Greece for another European country or even went back to their place of origin.

Former governments, (and the neo-nazi party, that had been advertised by the liberal media since 2009 until its success in the elections went out of hand) had used this same fact (that migrants fled Greece anyway) to postulate that migrants were leaving in large numbers *because* of the effective police operations, arrests and pogroms. In contrast, after January 2015, the left-majority simply denied migrants any reason or perspective to stay, making sure that they get no bearable living conditions, no security, no occupation, no education, no sociability). Even placing refugee children (some of whom had spent two years in refugee settlements already, in Greece, Turkey, or Jordan) in local schools, i.e. in the centralized nationwide public school network of mandatory education, was presented as a near-impossible herculean task: A handful of actual cases of fascists encouraging ignorant parents to protest against mixing local kids with refugees were blown up to epics of humanitarian government-led heroes fighting the monsters of “racism from below” across the country.

2. The second condition was to *keep the money flowing in*. The sojourn of migrants in Greece from one border to another, from entry to exit, boosted the circulation of capital, most of it unde-

clared, in a collapsing economy. Petty smugglers, port- and land border officers, bus- and taxi drivers, owners of shops and hotels have been profiting systematically and significantly from the confusion and insecurity that migrants have been facing.

Also, humanitarian aid from Europe and the US operated on many levels: NGOs dealing with migrants soon became the greatest contract-employer in the country. (There are no official estimates as to how long the NGOs will be placed here, even though the role of the State in managing funds is being upgraded.) Money stayed within the country, rather than being transferred to foreign banks). Good public relations with foreign officials were made by calling in humanitarian and aid/refugee management professionals from abroad. Furthermore, all kinds of secret agents within large international organizations could indulge in free experimentation with population management in the camps. This latter fact should not be underestimated given the wide margin for ideological manipulation of the stereotype of the “muslim terrorist” in international media. There are countless cases of unannounced activity (conferences, political counseling sessions, seminars and meetings, guideline-setting) of parts of the Greek government with parts of NGOs and foreign officials.

3. The proliferation of the ideology of *Greece as the victim State of the EU* was the third condition. *For this, the true human instincts of several people across the country who wanted to help migrants (a real social movement that was enriched by many thousands) were usurped by the paid-charity system for the creation of the profile of a crisis-ridden society that still*

has tears for the suffering. Deaths in the Aegean, the extreme danger of the migrants' entry passages were downplayed in favor of cries about how Greece is the country "that carries the burden of the whole of Europe". This ideology is also the main argument in lobbying the EU to press Turkey: The slogan goes like this: Greece is the final frontier of civilized Europe, Turkey should somehow be encouraged to halt the flow of migration into the fortress. This part of the deal, however, contains, as was evident in what followed the July 2016 coup, many variables, and using the card of Turkey can be totally unpredictable.

### Improvisation in Greek style

If one can clearly discern a conscious strategy, we doubt there was any central and thought-through tactical methodology. The State and the NGOs totally improvised their techniques as they went along. Many people on the islands, in Athens, Thessaloniki and towns with camps watched as a real drama unfolded, and tried to take action. The following description from Thessaloniki characteristically describes how a sense of confusion and helplessness was created for migrants, as well as for people who wanted to intervene:

*Those of us who had been visiting Idomeni frequently during the summer of 2015 had seen a wall being built before our eyes, people practically living in the mud, being beaten up by the police, giving birth in offhand tents, burning anything they could find from the rubble for some heat in the freezing cold, being moved around from town to town and from camp to camp, in buses that would just show up and then disappear, being constantly stopped for pointless checks in the middle of nowhere on their way to the border. If they made it to the border, they were often pushed back to Athens, many of them fell right into the hands of smugglers and even organ-harvesting mafias. [The Story of a House in Toumba, Thessaloniki, Former Occupied Home for Migrants, May 2017]*

However, State, NGOs, and their police and army, did remain within a tight framework of controlled chaos, con-

stantly issuing new and often unrealized plans, keeping the activities of migrants (protests, demos, hunger strikes, occupations and blockades of roads and stations) as invisible as possible, and the people themselves out of sight, moving them around for no apparent reason and consciously preventing the living conditions from becoming sufferable, on a physical as well as on a mental level.

We insist on calling it a tight framework since in all specific incidents when either self-organization or protest seemed to be getting out of hand (for example when hundreds of refugees kept demonstrating, networking, going on hunger strike in the fall and winter of 2015, during the protest campaign for the Moroccan Sanaa Taleb in 2015/2016 with the support of all her companions at the Ellinikon center, during the protests (in a dozen camps throughout the coun-

try), called on social media, on September 1st 2016, or during the participation of refugees from the camps around Thessaloniki at the International Fair protest march of trade unions, political and migrant solidarity groups on September 10 2016) the State and NGO response was uncharacteristically rapid, determined and organized.

The effect of these techniques of migrant management have been quite thoroughly recorded and have shaped the realistic image of the ordeal of migrants in Greece in global media: Terrible living conditions, police violence, State indifference, refugee children not going to school in their vast majority, freezing in tents in the snow, changing places of settlement, not knowing what's next. (Also, massive psychological problems. Unresolved trauma. Depression.)



Greece 2016 | Moving Europe

The victims who paid the price of the EU-Turkey deal most bitterly are the refugees on the Greek islands. In three cases people died trying to heat their snow-covered tents. There were several revolts that remained hidden. Even a few days ago [July 10 2017] a revolt broke out in Moria, Lesbos, with tents and containers being set on fire by the migrants, with the police responding with teargas in extreme weather conditions (almost 40 degrees Celcius) and with the government-controlled news agency *left.gr* describing it as *a minor incident in Moria*.

However, only lately have these techniques been recognized by some as part of a strategy to never let the situation in Greece become too comfortable, and, on the other hand, to never actually let migrants become too connected to local society and to people in solidarity, especially since there is the constant threat of struggles and protests. This is how we can explain the basic initiative of the Greek State .

## The victims who paid the price of the EU-Turkey deal most bitterly are the refugees on the Greek islands

For a long while they let Idomeni exist as an offhand mass settlement near the border with the Republic of Macedonia, where the conditions were difficult and highly unhygienic, yet allowed for a degree of self-management by the migrants and also became the site for their interaction with Greek and international solidarity. Later, when these interactions started producing trouble and it seemed that there would be neither an easy 'exit' of migrants from Greece allowed by the EU, nor any plan or will for 'integration', they were sent to smaller, more isolated, surveilled and controlled camps, (where

only official organizations, the army and the police had everyday access to the migrants), and very few (families etc) were sent to apartments for special humanitarian reasons, where they could become even more de-socialized on an everyday level.

### **The creation of the Balkan Route: A short chronicle**

As we mentioned above, for many years, the majority of migrants coming to Greece were transit. For them, the country was a stopover, a place where they could work to cover their onward journey. After the crisis this was no longer possible: There were no jobs anymore. As a consequence, the smuggling circuit changed. People who had no money to pay for smugglers anymore started walking up to Serbia on the centuries' old foot track along the Vardar river. From 2011 to 2014, around 200.000 people left Greece, mainly using the route that became known as the Balkan Route. This does not mean that Greece stopped being a State of smugglers. It means that it had to keep the smuggling business alive by recruiting many more low-level smugglers, that would deal with much smaller amounts of money but have much more intensive and everyday issues to deal with. It seems that former networks were not dissolved, but many loose new ones were created.

### **September 2014: the fact that Syrians are using the Balkan Route becomes known**

September 2014: In some media it was reported that around 100 migrants per day, mostly from Syria, had gathered in an open field close to Idomeni Police Station. Nobody paid much attention. Only volunteers and solidarity people from Kilgis tried to somehow help the migrants, who slept in the open fields close to the border of the Republic of Macedonia, waiting for the smugglers. During the winter the situation got really harsh, but almost nobody was interested: the attention was focused on the January 25 (2015) general elections. The SYRIZA party won the majority vote.

Part of the Syriza victory was also due to the fear that neo-nazis had gained too much power in parliament, and one of the main certainties was that Syriza was not a racist party. However, we can not say that the refugee issue was very high on the pre-election agenda of Syriza, since refugees were still quite invisible, or rather had sunken back to invisibility after 2009.

### **First half of 2015: The number of people using the Balkan Route increases steadily.**

In 2014, around 50.000 people came to Greece (and 70.000 left). During the first six months of 2015, 70.000 people crossed Greece. The reasons for this increase were: (a) the deterioration of the situation in Syria, (b) the big number of deadly shipwrecks in the central Mediterranean route (1.208 dead migrants just in April 2015) and (c) the fact that the Balkan Route became more known to people eager to reach central and northern European countries. As the summer approached, the number of migrants in the fields around Idomeni rose to hundreds. They waited in the fields for the signal from the smuggler that it is the right moment to cross the border. They remained invisible for the media.

### **The long summer of migration begins**

The weekend of July 4-5, 2015 was the weekend of the referendum called by the SYRIZA government. On that same weekend, around 1.000 migrants in Idomeni organized a protest, as the smugglers' signal did not come, and more and more people were stuck in the fields. The migrants blocked the tracks of the international Thessaloniki-Belgrade train route for almost two days, but the protest was kept invisible: nobody in the mass media reported or even mentioned the protest, no political party commented on it. The general idea was that these invisible people should exit the country just as they entered it: as invisibles. The situation, though, could hardly remain secret for too long. In the following weeks, 50.000 migrants arrived on Lesbos (75% of them Syrians). On July 13, the Hungar-



ian government announced the construction of a fence at the border with Croatia. On August 4, the Bulgarian government announced its will to complete the fence at the border with Turkey.

In Greece, everyday life and public discourse was dominated by the SYRIZA capitulation to the bankers' 'Troica' and by the capital controls imposed on bank transactions. As there was a withdrawal limit of 60 euros, huge queues appeared in front of bank ATMs. While at some point there proliferated a fascist rhetoric concerning the big numbers of migrants arriving in Greek islands, eventually the situation was dealt with as a much needed influx of cash: A taxi ride from Moria camp to Lesvos port now cost 10 euros, the boat ticket from Lesvos to the port of Pireaus cost 50 euros per person, then another taxi driver charged another sum, then a bus ticket from Athens to Idomeni (50 euros per person) was needed, while taxi drivers asked for 700 euros for a taxi ride from Athens to Idomeni. Stores on Greek islands that sold sleeping bags and tents run out of stock. A simple mobile phone charging could cost up to 5 euros, a small bottle of water (50 cents the most) was sold for 1 euro and more, sandwiches and rented rooms were preposterously overpriced etc. In other words: In the midst of financial suffocation, "hospitality to refugees" meant hot cash without a receipt.

### **The situation can no longer be suppressed**

The rate of migrants arriving on Greek islands was higher than the rate of migrants traveling to Athens and then to Idomeni. On August 19, 2015, the Greek government announced that the ferry boat "Eleftherios Venizelos" would be hired to carry migrants directly from the islands to the Thessaloniki port (migrants would still have to pay for their tickets). This meant that the Greek government was unofficially accepting that a large-scale transport of migrants through the Republic of Macedonia was underway. On August 20, the government of the Rep. of Macedonia responded by announcing that the border would be shut down, and declared a state of emergency. The

consequence: riot police clashed with migrants, lots of tear gas was used, the border was temporarily opened again. Around 3,000 migrants crossed daily. The situation was half-regulated by border police and smugglers on the two sides of the border, while volunteers and solidarity people tried their best to provide food and medical care.



Idomeni 2015 | Moving Europe

### **The State control of the Balkan Route**

On September 2, 2015, Alan Kurdi died. The image of the drowned child drew attention to the "refugee crisis". On the 5th of September, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that there were "no limits on the number of asylum seekers" Germany would take in. On September 8, 2015, clashes erupted at the Serbian/Hungarian border at Röszke.

NGOs and the UNHCR started working towards organizing the camp in Idomeni.

On September 14, 2015 and for 5 days in Edirne, Turkey, around 3,000 migrants (mostly Syrians but also Afghanis, Iraqis and others) gathered, following a call on a facebook page („Crossing no more“), to demand that the Turkish-Greek border be opened for them. On September 19, the police evicted the last group on the highway and brought them back to Edirne. Although there were many (official and unofficial) opinions expressed in the media against the fences constructed by

Hungary and Bulgaria (and Slovenia, later), rarely was it mentioned that the oldest such fence was the one constructed by Greece at the Greek/Turkish land border. A safe passage between Greece and Turkey was never considered part of the so-called humanitarian corridor. The same day the mobilization in Edirne started, at least 34 migrants, including

15 children, drowned when their overcrowded boat capsized in high winds off the Greek island of Farmakonisi.

Despite the Greek government's rhetoric about a refugee-friendly Greek state, from May 2015 to May 2016, 1,151 migrants lost their lives in the Aegean.

On October 15, 2015, the EU announced that a common plan with Turkey had to be reached, while Greece had to create hot-spots. The Balkan Route had to be shut down, they said. In order for this to happen gradually, the Balkan Route was temporarily transformed into a State-controlled "humanitarian corridor" through Croatia and Slovenia. The fade-out of the Balkan Route is still in effect, with people crossing, being arrested, returned, crossing again and living in a constant limbo between asylum acceptance and rejection, citizen status and non-status, "special housing" and the street, learning and unlearning basic words in our several variations of the *lingua franca* of colonial exploitation and privilege.

# REPORT ON THE FORMALIZED CORRIDOR OVER THE BALKANS



*The formalized corridor through the Balkans (2015/2016) radically changed the European Border Regime. We even would speak from a temporary collapse. The new report published by bordermonitoring.eu describes this process and is divided into six phases: The first phase focuses on the formalization process in the South of the corridor (in Macedonia and Serbia). This happened before the formalization in the North, which is described in the second phase. In the following, the geographical shift to Croatia (phase III) and to Slovenia (phase IV) is discussed. Phase V focuses on the narrowing of the corridor, which finally resulted in its closure (Phase VI).*

*Unfortunately, the full report is only available in German so far: <http://bordermonitoring.eu/analyse/2017/08/formalisierter-korridor> However, in the following you can read the English translation of the introduction and the conclusions.*

According to a widespread narrative it was Angela Merkel who decided to “open the borders” in the summer 2015. This dominant writing of history reached an even broader public on the occasion of the first anniversary of the march of hope, which started in the beginning of September 2015 from the Keleni train station in Budapest. Mostly reports conveyed the impression that there had been no migration at all through the Balkans towards Western Europe previously. In most articles the escalation at the Budapest train station and the following developments on the highest political levels were interpreted as the very starting point of the long summer of migration. It was rare to find any analysis on the more important questions on how people reached Budapest or why people suddenly met at the station. Furthermore, only very few academic as well as media publications described chronologically what happened exactly after the events in Budapest on the Balkans.

In other words: Which events have led to these radical transformations of migrant mobility across the Balkans during the years 2015 and 2016? What impact's did these historic fractures have? What were their reasons? These are the key questions of the following report. Therefore this text follows the premise that migratory practices and state efforts to exercise control are reciprocally influential, leading to the establishment of a formalized corridor.

Why does this report use the term formalized corridor instead of humanitarian corridor or simply Balkan route? Firstly, it emphasizes on and defines a specific time period, in opposition to the Balkan route. The latter is characterized by a much longer history of migrant mobility, which has often been clandestine and is

currently (2017) once again clandestine. The so called formalized corridor, on the contrary, temporarily used to formalize irregular migration and even led to an almost regular perception and status of migration. This not only increased the quantity of migration across the Balkans but it also its visibility. The formalization process took place only partly because of humanitarian considerations of the involved states, which is why the concept of humanitarian corridor is inadequate as well. The report shows that the involved states rather perceived the formalization and acceleration of transit through their territory as the more rational “solution” than the physical defense of their borders. [...]

The march of hope from Idomeni in spring 2016 as well as the march of hope from Budapest half a year earlier impressively demonstrate that the formalized corridor was always contested – precisely because of their absolutely opposite outcomes. The formalized corridor was constituted at the intersection of autonomous migrant mobility, migratory modes of protest, and responses from state efforts to exercise control. At the intergovernmental level the history of the formalized corridor is streaked with national solo actions, highly fragile temporary alliances, and open affronts. Interestingly this was relatively independent of existing EU memberships – which certainly says a lot about the current state of the EU.

For example, Croatia, as an EU but not a Schengen member, simply sent migrants past the newly built fence of Hungary into Hungary, which is part of the Schengen agreement. This in turn occurred after Hungary closed its borders to the EU candidate country Serbia and urged it to act. The Serbian government

immediately forwarded people towards the Croatian border. One might call this “logistical creativity” with regard to irregular migration to Europe, with seemed unthinkable until then. It was also shown that Croatia and Slovenia, both suddenly part of the formalized corridor, began to seek their salvation in the conflict with the “sending” neighboring states, with the (unsuccessful) attempts to close the borders and the general suppression of refugee mobility. However, it did not take long until they actually practiced the complete opposite and no longer tried to prevent the mobility – as Macedonia/FYROM and Serbia did only a few months earlier – but even professionalized and accelerated the transit. Formalization, not demarcation became the dominant strategy. Only shortly afterwards this even led to a transnational cooperation for the organization of cross-border mobility – such as establishing special trains from Serbia to Croatia or from Croatia to Slovenia – which also appeared unthinkable until then.

This was accompanied by the rapid development and expansion of the necessary infrastructure, which was similar to the one already set up in Macedonia/FYROM and Serbia a few months earlier. Apart from the acquisition of biometric data and the issuance of temporarily valid transit documents, this infrastructure was used primarily to enable the transit of hundreds of thousands to be implemented as quickly and as “smoothly” as possible. Previously informal migration was now perceived primarily as a logistical challenge. While the formalized corridor existed though it was a necessary condition for every involved state to have viable options for the immediate onward transportation.

For exactly this reason, the so called “strategy of chain reaction” – applied in the course of the closure of the formalized corridor – could be successful. In its practical implementation, this was certainly based to a very limited extent on negotiations and compromises, but rather on mere notification from the respective neighboring country. This was possible because no state wanted to be the one in which refugees or certain groups of refugees would be trapped

long-term. The closure of the formalized corridor was then carried out by Austria, which, together with Slovenia, withdrew from the coalition with Merkel and the Commission and adopted the idea of the Visegrád states to seal the Greek-Macedonian/FYROM frontier. However, since the previous months had shown that an abrupt interruption of the “flow” across the Balkans would promptly lead to massive protests and thus to dramatic images – which would have been circulated through media in no time – the closure was implemented bit by bit using very arbitrary criteria. And still, the situation of the Idomeni camp during the months after the total closure of the formalized corridor dominated the headlines. However an abrupt closure giving no hope at all to migrants to maybe be among the “chosen” ones would in all likelihood have produced far more dramatic images.

The “EU-Turkey Deal” contributed significantly to the fact that the closure of the route was finally possible. Above all the “deterrent effect” and less the actual number of deportations to Turkey led to a considerable reduction in the quantity of irregular migration across the Aegean

Sea. The formalized corridor was at no time independent of its wider context: on the one hand, it was dependent on the number of migrants who reached Greece, on the other hand, on the admission readiness of its northern end. As the latter will hardly be a given in a greater extent again in the near future, it cannot be assumed that the formalization of the Balkan route will be renewed. However, this does not mean that the Balkan route is currently “closed”, as is currently being misrepresented in most media. What is closed is only the formalized corridor. It is true that migratory movements across the Balkans have been reduced significantly but they are still taking place – again in the form of informality and again where they had already taken place decades before the establishment of the formalized corridor. To this extent the closure of the formalized corridor which can be understood as the restoration of the border-pervaded “normality” was hardly surprising. Thus the uniqueness reached by the formalized corridor was less about the process of its closure, but rather about its special way of constitution and its unexpectedly long existence.



Hungarian Border | [bordermonitoring.eu](http://bordermonitoring.eu)



## OPENING THE BORDERS SUFFERING AND DETERMINATION IN THE SUMMER OF MIGRATIONS

Gevgelija 23.08.2015

*„They drag themselves along serpentine roads across the Balkan mountains, they hope for a new life in Western Europe: On the road with refugee families.*

*Refugees from Africa and from crisis regions in the Middle East try to come to Europe in many different ways. One route goes through the mountains of Greece, Macedonia and Serbia for 250 kilometres – a forced and difficult march. Walking for days is exhausting, and simultaneously full of dangers and disappointments.*

*Many refugees fail, but nevertheless an increasing number of people opt for this route, according to the EU border management agency Frontex. The agency registered 43.000 people on this route in 2014 – twice as many as the year before. In the first two months of 2015 alone, 22.000 refugees came to Hungary through this way.“ (spiegel.de)*

Such was the situation for refugees in the Balkans early in 2015. In June, already 100 to 200 young men a day walked through the Greek border village Idomeni and tried to cross the border to Macedonia.

*But here you need smugglers again“, a refugee explained, „in order to get from Greece to Macedonia – without smugglers you have no chance“.*

*„We try to cross the border every night, but the police catch us. The police*

*arrested me and said: Go! Go away from here!“, said Imal, a young man from Afghanistan. Nevertheless, he wants to continue trying to cross the border to Macedonia undetected.*

*The small forest behind the village extends across the border into neighbouring Macedonia. In this forest, refugees endure until darkness; then want to go across the border.*

*„The nights are freezing cold. We do not have blankets, we have so many problems“, says Moez, a refugee from Afghanistan. The border police fired warning shots and forced the migrants back across the border.“ (DLF)*

In Macedonia the route continued along the train tracks by foot – or alternatively with bicycles or taxis – on the way to the border to Serbia. Several lethal accidents occurred on these paths.

The cat-and-mouse game at the Greek-Macedonian border and the presence of smugglers trying to profit from the vulnerability of migrants ended thanks to the law of large numbers on June 18, 2015. Echoing to a similar decision in Serbia, the government authorized the issuance of temporary residence permits for transit through Macedonia. Meanwhile, the number of migrants crossing into Macedonia increased to two thousand per day in July. The border police was literally pushed to the side, and for a few days thousands populated the Macedonian roads and railways.

*The few Macedonian police officers abandoned any attempt to control the arriving masses, or to at least channel them into ordered procedures“, according to a Serbian newspaper. „In principle, every refugee is required to register. Subsequently, migrants receive a transit permit valid for 72 hours. But just as in the ‚reception centre‘ in Presevo in Southern*

*Serbia, most asylum seekers do not wait for this on their way to Western Europe, specifically to Germany, and continue the journey without papers.“ (Süddeutsche.de)*

The support for migrants was primarily covered by volunteers, who organized themselves via Facebook and distributed lunch packets in Gevgelija as well as at the border station of Tabanovce at departure times to Serbia. Three trains per day with a capacity of 450 places each were provided. Until mid-August, a sort of coordination between migrants, the Macedonian border police and the supporting volunteers developed at the border between Idomeni and Gevgelija, and the headlines moved elsewhere.

Macedonia is a small poor and politically unstable country, constantly patronized by neighbouring Greece and Serbia, with two million inhabitants and 30% unemployment. The state's foreign policy moved between opportunism and fear. Considering these points, it can be understood that Macedonia is even less than Bulgaria a country where migrants could or would want to stay for a longer period of time. These factors need to be taken into consideration when reflecting upon the events of August 20, which were probably prompted by rushed measures of obedience on the part of the right-wing nationalist government and the fear of bottlenecks in the run-up to Hungary's border closures. Moreover, in July alone, 50.000 migrants had arrived on the Greek islands, and their passage through Macedonia was to be expected within days.

On that 20th of August, the Macedonian government announced a state of emergency and declared that the „increased pressure“ on the southern border made the measures of closing the border

\* This text is a collection of passages from <https://moving-europe.org/analysis/history>. Please open this page to find notes. Also the text draws from Kasperek / Speer, Of Hope, <http://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope-en>, and the recently published report, <http://bordermonitoring.eu/analyse/2017/08/formalisierte-korridor>

necessary. This was the first, and the last but one attempts to stop this movement of migration abruptly. A state of emergency had been declared in order to be able to deploy additional troops.

*Since yesterday's border closure by Macedonia, thousands of refugees have accumulated in the no-man's-land between Greece and Macedonia. This morning, the Macedonian police shot at them with teargas. According to the Standard, „the situation escalated in Gevgelija in the night to Friday, and a special police officer was stabbed by a migrant. Further details of this case were not known immediately. On Friday morning, the news agency AP published photos showing stones flying in the direction of the police and injured refugees being treated on the other side“. (repubblica.it)*

The border closure could not be maintained for more than three days. The pressure on the barriers was too large, and the use of firearms would have had unpredictable and negative political consequences. The government's plan to regain control of the border in a kind of open field battle failed miserably. Instead, August 23 marks one of the major breakthroughs on the Balkan route. *The Guardian* describes the scene of the breakthrough:

***“Migrants overwhelm security forces at Macedonia border***

*Riot police remain but fail to slow passage of migrants crossing from Greece on way through Balkans to western Europe:*

*Hundreds of migrants have crossed unhindered from Greece into Macedonia after overwhelmed security forces appeared to abandon a bid to stem their flow through the Balkans to western Europe following days of chaos and confrontation.*

*Riot police remained, but did little to slow the passage of a steady flow of migrants on Sunday, many of them refugees from the Syrian war and other conflicts in the Middle East, a Reuters reporter at the scene said.*

*Macedonia declared a state of emergency on Thursday and sealed its southern frontier to migrants arriving at a rate of 2,000 a day en route to Serbia then Hungary and the EU's borderless Schen-*



Gevgelija 2015 | [bordermonitoring.eu](http://bordermonitoring.eu)



Tabanovje 2015 | [bordermonitoring.eu](http://bordermonitoring.eu)



Tabanovce 2015 | [bordermonitoring.eu](http://bordermonitoring.eu)



gen zone. This led to desperate scenes at the border, as adults and children slept under open skies with little access to food or water.

*Saying they would ration access, riot police used teargas and stun grenades to drive back crowds, but they were overwhelmed on Saturday by several thousand people who tore through police lines or ran through nearby fields.*

*The state eventually laid on extra trains, and buses arrived from across the country to take the migrants swiftly north to Serbia on the next step of their journey.“*

The breakthrough was possible because of the firm determination of the migrants, but the fact that the Macedonian border police could not beat up families for days under the scrutiny of the world press also played a role. Greece, itself interested in exporting socially explosive issues, contributed by organizing buses transporting people to the border to their unloved neighbor every day. Another factor that induced the Macedonian government to reopen the border was the comparatively tolerant policy of the Serbian government.

## The Macedonian attack on the right to move on August 20 was stopped and OVERCOME

Henceforth, the Macedonian government had to choose: Either follow the example of Hungary and construct a massive fence, or tolerate the transit through its territory and perhaps even helping to make it smoother. The latter option was chosen, and this option became to a certain extent a trendsetter for a number of other countries along the Balkanroute. The 8 weeks from August 23 until November 20 were weeks of an accelerated routine in and through Gevgelija. Every day, thousands were channeled into the

transit camps, crammed into the trains and passed on to Serbia.

The Macedonian attack on the right to move on August 20 was stopped and overcome. Perhaps feelings of revenge on side of the Macedonian border security was one factor, that made the country willing to implement EU political interests for the second time, by selecting migrants based on national affiliation from November 20 onwards, producing new misery, but also resistance?

### March of Hope 04.09.2015

*Keleti train station in Budapest, in the night from Friday 4th September to Saturday 5th September. A few minutes after midnight, public transport buses arrive sent by the Hungarian government, to bring the refugees who have been camping at the train station for about a week to the Hungarian-Austrian border. Still suspicious that this might be another devious trick of the government, many refugees hesitated for a while and observed the situation. Eventually, they started boarding the buses to begin the next journey, towards the next border. After days of endurance they were finally on the road again. After days of boiling heat, a light rain suddenly started to fall, as if the weather also wanted to put an end to this week of struggles.*

*In the course of the night and during the following day, more than 10.000 refugees crossed the Austrian border. Austria and Germany had agreed on allowing their entry, and many more people followed. (Spiegel.de)*

Hungary was the first Schengen country that migrants on the West Balkan Route would reach, after Greece's de facto withdrawal from the Dublin system in 2011. Formally responsible for the implementation of the asylum procedures, until August Orbán's government tried to limit the number of migrants with deterrence strategies. Migrants were systematically apprehended by the police after crossing the border, and then detained in registration camps in inhuman conditions. This policy of deterrence might still have been a realistic strategy in June with a few hundred migrants entering the country per day, but when the num-

bers increased to more than 1000 per day in July and more than 3000 per day in August, there was simply no more space in the camps. Similar to the longstanding practice in Italy, migrants were released after a few days and could continue their way to Budapest.

The two major train stations in Budapest, Keleti and Nyugati, became increasingly important hubs of the migration movement – a market for the onward journey by car or truck to Austria and further on to Passau. The drivers, who organized the transport of migrants between Budapest and Passau – for affordable prices (around 200€ per person), but with high risks – were prosecuted in the hundreds for alleged smuggling and were detained in Austrian and German prisons. Concomitantly, the use of trains was systematically denied to migrants: every day they were targeted by the Hungarian police's racial profiling and taken out of the trains.

On August 27, the Austrian police discovered a refrigerator truck with 71 dead persons inside. They had suffocated in the back of the truck, on a parking lot near Vienna. The politicians and media people who appeared to show the most outrage about the tragedy were those who welcomed this opportunity to close the route altogether. But there was also real outrage from Hungarian activists, who criticized the racial profiling on the trains and demanded to „Let them board the trains!“ Even UN Secretary Ban Ki Moon demanded „safe entry routes for refugees“, and he added a topic on the summit to the agenda of the UN General Assembly. In the days that followed, large-scale traffic controls were implemented on the highways from Hungary leading to Austria and Germany, causing traffic jams of up to 50km in length.

These extensive controls effectively closed down the activities of the drivers. Meanwhile, the large group of refugees and migrants, who had achieved the breakthrough at the Greek-Macedonian border on 23 August, had reached Budapest. A ‚transit zone‘ was made up outside Keleti train station, with no infrastructure and a lack of any chance of onward travel. While the police continued to prevent migrants from boarding



the trains to Austria and Germany, the situation became increasingly critical. Migrants formed groups on the station square, lifted their children on their shoulders, clapped their hands rhythmically and demanded permission for the continuation of their journey with signs and chants. Some observers pointed towards the familiarity of the scenes with the beginnings of the Syrian uprising:

*Have we all overlooked it? The images and films of the Syrian refugees at Keleti train station always seemed so familiar. How they were standing there, how they were demonstrating and holding together, the rhythmic clapping, making a wave arm in arm, the self-made signs and drawings, how the flag is carried ... These are scenes we also saw at the beginning of the Syrian uprising in Damascus, in Daraa, in Homs or also in Kobane. They were signs of democracy, of dignity and of the will to freedom of Syrians, who rebelled against the violence of the regime. But then, the militarization of the revolution commenced, the civil protest disappeared and was crushed between barrel bombs and house-to-house fighting. The images and signs from Budapest prove though, that everything continues to exist, and what is not possible anymore in the country itself is transported and supported by those who see no other possibility except to leave and come to Europe. The Syrian flight has exported the signs of their great rebellion: Freedom and dignity! Be it in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Budapest or Bicske, the Syrian revolution might have been defeated in the country where it started, but it is not dead. It continues somewhere else – and can thus also return ... (Martin Glasenapp, Arabellion in Hungary)*

Today, there is some information about the diplomatic negotiations between Germany, Austria and Hungary during those hot days. The public opinion in Germany was one of the main issues for Angela Merkel. Germany and Austria had an interest in de-escalating the situation in Keleti. The pictures from the Greek-Macedonian border and the dead in the refrigerator truck had already attracted too much attention worldwide. On the other hand, despite the desire to reduce tensions, there was also a politi-

## The PUBLIC OPINION in Germany was one of the main issues for Angela Merkel

cal incentive to let Orbán fail and not give in to his right-wing obstinance. Distinctly from this, on August 25 there was a statement from the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), saying that Germany would suspend returns of Syrian refugees until further notice, which was disclosed. Later, the message turned out to be no more than a controversial internal guideline. But social movements organize themselves in the gravitational fields of hope and aspirations, and people in desperate situations hold on to anything that could save them. The message from the BAMF quickly spread among the migrants and Germany became destination country number one in Europe. On August 31 another rumor spread in front of Keleti station, and it turned to be realistic:

*The rumor was that Germany would pick up the refugees stranded in Hungary with a special train, while the Hungarian police was withdrawing completely from the station. A run on the trains (#train-of-hope) began, and in the course of the day several thousand refugees were able to leave Hungary and arrived in Vienna and Munich a few hours later. (Kasperek, Speer)*

Once these kinds of rumors spread and are visibly confirmed by the circumstances, there is no turning back without the use of violence. Nevertheless, the access to the trains at Keleti was forbidden to migrants again the next day, although at least 3000 migrants were still staying at the station, and every day more people arriving.

Thursday September 3 then saw the climax of the fight for the Right to Move in the year 2015. For a few days, the European project of the exclusion of social conflicts, the balance of social degrada-

tions, the management of refugees and even the project of political rationality itself, was profoundly questioned and compromised; just as deeply as it had happened during the Yugoslav war.

The tense waiting of those stuck in and around Keleti lasted until that Thursday, September 3:

*On this day, all international train connections were suspended, while the refugees were told that they could take regional trains to the Austrian borders. However, the first train with around 600 refugees was stopped and surrounded by police around 35 km outside of Budapest in a town called Bicske. The place in question was the location of one of the Hungarian refugee camps, to which the police wanted to transport the people in the trains. The people refused to exit the trains at the discovery of the deception and endured on-board the trains for around 30 hours. At the same time, news of the trick spread, and consequently no more refugees boarded the trains.*

*Friday, September 4, marks the current climax of the struggle for freedom of movement. As already announced the day before, several thousands of refugees started walking on foot in the early afternoon, the beginning of the 170km march to the Hungarian-Austrian border. Their declared aim: Austria and Germany. Also in Bicske, around 300 of the refugees who had been stopped on the previous day started marching on foot and walked westwards along the train tracks. In the morning already, another 300 of the refugees contained in Röszke near the Hungarian-Serbian border had overcome the fence around the camp. They were later intercepted by the police. The refugees remaining at Keleti train station were attacked by Hungarian hooligans in the afternoon, but were able to defend themselves against the attack. (Kasperek, Speer)*

The March towards the West advanced relatively quickly, and soon reached a two-lane highway. The news about the departure of so many spread over the media almost in real time under the hashtag #marchofhope. The images of the march will enter the iconography of this long Summer of Migration; a long line of people reclaiming their own mo-

bility after a long week of endurance, leaving Budapest in a collective and spontaneously coordinated action.

Under the powerful impression of these pictures, as well as with the knowledge of the existing risk of a repressive strategy, Merkel and Faymann indeed declared that they would open the borders and receive the refugees. Within hours, the Hungarian government organized the bus transport to the Nickelsdorf border crossing. On Saturday night already 4000 migrants had been transported to the border with Hungarian buses, and the first had already boarded the trains to Germany. During this one weekend, at least ten thousand refugees arrived in Germany. In Munich, they were welcomed with applause, lunch packets and toys for the children.

That the *March of Hope* on September 4 would become the second great breakthrough – after the events at the Greek-Macedonian border two weeks before on August 23rd – might have been foreseen from the determination on the faces of the marching people from the very beginning. However, other dangers lingered as long as the fight against the Hungarian camps had not been concluded. Orbán had just returned from the summit of EU leaders in Brussels, and he wanted to prove his reputation as a man of hardness. The fence was almost finished. The risk, that Hungary would close the borders and detain the migrants who remained in the country, was real. The conditions in the reception camp in Röszke, the first station post in Hungary behind the Serbian border, functioned as a warning sign during the events of 3rd and 4th September. Keno Versek visited Röszke precisely in those days. He reported the following:

*There is a three-meter-high fence, crowned with NATO barbed wire. Behind it stand armed guards and riot police in combat gear. This is the first ring. Cars and buses park here, and barracks and sanitary tents have also been erected. 30 meters behind the first ring follows a second one, another fence without barbed wire, which surrounds the camp where refugees are accommodated in tents.*

*New people continue arriving in front of the camp, they have no option but to*

*sit in cramped conditions on the sand ground, guarded by a cordon of riot police with surgical masks and rubber gloves. A German shepherd barks at the people crouching on the floor. The new preliminary reception camp in Röszke at the Serbo-Hungarian border evokes a welcome culture reminiscent of Guantanamo. Neither aid workers nor journalists have access to the camp. (Spiegel.de)*

Breaking out of the camps was the required counterpart of the March of Hope. There was no doubt about the intention of Orbán's government to confine migrants in camps in the long run.

In comparison to these historical events described above, the passage from Serbia across the border to Hungary during the following ten days, until the closure of the last gap at the Röszke train tracks, was relatively unspectacular. Merkel's and Faymann's announcements that the borders to Austria and Germany would remain open without a number cap removed a lot of pressure. None of the countries concerned – from Macedonia over Serbia up to Hungary, and later also Croatia and Slovenia – had to worry about thousands of migrants stranding on their territory. The camp in Röszke did not turn into a concentration camp, but instead it remained a 'normal' transit camp for 10 more days, with insufficiencies and chaotic scenes similar to those in Gevgelija or Presevo.

#### **Röszke 15.09.2015**

The Hungarian government under Orbán had already announced in July that it would build a fence to stop people marching through the West Balkan Route, a technique previously implemented in Bulgaria. Thousands of soldiers and prisoners were mobilized for constructing the fence, and the crossing or damaging of the border installations were to be punished with prison charges. Nevertheless, the situation remained relatively calm until Monday, 14th September, the day of the border closure in Röszke. The border closure itself, although it had been anticipated and although it seemed rather unspectacular when a freight car with barbed wire was placed in the last remaining gap of the fence on September

14, it nevertheless triggered a chain of events which did not predict a happy ending. The Hungarian government declared a state of emergency due to large-scale migration and the crisis at the borders, for which the legal basis had been created a few days prior to the border closure. The camps were emptied and the (supposedly) last migrants put into special trains and dropped off in front of the Austrian border.

In combination with the actions of Orbán's government, the German interior minister had signaled for another sequence of hectic reactions. On the day of Hungary's border closure, controls began to be implemented at Bavaria's border to Austria and the train connections were suspended with reference to the Oktoberfest in Munich. The German interior minister insinuated that the reintroduced border controls could become permanent. However, it is important to emphasize that the Merkel strategy stood firm against internal forces of opposition, and the borders of Germany were not closed, nor did a complete border closure occur in the ensuing months.

The confrontations in Röszke on September 15, the day after the Hungarian border closure, were brief but intense. Hungarian units shot water cannons and teargas at refugees who were trying to tear down the fence. The following report by activists from Halle (Saale) is cited extensively, because it impressively illustrates the ambivalences of the events, fluctuating between militancy and despair:

*The border is barred with a kind of palisade (fence and razor wire). Hungarian military officers are guarding their side of the crossing 24/7. Again and again, there are loud protests by refugees. But above all, there are many exhausted travelers: Thousands of people are sitting in the dark. Some with a tent, some with a sleeping bag, a blanket or a roll mat, many without anything. The only sleeping place is the cold floor. It is a shock for all of us – we did not expect this situation.*

*We had distributed all our material donations on the same evening within a short time frame. It only served for a fraction of the people present.*



*This is the beginning of a sequence of dramatic days and nights, which will appear like weeks in hindsight.*

*The next morning: The impressions from the previous evening are even worse in the daylight. This is a humanitarian catastrophe. Many people have been fleeing for weeks and are completely exhausted, among them are many elderly and sick people, as well as small children. The hygienic conditions are unbearable and most of the people we see have neither water nor nutrition, which is life threatening with a temperature of 35°C ....*

*The situation escalated in the afternoon. The special units of the Hungarian police, who are completely masked and who appeared next to the border guards in the morning, provoke confrontations with the refugees at the border. A water cannon shoots into the crowd – not only with water, but also with CS-gas ...*

Marc Speer, with information from an article in *Budapest Beakon*, describes the event als follows:

*A street which runs some hundred meters parallel to the railway had been closed by means of an improvises wooden gate and a metal grid. Some crowd gathered in front of this blockade, and a few things were thrown in direction of the police, and a few people stepped against the gate. The police reacted directly and used truncheons, tear gas and a water cannon. It was after this that solid stones and other gadgets were thrown in direction of the police. But soon the situation cooled down, mainly because the police withdrew behind a fence of wire netting which run alongside the street on both sides. The gate had been opened for a moment. This situation made the refugees think that the Hungarian police would now let them pass. However. The opposite happened.*

*The crowd was totally peaceful now, and there ware shouts “Thank you Hungary” to be heard. Families were asked to walk in the first row by other refugees, and the crowd stepped into the corridor. When they reached the police line, the special police TEK suddenly attacked, and many people were arrested. There was massive use of tear gas. Many refugees managed to run back to Serbian territory.*



Röscke, Horgos 2015 | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig



Röscke, Horgos 2015 | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig



Röscke, Horgos 2015 | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig



These confrontations in Röszke on September 15 sent a strong signal of determination, and a lasting warning to the security forces, even though the special units were eventually able to hold their positions. The clashes only lasted from noon until the evening – not only due to the presence of Hungarian special units and the draconian punishments threatened in cases of damage to the border infrastructure, but also because of the numerous gaps in the fence in other sites away from clashes.

While the last refugees crawled through under the fence between Serbia and Hungary, while children and babies were lifted across the fence, and while others were trying their luck at the border post itself, Serbia deployed buses to transport people away from the site and towards the border with Croatia. In this way, Serbia refused to become complicit with Hungary's isolationist policy. The refugees arriving from Presevo were rerouted to Šid – but without consideration for the limited capacities of neighboring Croatia.

The minefields remaining from the Yugoslav war had not been removed in Croatia. Serbia and Croatia had maintained a hostile attitude towards each other for years, implying that their removal had not been deemed necessary. Nonetheless, the Croatian government initially responded positively and showed its willingness to dissociate itself from the Hungarian cruelty. The prime minister Zoran Milanovic signaled to allow some refugees to pass.

However, instead of a few hundred that he was willing to accept, the next day there were 8.000 refugees near Tovarnik. The Serbian bus connections no longer led from Presevo to Belgrade and Subotica, but a direct bus connection was installed from Presevo across the country to Šid. From Šid, the route continued for 10 km on foot until the Croatian border site Tovarnik. A group of several hundred migrants broke through the Croatian barriers and pushed to the train station of Tovarnik, where the people initially had no option but to camp outside.

*A colleague, who was present in Tovarnik, a Croatian village near the*

*Croatian-Serbian border, described the situation as a humanitarian disaster. According to her estimates, at least 2.000 refugees were staying at the train station, and just as many in the village itself. However, the Croatian police blocked the access to the village, meaning that the refugees, including many children and elderly people, were forced to endure at the train station for days.*

When drawing interim conclusions about these days between September 14 and 17, it is important to record not only the misery described here, but also that the concerted actions coordinated between Serbia and Croatia prevented that the migrants got lost in the minefields. These days were hectic not only on the streets beyond Šid, but also on a diplomatic level. Zagreb protested against Belgrade and Budapest, and the Pope called for mercy.

However, after three days full of anxiousness, Zagreb adjusted to the new situation – in an unpredictable way: on Friday 18 September and in the following night, thousands of migrants were brought to different unsecured parts of the border in trains and buses and escorted to the Hungarian border. In the ensuing four weeks, a sort of state-organized assistance developed: Around one hundred special trains and multiple buses were deployed. This put the Orbán-government back into a defensive position four days after Röszke, and they had no choice but to resort to the same tactics as the Croatian government. Henceforth, without any further registration, three or four special trains per day transported the migrants to the Austrian border to the Hegyeshalom-Nickelsdorf border crossing.

The events in Röszke led to a generalized opinion among security forces, which spread across these mutually hostile countries: the movement of migrants could not be halted, unless at a very high and internationally despised price – but it could be possible to develop a disciplinary regime to control and steer the 'flow'. Military units were deployed, armored tanks arrived to intimidate the migrants, rituals of submission were performed: building barricades, forcing refugees to sit on the floor, letting

them starve, lining them up in rows of two, cattle-driving Yalla Yalla cries and many similar scenarios.

So, in the weeks that were to come after Röszke, the question was whether the refugees would be able to keep up their strength and determination, or whether they might be forced to accept regulations and humiliations.

### **The „Humanitarian Corridor“ and Brežice 21.10.2015**

Four days after the closure of the border in Röszke, the Hungarian government found itself on the defensive again. From Friday the 19th of September, thousands of refugees and migrants were transported in trains or buses from Tovarnik or Opatovac towards the non-secured sections of the Hungarian border. In the following four weeks – against all rules and regulations and bashfully concealed by Orbán – a migratory route opened across the green border. During these four weeks, three to four Hungarian special trains transported the refugees and migrants without further registration to the Austrian border in Hegyeshalom, at the crossing to Nickelsdorf. At the same time, the Hungarian government began to hastily construct another fence at the sensitive sections of the Croatian-Hungarian border. In the end, just as during the previous month in Röszke, 4.000 refugees per day squeezed through the remaining small hole.

More than 200.000 people were brought to Hungary between the closure of the Röszke border and the closure of the last hole in the fence. The UNHCR infographic demonstrates that the vast majority of migrants passed via Serbia and Croatia through the green border to Hungary, while the passages through Slovenia remained in the low double-digits until 17th October 2015.

The state authorities – police and soldiers in riot gear – who were not able to stop the people on the move, alternatively made use of their martial threat potential to at least make them line up in rows of two. The breakthrough in Gevgelija on 22 August, the March of Hope on 4 September, the militancy in Röszke and the breakthrough in Tovarnik on the fol-

lowing day were not the only important features marking the strength of this movement and the creation of the temporary possibility of quasi free passage. The successive numbers of migrants, who came to Greece via the Aegean – more than 7.000 per day in October and in November more than 6000 – simultaneously carried particular significance.

In the meantime, Greece had established a regular ferry connection from Lesbos and the other arrival islands in the Aegean to the port of Piraeus, and was deploying buses for the quick onward transport of the migrants from Piraeus to Idomeni. In Gevgelija, on the other side of the Greek-Macedonian border, around four or five trains per day were going across Macedonia to the Serbian border. The journey took three hours for 180km and was then followed by another 8km across the border to Presevo. There, chains of buses were accumulating for the northward transport to Šid. Once there, another 2km by foot through mud and corn fields awaited the people in order to cross the border to Croatia. In Croatia, they were received by Croatian police and escorted to the buses to Opatovac.

The ensuing scenes, which took place between Croatia and Hungary during foggy nights, are unprecedented. The Croatian police did their best to keep observers distant. But the following report describes one of these incomparable crossings – processes which make activists rub their eyes in surprise:

Botovo / Croatia – 26.09.2015

The power of  
the refugee  
movement: When  
GOVERNMENTS  
are forced  
to become  
SMUGGLERS

*It was a surreal situation and probably nothing could express more the power of the ongoing refugee movement and the fear of governments of these struggles: more than 1600 refugees were transported last Saturday night at 10 p.m. to the little train station of Botovo. It lies outside the small village of Croatia and is very close to the Hungarian border. A lot of policemen, volunteer fire fighters, red cross personnel and about 150 activists from the open border caravan were expecting them. Hundreds of young people mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, but also many families with hundreds of children, very old people, even handicapped persons with wheelchairs left the extra train, which was ordered by the Croatian government. Most of the refugees were held in a Croatian camp before, in Opatovac near the Serbian border, after having arrived by boat on the Greek islands and having gone through northern Greece, Macedonia and Serbia. Now they were facing a very strange border crossing. First they met local supporters and activists from the open border caravan and they were offered drinks, food and clothes (and information such as the w2eu-visitor cards) on the street, which looked like a night bazar. Then, escorted by the Croatian police, these 1650 refugees were led through a small dark forest to the green border of Hungary. Barbed wire was everywhere at the borderline, but the armed hungarian soldiers opened a small path through this fence and the refugees were asked to cross it with not more than two persons beside each other. Finally the hungarian soldiers escorted them through a field to another train, which was waiting nearby with 20 wagons. From a small group of hungarian supporters the refugees received some more food through the windows.*

*It all needed some hours time, before the train started in the direction of Hegyeshalom near the austrian border. But the whole procedure obviously happened with a certain routine as it might have been the 19th time to organize such an „illegal bordercrossing“ in this way during last days. About 30.000 refugees took this channel and probably more trains will follow.*

Once the fence on the Hungarian side was almost finished, one of the topical questions was how long the path across Hungary would remain open. The last hole in the fence along the Hungarian-Croatian border was already closed in the night to Saturday 17th October. Slovenia had successfully kept the route of migratory movements away from its territory in the days after the border closure in Röszke. In Harmica, the border crossing with Croatia, the Slovenian police used tear gas, also against women and children when migrants and activists demonstrated for the Right to Move collectively. Moreover, a train with migrants and refugees on board was stopped shortly after the border.

Before Slovenia became the new transit country four weeks later, the notorious stages of defense, chaos and eventual adjustment were repeated once again in this country. Whenever the Balkan route moved to a new state, governments initially reacted with panic. And it always took a few days until they realized that the solution of the ‚problem‘ could not be the iron fist of the state, but the efficient organization of transit. The situation that had caused intolerable conditions in Croatia after September 14 repeated itself in the days following October 19 in Slovenia. The first step was the declaration of an emergency situation, in order to be able to deploy military units at the border.

Slovenia limited the number of permitted transits per day to 2.500 – which had the consequence of provoking an accumulation of people in Croatia and Serbia. The train connections between Croatia and Slovenia were suspended for one day. At the same time, as rain continuously poured down and the winter cold started, thousands of people got literally stuck in the mud, whilst 5.000 new people coming from Macedonia arrived every day.

One of the overcrowded camps was in Brežice – a hastily constructed camp, set up behind a police station in the village of Dobova close to the Serbian border. It was made up of tents standing outside in the cold on the hard floor of a parking lot.

*The refugees are squeezed behind the police barriers and the iron fences around the terrain of a large empty building in the Southern Slovenian municipality Brežice. An energetic and hands-on young woman studying in Vienna, is passing bread through the fences. Many hands stretch through the grids, everybody wants to have their share.*

*It is an unnerving scene, reminiscent of hard times in the last century. Dignity is not preserved. If they had not brought 1500 sandwiches donated by the Islamic community in Vienna, even more people would have remained hungry.*

*Unrest is spreading among those waiting. „Germany, Germany“, they chant. They do not want to wait any longer, the onward transport to Germany is too slow. Special police units take position, several dozen police officers equipped with shields move towards the barriers, which further increases the volume of the chants. In addition, three vehicles of the Slovenian army are parked in front of the camp, armored transporters whose big wheels leave deep marks on the soft grass. Now and then helicopters circle above the area. (taz.de)*

Was it the burning tents of Brežice, set on fire in the night of October 21 by people who were blocked, and the protests against the repeated delays at all borders, which opened the path on towards Germany and Northern Europe? Or was it the knowledge of the continuous flow of migrants? Minister Schäuble spoke of an ‚avalanche‘ where one does not know whether one is currently in its first quarter or in its middle. The description by the Zeit is paradigmatic, and the article is about migrants who feel ‚treated like cattle‘:

*Burning tents, freezing children sleeping outside – and more and more people keep arriving. The control system is collapsing at the Slovenian-Croatian border.*

*The smell of burnt fabric hovers above the fenced tent town. A police helicopter is constantly circulating around the reception camp in Brežice. A camera drone flies above the remaining sticks of the burnt tents.*

The migrants who had struggled through the rain in Bapska and who

had burnt the tents in Brežice, were the ones who arrived in Spielfeld / Austria a few days later and did not accept being stopped once more by the Austrian authorities. They just went through the controls and no one dared to stop them.

After the Slovenian blockades were overcome, the route became passable again – but soon it was limited to persons from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan only. Heated tents and provisions, charging stations for mobile phones and free Wifi were meanwhile provided at almost all places the refugees and migrants had to pass. Trains in Gevgelija were available for 25€ per person, the buses waited in queues in Presevo to bring the migrants to Sid for 35€, then the trains continued free of charge through Croatia until the new registration camp in Slavonski Brod. Even Dobova/Brežice became a functioning transit camp. The migrants only needed 3 to 4 days for the 1.200 kilometres through the Balkan states up to Austria – all this a result of the chain of struggles and determination described here.

### Winter in Idomeni

The moment which was undoubtedly decisive and made the summer of migration a long one, was the number and perseverance of migrants themselves. As long as the „humanitarian corridor“ through the Balkans functioned, the passage across the Aegean sea was the last considerable obstacle on the way to Europe. The dinghy-business on the Turkish western coastline had developed in such a way that migrants could expect a relatively safe passage, at least during the summer. Therefore, it was no longer predominantly young men crossing the sea, but increasingly also women and children, whole families, disabled and old people. The major events of the summer – the breakthrough at Idomeni on the 22th/23rd of August, the March of Hope on the 4th September and the consequences of the closure of the Hungarian border at Röszke on the 15th of September – continued to have an effect for several weeks. Under the pressure of the continuous arrival of migrants, the transit states saw themselves unable to do

anything other than to manage the flow of migration as much as possible, while keeping an eye on Austria and Germany's receptiveness. How the police tried to degrade migrants on the route from claimants to petitioners has already been described in the previous chapter.

When police and politicians from Berlin to the Balkans hoped that the autumn storms of the Aegean sea would solve the „refugee crisis“, they were taught otherwise as in November and even December, prices to cross became cheaper in stormy weather, and thus became more affordable for families with less financial means. The dead children testify for the high risk migrants had to take. The number of passages declined and the number of the drowned rose. Nevertheless in November and December, 1,500 to 5,000 migrants daily crossed the few kilometres between the Turkish mainland and the Aegean islands. And during the first weeks of 2016, the figures greatly exceeded those of the previous year. Finally it was the deal with Turkey that closed the route across the Aegean sea in March 2016 with paralysing efficiency.

The border crossing between Idomeni and Gevgelija had already been the site of clashes on August 22 between the police and the army on the Macedonian side and thousands of migrants on the Greek side. On November 16, the Macedonian military began preparing the area near Gevgelija for a border fence. Two days later, the border was closed for all „non-SIA“ migrants. With this partial border-closure on November 18, Macedonia distinguished itself as the „new European frontier state.“ By willingly surrendering to the EU's pressure the right-wing Macedonian government – crippled by inner conflicts – tried to stabilize itself on the European landscape.

This was the beginning of a new era in the short history of the Balkanroute, an era which ultimately replaced the right to a hearing and the right of asylum with racial profiling, and with the rejection of migrants based on national origin, ethnicity, skin color or dialect. Now there was a differentiation between SIA and non-SIA migrants, and it was only a matter of time until the A would be removed and refugees from Afghanistan would be



denied to continue their journey, regardless of the steadily deteriorating security situation in this country (this happened from the 21.02.16 onwards, and only people from Syria and Irak were let pass after that date). The fact that UNHCR interpreters participated in this profiling of migrants from the outset was one of the great disappointments for many observers.

In our short survey, we would also like to remember the new #marchofhope on the 14th of March, when 2,000 migrants formed a march to cross a river away from the Macedonian fence and then carve a path northwards. A rope was spanned across the river, people helped each other, and families and children arrived on the other shore unharmed (the day before, two people drowned in the torrents of larger river while attempting to cross it). The concept of a new #marchofhope was immediately on everyone's lips.

*BREAKING: A new #marchofhope has just started from the Idomeni camp to find a way to Macedonia. Moving Europe is joining the march, reporting that more than 1,000 people are participating.*

There were many misleading reports about this event. Moving Europe condemned these reports. They were derogatory to those 2,000 people who had taken their fate into their own hands, and who had collectively opted for a march. The team decided to gather testimonies of some of the people which they had met on the march.

Our chronology ends with this last great uproar at the Macedonian border. Further protests took place in Idomeni during the following weeks and this place remained a thorn of Europe's bad conscience until May. The camp was evicted on the 24th of May, and the inhabitants were resettled to military camps, where they were deprived of their contacts and where they barely encountered better conditions than in the mud of Idomeni.

Altogether the migrants transported an awareness and message about their rights and dignity across the borders. They carry the last glow of the Arab revolutions into Europe. Seen with eyes of European people, bombed anonymous populations turn into children, women and men who, despite all their hardship, represent themselves along with their de-

mands, and who do not beg for anything. The link between European prosperity and the poverty of the periphery is becoming more clearly visible, and Europe must decide whether it wants to get used to images of misery or if it is willing to change itself.

The real issue is not the sheer number of migrants, even ten or twenty million should not have to starve and could be welcomed to Europe in a way of respect. The political debate in the media correlates with the importance of the topic, as the questions, opening the borders or fortress of prosperity, opening society or militarization and shooting orders – these key questions about the future of Europe were debated during the long summer of migrations and migrants continue to pose these questions, even if more than 50,000 of them are detained in Greece and 8,000 are stuck in Serbia, and multiple thousands are going the dangerous route to Italy via Libya or Egypt. Behind these migrants there are hundreds of thousands others, who demand as well as actualize their right to mobility. They will not leave Europe in peace. Idomeni is not the end of the story. Europe is being moved.



Idomeni 2015 | Solidarische Gruppen Halle-Leipzig

## CAN'T STOP A MOVEMENT! IMPRESSIONS FROM EIGHT YEARS OF STRUGGLES AGAINST INNER-EUROPEAN BORDERS, THE SO CALLED DUBLIN-DEPORTATIONS

*At 15th of January 2011 more than 20 Afghan refugees died, when their boat came into distress and capsized, while they continued their flight from Greece to Italy. A 16 years old young man, who was saved, asked us to write down this story not to get forgotten.<sup>1</sup> The most of these dead people would be still alive if the Dublin-III-regulation would not exist. Most of them started their journey again and again after they have been deported back from other European countries. We dedicate this article to commemorate the forgotten dead people of the internal borders of EU. May this injustice - as it happens at the external borders of EU - as soon as possible become history.*

The struggles against deportations back to Greece, Italy, Hungary or Bulgaria are strongly connected with the fights at the external European borders. The struggle against Dublin was significantly fought out along the Balkan route: first until the temporary deportation stop to Greece in the beginning of 2011 and in a second round mainly in Hungary with the break-through by the march of hope in September 2015.

Contested spaces – every centimetre progress tenaciously achieved from a multitude, which stood up individually and collectively to this regulation und still do it until today. Without listening to these manifold stories of resistance it seems to us impossible to understand the political conflict on Dublin. It was and is a social process of erosion and of continuous undermining the border regime, in which the not-granted right to freedom of movement was asserted. It was and is supported by structures, which exist everywhere in Europe in the meanwhile: an underground railroad for freedom of movement.

The Dublin regulation was adopted already in 2003. In general it establishes the rule: the country, which „causes“ the entry of an asylum seeker - because its embassy has issued a visum or because it could not prevent the entry at its borders - should be responsible for the assessment of the asylum application. If a refugee applies for asylum in another country and s/he will be recognized in the fingerprint database EuroDac or because of other proofs, the deportation to this responsible country should be carried out. Obviously such a system cannot function and this regulation mainly should serve to the interests of the central-European governments to keep the refugees in the European border countries. All European countries enforce deportations to the border countries, which are overburdened with logistics and accommodation.

In February 2014 Eritrean and Somalian refugees announced in a public event the foundation of the selforganised initiative „Lampedusa in Hanau“. They mourned the dead persons and they reported about the bad experiences of their flight through the Sahara, through Libya and through the sea - and about their subsequent homelessness and non-protection in Italy. They wanted to resist against the threats of Dublin-deportations and they were in search of support from civil society: „Who is honestly mourning the death, should protect the survivors.“ A few months later the first church asylums have been established. All friends

from Lampedusa in Hanau finally could achieve their right to stay and they formed the base for a sustained cycle of successful resistance against „Dublin“.

In reference to Greece and the Balkan route or to the central Mediterranean route and Italy - this article will try to tell the stories of resistance against Dublin-deportations. It's one of many narratives about struggles for freedom of movement, in manifold fragments and based on moments, in which we (with no one is illegal Hanau and with the network Welcome to Europe) were involved as supporters or testimonies.

### Greece

Lesvos, October 2009

Our storyline starts in October 2009 on the Greek island Lesvos, at the fence of the infamous detention Pagani. Smog is in the air from the last revolts, which will finally wipe the slate clean from this prison at the external borders of EU. A few weeks before protests from inside and outside against the inhuman conditions have created images, which went around the world. At the fence - still before the release - next steps are in preparation. Everybody wants to go on as all know, that the situation in Greece will not offer a better life. They also know about the curse of the fingerprint, which all of them have been forced to provide and which burned in their bodies the risk of deportation back to Greece. Here at the fence they discuss with activists from other European countries, who hand over addresses through the wire, which can be contacted after arrival. The idea of w2eu.info is born in this situation, in the smog of the revolts and by the conviction that freedom of movement is the right for everybody.



## The web guide w2eu.info

The idea was already developed during the nobordercamp, but these face to face encounters on the fence in Pagani in October 2009 became the final starting point for the web guide w2eu.info.<sup>2</sup> Initially handed over as slips of paper through the wire, quickly it was clear that the need of information and mainly of reliable contacts is huge. In 2010 the web guide went online as an attempt to present a transnational quadrilingual guide for freedom of movement, first of all with contacts in all important European countries of destination and mainly including information about the chances to counter the Dublin-deportations to Greece successfully on a legal level. Step by step the website developed further

and the network around have grown up to a more and more stabile structure as a backbone for daily struggles.

### 'Schengendangle'

#### On the bottom side of a truck back to Europe

Igoumenitsa, Springtime 2010

*When we reached after seven hours bus-tour from Athens in Igoumenitsa, it is cold and the darkness of the mountains gives a feeling of isolation. We see that small groups of people disappear in the hills, the wind carries their voices to us. Igoumenitsa is the second biggest ferry-port of Greece and thus also a starting point for all the invisibles, who try to continue their journey to northern*

*Europe. 'Schengendangle' they call it, when they clamp themselves on the bottom side of the trucks, between the tires, to arrive perhaps some day. It is not without risk and we see some people with broken arms and legs. The two prisons in the ferry-port are all the time overcrowded, because the control is strict and every day between 10 and 40 refugees are deported back from Italy. Who was deported might have bad luck. We listen to stories about detention camps at the albanian border, or about refugees, who have been kicked out 100 km away nowhere, and even about clandestine deportations back during the night to Turkey in the region of Evros. After a wave of raids this winter, when many nylon-tents and small belongings were burnt down, most people change the sleeping place every night: from a con-*



Lampedusa 2013 | No One is illegal



struction site to the forest and back to the street. Small tents out of nylon-tarps hidden under branches and everyday waiting on a good opportunity: that is the world of the invisibles in Igoumenitsa.

Almost all people here were imprisoned in Greece more than one time and every second person we meet is a „Dublin-II-case“. Some refugees have been deported back to Greece already several times. J. was deported from Germany in March 2009. He shows us his expulsion order from Greece: ‘Since my deportation I was 10 times imprisoned and every time I get another order to leave Greece within 30 days. But where should I go?’ S. is coming from Palestine and he is already since six months in Igoumenitsa; ‘I forgot to be hungry, I am not thirsty anymore and I do not know, if I am tired.’ He wears a jacket, which is five numbers too big for him, on his three pullovers: ‘Everybody gets sick here. We try find food in the garbage cans. Warm water is not existing and nowhere a chance to recharge our mobile phones or to keep contact with my family.’ When we started to say good bye, a young Somali turned to us: ‘Do not let us alone! Do not let us alone!’ It sounds as if it is not directed to us personally but as a general appeal to the society.<sup>3</sup>

Athens, July 2010

Athens is the hub of transmigration in Greece, from the islands as well as from the Evros region. Usually Athens is the next station to organize the further journey. During last years Athens became additionally the hub for Dublin-deportations. From all European countries Dublin-deportees arrive in Athens, where they are imprisoned at the airport in inhumane conditions. Not a few people turn the loop several times and try to leave Greece again and again. And not a few end up in the streets of Athens, when they lost their hope some day and all options to get money. Many refugees in Athens are caught in a trap, often even a voluntary return is not possible anymore. Massive homelessness of refugees is an increasing problem. The precarious support system from NGOs collapsed in the course of the economical crisis. In summer 2010 the most staff of NGOs was not paid for months and subsequently they stopped their work

entirely for some periods. Around the Attiki-square, where in the daytime many Afghan refugees stayed, massive racist attacks happened for several months. The situation of minors in Athens is particularly dramatic: countless young people

## Deportation stop to Greece in January 2011

In January 2011 the European Court for human rights decided in an individual



Budapest 2012 | bordermonitoring.eu

are exposed – beside all other problems – to sexual assaults in the parks. In the same time the protests of refugees increase: 2010 several hunger strikes of refugees took place for their recognition and legalization, often sharpened as the strikers stitch up their mouths.<sup>4</sup>

These descriptions from the squares in Athens summarize the situation in summer 2010, the first report of the Infomobile in Greece was a „Dublin-II-deportation-diary“<sup>5</sup>, a report full with the voices of the Dublin-deportees from Athens. The documentation of all individual stories is a crucial method in this period. The documented cases have been used as written testimonies to prevent deportations to Greece in front of the courts in other countries and in general to illustrate the situation of Dublin-deportees and to scandalize the inhuman living conditions in the transit countries at the external borders.

case, that Greece violated the human rights of a person, who was imprisoned in inhuman conditions and became homeless after his release. This decision also affected Belgium as the deportation to the mentioned conditions in Greece also had violated the human rights there. As a consequence of this decision the deportations to Greece have been suspended in more and more EU-countries as probably hundreds of similar „Greek“ cases might have been decided in the same way. Thus the deportation stop was a court decision of last resort. But this temporary deportation stop, which lasted at least seven years, first of all was the result of the struggles of the refugees themselves and their supporters. After their deportation back to Greece they started again and again to go back to the places they want to stay. They themselves have documented over and over again the unacceptable conditions in Greece and pushed it into

the public. Longterm lawsuits in each singular case and mainly the tenacity of the affected persons themselves led to a situation, in which the deportations had to be suspended.

Just now, when we have to develop new strategies to stop again the deportations back to Greece, we should learn from these experiences. Since March 2017 it was announced in the frame of the overall roll back, that Dublin-deportations to Greece will be restarted.

## Hungary

In Hungary the human right violations at first have been much less public - not because it was less massive but because it have been more hidden forms of violence. Imprisonment during the asylum procedure was and still is the norm and not an exception in Hungary. When we started to be engaged in the situation in Hungary, we mainly heard about the reports on the unbearable conditions of detention. The circulation of tranquilizer have been standard and many people were released after months of arrest with strong psychological problems and often also with addiction to pharmaceuticals.

asylum system. First research journeys started and affected refugees have been informed about useful contacts in their destination countries through the web guide [w2eu.info](http://w2eu.info), while experiences about Dublin-deportations have been exchanged. Already in this stage many have told their stories.

So one young Afghan man, 17 years old, gave us an interview by phone from inside a detention center.<sup>6</sup> We never saw each other, but a friend of a friend brought us into contact. He felt very bad, he said, but he wanted to give testimony about the situation of refugees deported back to Hungary. He reported that he is arrested since nearly three month as a minor. He hoped, that the deportations to Hungary might end, when the practice of imprisonment becomes public. He said it is too late for himself, but perhaps it will help all others, who afterwards will go the same way, not to experience the same. In this period we made numberless interviews and many used these testimonies, which they had given still in Hungary, in their next attempt of continuous flight for the documentation in court cases and against another deportation to Hungary.

another updated report on Hungary was published and got attention in several courts in Germany.<sup>8</sup>

Hungary for a long time was known only as place of quick transit. With increasing Dublin deportations many affected refugees could not keep their strength for a second or third attempt and mainly families with children stayed and tried to get organized in Hungary and to struggle for an improvement of their living conditions. From late summer 2012 until early summer 2013 mainly Afghan families went on protests in Budapest and Bicske, supported from the new developed group MigSzol.<sup>9</sup> But all efforts failed and the most families - even with a residence status - could not find any perspective, rather they were confronted with the eviction from the refugee camp and subsequent homelessness. Against this background they decided collectively to leave and more than 70 refugees together boarded a train at 12.06.2013. All of them had a protection-status in Hungary, so they could be controlled at the border, but with their documents they have been entitled to move through Europe and thus they reached their destination. At the train station in Munich they finally decided for the end city: Karlsruhe. There some of them had relatives and one of them got the information, that a chance might be given. In Karlsruhe they went to the first reception center, put all their Hungarian documents on the table and asked for asylum as in Hungary a live in humanity and dignity was not possible.

*"We, the refugees previously living in the Bicske Reception Centre (Hungary) decided to leave Hungary and apply for asylum in Germany. ... The fact, that approximately 100 of us left Hungary will not change anything in Bicske. The new people who will be granted the refugee status by Hungary will face similar problems. We saw no other choice than staying together and seek a common solution abroad. We have seen that the European rules on asylum are not working, there is no common treatment and care for asylum-seekers and refugees in Europe. We will not accept this system. Our political resistance is movement. We have to do that for our Children."*<sup>10</sup>



First notices about the indefensible conditions inside the Hungarian prisons for refugees trailed away without attention. Already in December 2010 first considerations came up to research on the Hungarian situation as we could expect similar serious failings as in the Greek

Already in 2012 and 2013 bordermonitoring.eu in cooperation with Pro Asyl tried to document in the German-speaking countries the general situation of refugees in Hungary „between homelessness and detention“ and thus to win influence on procedures in various courts.<sup>7</sup> In 2016

This declaration was published together with a detailed list of all their attempts in Hungary to change and to improve their situation (in negotiations with immigration offices, camp administration, politicians and UNHCR, and by protest-

## Without Dublin it would mean that I would be a bird and could fly

actions in front of the parliament). It was the first collectively organized leave and the families organized common events also later in Germany. Until today nearly all of them still live in Baden-Württemberg (the federal state, in which Karlsruhe is located).

### Italy - the curse of the fingerprint

*„We are escaping the whole time, you know? Our life is homelessness, we sleep on a big street of hope. We could not see any hope until now. We only live, breathe, sleep. They decided for us, that we have no rights. That's the meaning of Dublin for us. We should not have other options than to live on the street.“*

O. from Eritrea, Oberursel (near Frankfurt) in July 2011

*„Without Dublin it would mean that I would be a bird and could fly. I simply would continue my studies, I would marry and live a better life.“*

S. from Eritrea, Oberursel in July 2011

The Italian islands Lampedusa and Sicily are the places, where the stories cumulate, in which refugees tried to resist from the very beginning against the hex/bane/curse of the fingerprints. Most people know before their arrival in Italy, that the fingerprint - sometimes even taken on the boats of the coastguards - will be a trap. Thus forms of resistance are manifold. If the opportunity is given, they escape directly after the arrival in the ports in Augusta, Pozallo or Catania. Some

even could get away from Lampedusa, hidden in a truck in the ferry, to avoid the fingerprinting. Others treated their fingertips with glue before the arrival, or they vitriolized or burned them. Many opposed the taking of fingerprints and experienced massive violence by the Italian police, partly through counter insurgency units against refugees, who just were rescued from boats at sea. As testified people were broken their hands and fingers to force the fingerprint procedure, in several times electric shockers were used to break resistance. Often any food was denied, before people did not give fingerprints.

In July 2013 one of the collective protests has been finally successful:

*In the last couple of weeks new boat people – refugees and migrants mainly from East African and Sub-Saharan countries – are arriving via Libya on the Italian island of Lampedusa. There they are detained in an overcrowded camp and registered before their transfer to Sicily or the Italian mainland, which includes having their fingerprints taken. Many of the persons involved know from friends and family who went through the same procedure, that due to these fingerprints their residence will be bound to Italy, that they may obtain a protected status there, but that socially this is worth nothing. This because in general they will then find themselves homeless and without an income on the street and any continued journey towards North-Western Europe is threatened with immediate deportation back to Italy in accordance with Dublin II. Against this background impressive protest actions occurred on Lampedusa in mid-July. About 250 refugees, mainly from Eritrea, refused to give their fingerprints and demanded from the responsible authorities their immediate transfer. After protests and controversies with the police in the camp, they held a more than 2-hour demonstration in the streets of the small tourist town on 20 July 2013. “No Fingerprints” was their main slogan, a collective protest against the Dublin II injustice. Then a 24-hour sit-in on the square in front of the church was organized and in selfdetermined negotiations with the local authorities they even could*

*carry through their main demand to leave without fingerprints.<sup>11</sup>*

The fingerprint in Italy became also a trap for refugees, who continued their flight after the deportation stop in Greece via Italy as the story of N. demonstrate. It was an almost endless odyssey through the European Dublin-jungle.

*“My flight from Afghanistan via Iran and Turkey to Greece took me several months. In late November 2011, I crossed the Evros River. But in Greece you can not survive as a refugee. In December 2011, I've been hiding in a truck to get onto the ferry to Bari / Italy. When moving out at the port Italian police caught us and deported us directly back to Greece with the same ferry - directly into jail. On the second try, I went by foot across the border to Macedonia and continued via Serbia to Hungary. I was there for six weeks in custody and then deported to Serbia. The Serbian police beat us, took our money away and pushed us illegally back at the Macedonian border. From the Macedonian police we were left in the forest and hunted with threats towards Greece. I went the same way to Hungary a second time - with the same result: imprisonment and illegal refoulement to Greece. The fourth time I went in a small boat with 72 people to Italy. After days at sea I arrived in July 2012 in southern Italy. Via France and Belgium, I tried to go to Germany. In Brussels I was checked by the police and taken to a detention center. Out of fear of deportation to Italy I went on hunger strike. They have silenced me in February 2013 with a sedative injection and four Belgian police officers accompanied me to Rome. After the deportation I did not get any accommodation and had to flee from Italy again. A couple of months I remained in France, without any support, then I tried to come to Germany. After a second deportation from Belgium I was sent back into homelessness at the airport in Rome. I went on a hunger strike in front of the airport in Rome. Eventually I gave up and lived again homeless with other Afghans in a kind of tent.”<sup>12</sup>*

N. escaped once more at the end of his odyssey through Europe, this time to Germany. He spent several weeks in a church asylum in Frankfurt until the transfer-deadline to Italy was over and



he finally did not risk another deportation anymore. He is living and working today in Hanau.

There are people, who became nomads, who go and return in Europe many times and many years to find finally a place to stay. We met a Somali refugee, who had to give fingerprints in at least nine European countries. From everywhere he was deported back to Italy or he escaped before his deportation to a next country.

Also after the arrival in Germany many refugees vitriolize or burn their fingers, mainly in the years 2011 and 2012. But this kind of resistance soon went into space: the asylum procedures have simply been suspended, because of „non-collaboration in the identity verification“. Often the affected persons fall

into the Dublin-trap years later, when they were not prepared in another fingerprint procedure. But many make it, they layaway from step to step until - for example - they get married by a friend, who already held a long term residency in Germany.

### **Resistance against Dublin-deportations in air planes**

Several refugees defended themselves against deportations to Italy. Between 2011 and 2014 according the official statistics concerning the Frankfurt airport the most deportations have been interrupted by Eritrean refugees, who should have been forced back to Italy.

K., an Eritrean friend in Oberursel near Frankfurt (who achieved after many

years of struggle his blue passport and in the meanwhile even a flat), was one of them. After he prevented his deportation on 6.12.2011, he was detained in the prison in Frankfurt-Preungesheim. He said:

*„I will not accept another deportation to Italy quietly and secret. If we remain silent, nothing will change. The situation of refugees in Italy is a constant violation of our human rights. I escaped as many other young people because of permanent human rights violation in Eritrea. Here in Europe we experience again, that we have to live in inhuman conditions.“*

After his deportation to Italy he met there with a journalist from the magazine „Stern“<sup>13</sup>, who documented the story of K. at full length and as a representative example for many others.



Pagani in Lesbos in 2009 | w2eu

In 2014 S. and two other Eritrean friends resisted against their deportations in scheduled flights even repeatedly. The responsible immigration authorities in Darmstadt decided to make an example of their case to try to discourage the Eritrean community. All of them should know that resistance will be broken by any means necessary and by any costs. The authorities chartered a small plane exclusively for the three Eritreans and they were deported like criminals and accompanied by policemen, one even sedated by an injection from a collaborating medic:

„On June 17th 2014 I was woken up at 6 clock in my cell in the deportation prison in Ingelheim. It was the third attempt to deport me back to Italy after I had resisted two times. I said that I did not want to fly to Italy and they then brought more forces. Six men in the whole entered the cell and I screamed for help. They have levered my left hand and kicked me repeatedly against the legs. They have tied up the hands with handcuffs on my back and also gave me leg irons and transported me tied up in the police car. Besides me two more Eritreans were deported. I was the first who was brought onto the plane. I have said already in the police car that the deportation I done against my will. On the stairs was the pilot and I told the police, I want to talk to him. When I was inside they brought the second man. I have only heard him scream from inside: “Uuyuyuyuy” - cries for help. He does not speak English and he would scream in this way for help. They carried him to the plane. The third Eritrean shouted in this way and fought back and they dragged him onto the plane. On the plane, we then cried all three, and the aircraft did not start about 30 minutes. The police squeezed my ear when I cried, I got scared because I should actually have an operation on the ear, which was not done because they have picked me up before for deportation. The police have tried to shield us from each other, so I could not see exactly what happened with the friend behind me. He certainly did get a shock and had foam coming from his mouth. There was a doctor with us in the plane she was very tall and thin. She gave him an injection and then we have not heard

from him, he was made quiet by her injection. We started to fly and we continue to scream me and the other friend. The policeman next to me says ‘Byebye Germany! Ciao!’ And I ask him how he can

Mainly at the Frankfurt airport, the biggest deportation airport in Germany, but also at other airports support-groups developed to prevent deportations. They tried to intervene - by sensibilization of



Airport Frankfurt/Main, Germany | Lampedusa in Hanau

do in such a situation jokes, if he still has a remnant of humanity.“

A few weeks later all three were back in Germany - and after years of struggles and tenacious judicial conflicts S. today has his recognition as refugee.

Shortly after his selforganised return he held a speech during a demonstration against deportations in Darmstadt. Exactly in front of the building of the administration, who chartered his extra-flight and executed his deportation, he accused the responsible authorities for human right violations.

K. and S. both were arrested for several weeks in detention after they successfully resisted against their deportation in the air planes. But shortly after the deportation charter in June 2014 it became much more difficult for authorities to detain asylum seekers. After successful legal interventions it was forbidden to keep asylum seekers in the same prisons as criminals and most federal states had no capacities anymore. And longterm juridical efforts by lawyers could achieve decisions from higher courts, that particularly Dublin-refugees should not be detained anymore.

travellers and staff of air lines, but also by protests against deportation air lines. In March 2012 simultaneous actions took place at the five biggest german deportation air ports. In the common call it was written:

„Let us support this resistance! Lets take a look into the flights to Rome, Budapest or Valetta! Lets stand up against deportations! In its literal sense: because as passengers on board we can prevent deportations, when we refuse to belt on but stand up and bring our complaints to the pilot. The Dublin.II-system has to be abolished immediately! No deportations into the social misery at the margins of Europe! Asylum seekers should have the right to search for protection, where they want to do! For an Europe of welcome.“<sup>14</sup>

In several cities (the protests were different according to the different practices of authorities in different federal states and districts) groups developed blockades in front of refugee camps to stop deportations, which have been announced in advance. Mainly Göttingen and Osnabrück became stronghold to prevent deportations from outside - un-



til the authorities decided: deportations should not be pre-announced anymore.

### Germany and the places of struggle to stay

*„Never before was the resistance against the restrictions of the freedom of movement for refugees and migrants and especially against deportations within Europe so loud and convinced. In Germany and all over Europe, initiatives call for self-organized resistance such as the „Lampedusa Groups“. European borders have never been more contested. Almost everyweek migrants collectively pass the borders in Ceuta and Melilla, thousands arrive on the shores of Sicily. On Lampedusa, hundreds of people reject their registration and in the Aegean Sea boats arrive daily on the Greek islands.“ Time to Act. Dublin has to be abolished! - Call in June 2014<sup>15</sup>*

Lampedusa in Hamburg is the first group, which was founded in explicit reference to the first place of arrival. In difference to many following self organized groups is Lampedusa in Hamburg composed by people, who already got documents in Italy and who now try to find a living and mainly a work in Hamburg.

*„In Lampedusa we were 7000 persons in a camp, which was build for 900. Nevertheless the people there tried their best, but they did not get support from the EU. The Dublin-II-system - you have to stay in the country of first arrival - is violating our human rights. It forces us to live and die on the streets. After the recognition of our refugee status Italy kicked us on the street in winter 2012. They asked us to leave Italy. They said: the EU is big, go and find your way. Here is nothing for you. And so it happened and with nothing in snow and ice we set off to France, Scandinavia, Switzerland and Germany. We are recognized refugees from a war, in which the european states have participated, but they ignore our existence. When we show up and when we make our conditions visible, they want to deport us. In Italy we can beg, starve, steel, become guttersnipes or simply die. The main issue remains to keep the Dublin-II-system implemented. It is painful, after we could*

*stabilize our life in Libya, that we once again have to struggle to survive - in countries, which name themselves as big democracies.“<sup>16</sup>*

Lampedusa in Hanau was founded in March 2014, after more and more Somalian and Eritrean refugees in Hanau and the district around were threatened by deportations back to Italy:

*„We escaped from a dictatorship with forced recruitment and political persecution in Eritrea and from a 23 years long civil war with forced recruitment and raping of women in Somalia.*

*We survived to cross the desert with little food and too less water and we faced kidnappings for blackmailing our relatives or even to misuse our bodies for trade with organs. Arriving in Libya we experienced strong racism on the streets and systematic imprisonment, partly for years. Crossing the Mediterranean Sea we again had to risk our lives in overcrowded boats. Some of us experienced shipwrecks and the death of relatives or friends on sea, before we arrived on the coasts of Lampedusa, Sicily or Malta. Most of us were forced to give our fingerprints in Italy or Malta, although wenever want to stay in these countries. (...) In Italy we went through overcrowded camps with inhuman conditions and internal fights. We experienced homelessness and racist violence and sexual harassment on the street, we were without any income, perhaps one time per day food by caritas and without medical provision. Against this background we travelled to Germany to ask for asylum and protection. But here we face again insecurity and threat of deportation*

*back to Italy and Malta. German authorities refuse to allow us the access to a fair asylum procedure. (...) We know that many of our friends and relatives from Hamburg to Frankfurt are in similar situations. (...)The system of Dublin cannot grant us the protection and safety we need. It stops us from building a future after all this hardship we had to go through. We are in solidarity against deportations and exclusion and for the rights of refugees and migrants in Germany and Europe. We need the freedom to choose the place to stay. We ask to delete our fingerprints from the European Data-System because these fingerprints are like a prison to us. No Fingerprints - no Dublin II and III. We are here to stay!“<sup>17</sup>*

Lampedusa in Hanau consisted mainly in a mutual promise: no one will be left alone with the fear of deportation. And even if we cannot prevent all deportations, we know: from Italy a quick travelling back to Germany is possible. In Frankfurt simultaneously the group Refugees for Change was founded. During manifestations against deportations affected refugees confirmed to each other in speeches: after they deport us, we will come back again.

Parallel the active refugees approached church communities and tried to get their direct support. Church asylum is one successful option against Dublin-deportation and many use it to overcome the transfer-deadlines. According the Dublin regulation the German authorities are obliged to deport the people back within six months (after the Dublin country got responsible). As soon as this deadline is over, Germany get responsible for the asylum procedure and the refugees can stay. Only if people disappear and go underground, the transfer-deadline can be prolonged to 18 months. But in church asylum the authorities are informed about the address of the refugees under protection, theoretically an access by police is possible and the people are not disappeared. But it is a political decision, if deportations will be executed against refugees under church groups protection and usually church asylum is respected by authorities in Germany. The few times, when church asylums have been broken

CHURCH  
ASYLUM is  
one successful  
option AGAINST  
DUBLIN-  
DEPORTATION



by police, it brought even a boomerang effect. In the case of a Chechnyan family in Augsburg, who was hauled off by police from a church asylum, it led to a big scandal and even more churches offered their protected spaces afterwards. The established regional church was in full support of the local church group and finally even the interior minister of Bavaria had to row back.

Even if several hundred refugees – mainly against Dublin-deportations and to overcome the transfer-deadline – are in church asylum in Germany every year, these are still individual cases and not so many in comparison to the general numbers of Dublin-cases. Nevertheless the hardliner in the ministries and in the authorities try to push a debate, that church asylum should be classified as disappearance and thus to prolong automatically the transfer-deadline on 18 months in future. It is still and again a contested field.

In most other European countries the practice of church asylum to overcome the six months did not work, probably because the churches did not have enough negotiation power. In Sweden church communities support again and again refugees, but they have to hide for 18 months, before their procedure will be conducted in Sweden.

### **The Dublin-system collapsed in Hungary – in the Summer of Migration 2015**

16.09.2015 Hanau

*Welcome to trains of hope: in seven days from Izmir to Hanau.*

*Still in August we countless times answered the question in Lesvos, what will happen with our fingerprints in Hungary, and now – only one month later – nobody is asking anymore. We said to the people: 'Go on, you will arrive. The route is hard, but never refugees and migrants have been quicker than today.' We have waved at the extra-ferries, about 2.500 people in departure in direction to the macedonian border. They were as quick as never before. Record time was seven days from Izmir to Hanau. Ten days from Homs.*

*Now we stay in Hanau at the train station during nights and say welcome on a stage*

*of the journey, together with many others from various communities and their associations. Many just want to say hello. Here in the emergency accomodation, in gyms and tents still for many refugees it is open, where the traveling will end. Also here is still not a serious registration, at least for some moments the old rules and restrictions have been suspended. Many will continue, to the aunt to Schwerte, to Leipzig to the bride-to-be or to Hamburg, because there are living more Afghans. Or from there to further north, some want to reach Sweden, Norway or Finland. After some days several people decide to stay, because they met friendly people, because the city is in the middle of Germany or because they are simply tired and finally want to arrive somewhere. Welcome!*

About the break-through on the Balkan route, which led to such scenes in September 2015, a lot of other texts are published.<sup>18</sup> It was not a sophisticated strategy, which pushed the Dublin-system into a temporary collapse. It was a vote by feet in its literal sense. It was courage of despair mixed up with experiences of resistance in the Syrian uprising combined with the right moment, that the decision had to be made to open the borders. It seems to us important to remember it, when today we want to counter the ongoing roll back.

### **Roll Back**

Since the break-through in September 2015 we followed the attempts on all levels to win back control as we all know: The closure of the formalized corridor along the Balkan route, the EU-Turkey deal, the mass-internment on the Aegean islands, the increase of push backs between all the Balkan states.

Simultaneously the debate went on to reorganize the Dublin-regulation. Dublin IV will even include the abolition of the transfer-deadlines. It is not a surprise as the overcoming of these timelimits of deportations have been the main method for thousands of refugees to escape from the Dublin-trap.

Even the re-installation of Dublin-deportations to Greece is coming back now:

*'One step forward, hundreds back ...' seems to be the motto under which EU experts implement refugee policy, as currently also demonstrated in Greece. On 8 December 2015, the European Commission published its fourth recommendation on the resumption of Dublin Returns to Greece, this time stating that they could be gradually re-installed, as according to them, refugee rights would be adequately protected in Greece. At the same time, images of people who fled war and are now staying in tents covered in snow are spreading through the global media. Once more, the EU is using Greece to make a point: Dublin has to survive, not matter what, that's the plan. But in reality, this failed plan has significant consequences, causing one more massive human tragedy in Europe for thousands of people who are escaping war, conflict, disaster, hunger and poverty.<sup>19</sup>*

Just before its starting the information circulate already in Greek refugee camps, in which way to deal and to respond against these new threads of deportation. Welcome to Europe published a detailed info sheet.<sup>20</sup>

### **Outlooks**

Relatively simply to anticipate: Despite and against the reorganization of Dublin-deportation Greece will experience another vote by feet:

*„But Dublin will fall again! Deportations to Greece were already once stopped back in 2011 following the decision of the European Human Rights Court in the case 'MSS v. Greece' – and as a result of a long struggle during which many, many refugees escaped from Greece, were deported and escaped again. Some had to flee through Europe 5-6 times. But finally it was over, they succeeded often, and stayed. Dublin Returns to Greece will be strongly contested in national and international courts again now. As we have seen, the Dublin-regulation has been overrun many times before by the struggles for freedom of movement of individuals and groups. Mouzalas had to correct himself. We politely suggest the European Commission to do the same.*

*Refugees are no numbers on a tent, no fingerprints, but people with faces, names and stories!*

*The Dublin Regulation has to be abolished now.*

*Human rights violations have to end now.*

*People have to join their families now.*

*People have to be in safety and in dignified conditions now.*

*We therefore demand:*

*Equal rights for all!*

*Freedom of movement to all refugees in Greece and elsewhere!*

*The right to stay for all!*

*Stop deportations!*

*No one is illegal!*

*w2eu – a network born out of the struggle against Dublin returns in 2009<sup>21</sup>*

The struggles against deportations developed further all the time. Since in Osnabrück the deportations are not pre-announced anymore and it is not possible to stop it from outside mobilization of supporters, refugees inside the camps got self organized and took the prevention of deportations in their own hands. They patrol during the night at the entrance of the camp and with whistles the whole camp will be waked up as soon as police try to execute early morning deportations. Then hundred and more refugees approach the police cars – peacefully and whistling – and the police has to leave without having achieved anything.

The example from Osnabrück demonstrates a process of vivid learning and adapting to new challenges. It is impres-

sive, what is possible, when people talk with each other and develop collective strategies. The whistle became already the new symbol for the resistance against Dublin-deportations. We created now a huge version – a two meters big whistle, which will be presented during the *We'll Come United* parade at 16th of September in Berlin in front of the interior ministry. Then it will be carried further on to Oranienplatz and other places, where affected refugees will meet and gather, who are not willing to get arrested and to accept this injustice. A symbol to tell the (hi)story of resistance, that it will be retold and new ideas appear. That the right for freedom of movement and the right to stay will finally win through!

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Ickerweg, Osnabrück | Executive Committee of the Sudanese Refugees

## PUSH-BACKS AT THE EXTERNAL(ISED) BORDERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

On 14 March 2016, approximately 2000 people left Idomeni at the Greek-Macedonian border and started walking towards the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). They passed the Greek border police, crossed a river, walked along the fence demarcating the border line, eventually entered Macedonian territory and continued until the Macedonian village of Moin. In Moin, the group was stopped by the Macedonian military. The officers were armed with riot gear, screamed insults, pushed and threatened to hit those who came near, and ordered everybody to sit down. After hours outside, army trucks arrived, and everybody who had just crossed the border into Macedonia was returned to Greece.<sup>1</sup>

This is one of many push-backs conducted at and beyond the external(ised) terrestrial borders of the European Union all along the Balkan routes after the closure of the formalised Balkan corridor. As declared in the corresponding Statement of the EU Heads of State or Government on 7 March 2016: “Irregular flows of migrants along the Western Balkans route have now come to an end”.<sup>2</sup> Part of the enforcement of the re-introduced border restrictions is to push back those who crossed without authorisation. At the Greek-Macedonian border, people on the move are sometimes apprehended directly at the border, sometimes further into Macedonian territory – and then returned to Greece.<sup>3</sup> Border guards from other European countries also participate in the border control operations.<sup>4</sup> Similar practices prevail at the other borders further north: People on the move are also systematically pushed back from Hungary to Serbia<sup>5</sup> and from Croatia to Serbia<sup>6</sup> – to name part of a non-exhaustive list.

During these push-back operations, people on the move are immediately returned back to the place they are trying to leave – without the possibility to explain their situation, to describe their personal circumstances, to seek international protection, to access legal representation or to object to their deportation. These immediate returns not only deny a list of specific rights, but also the possibility to access any other rights, because they bar individuals from entering the jurisdiction within which they could claim them. To put it in Hannah Arendt’s terms, push-backs deny the right to have rights.

Push-backs constitute a systematic practice that is explicitly or implicitly condoned by the responsible state authorities. The Spanish authorities passed a law to legalise the automatic returns at the border fences in Ceuta and Melilla in March 2015.<sup>7</sup> The Hungarian authorities followed with similar legislative amendments to the Hungarian Asylum Act and the State Border Act in July 2016, legalising the immediate extrajudicial return of asylum-seekers apprehended within 8km of the Serbian-Hungarian or Croatian-Hungarian border.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Macedonian state, the Interior Ministry itself published a statement announcing that they had returned everybody who participated in the collective border crossing on 14-15 March 2016 back to Greece.<sup>9</sup>

Push-backs are prohibited under numerous human rights conventions which these very states have developed, signed and ratified. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol enshrine the principle of non-refoulement. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) explicitly prohibits collective expulsions. Article 4 Protocol 4 ECHR

states: “*Collective expulsions are prohibited*”. A collective expulsion is defined as “*any measure of the competent authorities compelling aliens as a group to leave the country, except where such a measure is taken after and on the basis of a reasonable and objective examination of the particular cases of each individual alien of the group*”.<sup>10</sup>

One of many ways to intervene against push-backs is to use these human rights instruments that European states purport to uphold while constantly violating them. In the case of *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v Italy*, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found that the interception by Italian ships and their immediate return to Libya without an examination of the Applicants’ situation constituted a collective expulsion and exposed them to the risk of ill-treatment in violation of Article 4 Protocol 4 and Article 3 ECHR.<sup>11</sup> Related cases against push-backs at terrestrial borders are currently pending at the ECtHR. The case of *ND and NT v Spain* concerns push-backs at the border fences of Melilla at the Spanish-Moroccan border.<sup>12</sup> The case of *AA and Others* against the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia addresses the push-back operation conducted by the Macedonian authorities on 14-15 March 2016 after the closure of the Greek-Macedonian border. The complainants submitted that their return to Greece without an individual examination of their case and without a possibility to object to their deportation violated Article 4 Protocol 4 and Article 13 ECHR.<sup>13</sup>



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[10] European Court of Human Rights, Guide on Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights, p. 5, available at: [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide\\_Art\\_4\\_Protocol\\_4\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide_Art_4_Protocol_4_ENG.pdf). See also: Andric v. Sweden (dec.); Čonka v. Belgium, § 59; Sultani v. France, § 81.

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Border Macedonia – Greece | [bordermonitoring.eu](http://bordermonitoring.eu)

# COMMUNITIES AND SOLIDARITY CITIES

Two years ago there was this great migration movement across the Balkans. We supported it and we were part of it. While we were on the route, we saw the strong determination on side of the migrants, and we saw some coming out of forms of protest which very much reminded us to forms of protest created in the times of Arabellion, like clapping hands and chanting in circles, taking kids on the shoulders, holding up posters, and the like. Protests of this kind took place at Keleti Station, Röszke, Idomeni, and several other places. This was not by incident, but it was not organized from outside either. Protest was one essential part of the mobile commons of the migration movement.

Since then, state policies do their very best to reduce refugees to a status of poor and needy refugees. Take the Syrians, bombed out of Syria, robbed off their possessions, than being concentrated in Camps or being forced to work for nearly no money, in Lebanon or in Turkey. Then being reduced to basic needs on their way to Europe and through Europe. Then fingerprints and photos taken, and in the promised land of Germany given a standard metal bed and some clothing. So, the concept of refugee, which is also the imagination conveyed by media reports, is the concept of people reduced to nearly naked life. Thus charity seems to be the only option how to deal with these people. Even if you follow some concept of empowerment, meeting the naked life bears the imagination of drained and empty personalities to be refilled with external contents of knowledge. This is not our way. Still, two years after the great movement, we refer to the determination and self-determination of the migrants, and we show this during the days of Welcome United 2017.

What is the current situation about, 2 years after the March of Hope and Idomeni?

Apart from the Central Mediterranean, which is a field with different characteristics, with high risks and extradited status, but also with the strong determination of the Boat People who risk the crossing, there is a situation of migration movement stuck in the mud. Be it in the mud of Turkey, Greece, Serbia, around Ceuta and Medilla, Como and Ventimiglia, Calais, and in so many places, including France and Germany. There are non-collective actors in great numbers, but may be these people are too few in numbers at any given place, so that they do not find to collective action.

On the other hand, there are one million migrants who have reached Germany in the last two years. There are continuous struggles every day, in the camps, at the places of registration, at the police stations, and in the streets. Networks of support and mutual assistance are being built. Reproduction and being reproduced in contexts of family, and neighborhood, and communities are most important. Nearly all of the migrants do have a permanent contact back to their family and friends, and there are many who want to follow. One million migrants might be enough to be a bridge head for a chain migration to take place in the near future. We like this and we invite them to come. Europe will be moved. It might become a better place to live.

The political class in Germany does know this. They still remember what was called “Familiennachzug” in the 1970s, when family members of Turkish “Gastarbeiter” were allowed to immigrate. After family reunification they made up communities. The political class does not want new communities but isolated = “integrated” members of the work force. So at the moment they avoid give full asylum to Syrians and try to reduce migrants to be bachelors or

part of nuclear families at the most. They want to fill up the reservoirs of cheap labour. They tie “Duldung” to apprenticeship and given place of work. Also there was a huge wave of expulsions planned for 2017. A McKinsey advisory report ordered by German government suggested 560.000 persons to be deported this year. This would have been a disaster. That this disaster did not happen yet is due to the still enduring strength of what was called “Willkommenskultur”, and due to the every day resistance of the migrants. And these are the two factors which we refer to when speaking about the heritage of the great migration movement of 2015.

Let us ask for consequences as regards support. “Integration” for us does not mean integration into that society of work and performance, but security and defense of the means of subsistence for all. Cities for All. Of course, protection against deportation comes first. Furthermore, action is needed to support family reunification, and opening spaces for structures of solidarity. This means places for self-organization of the refugees, and there should also be places where the metropolitan lower classes can join in. These are the essentials when we come to think about building Sanctuary Cities or Solidarity Cities from below.

So let us conclude with what we think are basic principles of refugee support:

- **No Deportations**
- **Family Reunification**
- **Opening Spaces of Self Organization**
- **Supporting Memory Projects**  
*and in the longer run*
- **Open Borders and Urban Citizenship**

This is the stuff out of which Solidarity Cities will be fabricated.



## STRIKE THE BORDERS, FIGHT NEOLIBERALISM!

Final statement after the Transnational Social Strike (TSS)-Meeting in May 2017 in Ljubljana/Slovenia

As TSS platform we consolidated in the previous two years a method and a vision: the method consists of placing the tenets of our transnational initiative from within the movements of migrants, precarious and industrial workers, men and women, who are challenging the neoliberal constitution of Europe, by striking and refusing the conditions of their exploitation and oppression. The transnational social strike is for us the name of this real movement of insubordination, which overcomes organized structures and national borders and which is now confronting neoliberalism in its material pillars. For a while, neoliberalism seemed to have put out of play the possibility to radically contest subordination and the use of the strike as a political weapon, by means of extreme precarisation, of fragmentation, of the exploitation of migrant labour. This time is over and we need to be up to the new state of things. The vision is that of strategically setting our initiative on a transnational scale, by triggering organization processes across the borders and building a common discourse that is able, on the one hand, to counteract the neoliberal narrative of isolation and lack of alternatives and, on the other, to point at common fields of struggle and political initiative.

This method and this vision brought us to the Balkans: almost one hundred people participated in the meeting that took place in May 2017 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Collectives, grass-root unions and individuals from France, Germany, UK, Sweden, Italy, Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Greece, Bulgaria and Hungary addressed together the connections between the mass movements of migrants, severing conditions of labor in different sectors and ongoing political re-organisation of the European space taking place most visibly in the Balkans.

During the discussions that animated the meeting, many refugees and groups active along the so-called Balkan Route since 2015 described the overall increase in illegal practices and abuses on the skins of incoming migrants, which followed the formal closure of the Balkan corridor. Push-backs, detentions, arbitrary administrative practices are putting in danger the lives and the possibility to access a decent life of hundred thousand

people. Nonetheless, starting from the commonalities we ascertained between our local experiences – from Sweden to Italy, from UK to Serbia, from Greece to Germany – we underlined the need to address this situation outside the logic of emergency. The Balkan region shows us the intrinsic connection between the violent management of migration and the precarisation of labour and life, which is a common trend throughout the Europe-



Women Strike, 8.3.2017 in Bologna - Precarious Disconnections



an space. Against this backdrop, the Balkans emerged neither as a periphery, nor as an exception. They rather stand right at the centre of Europe. While being the site of a relentless movement of migrants, they have been the laboratory of neoliberal reforms later on implemented in other European countries, as well as for massive protests against them. The so-called migrants' and refugees' crisis brings to the surface the systematic violence which characterises the present of this Europe.

During the meeting we worked together to assess what it takes to set our common initiative on the level of these material strands connecting the Balkans with the whole European space and back. We recognised first of all that migrants' movements are challenging through and through the stability of neoliberal Europe as a whole. Migrants are putting Europe into crisis and we need to act transnationally in order to deepen this crisis. They are relentlessly pushing forward, no matter how hard the institutions are trying to stop them. Migrants are striking the borders, forcing the States to act on the edge of illegality, which means that out-law spaces and un-regulated conditions where violence can be arbitrarily exercised are created in order to stop their ungovernable movement. The EU and its States are compelled through the migrants' strike of the border to show their authoritarian face. By striking with their feet, they materialise a new meaning of the strike as a refusal of command and subordination, that goes well beyond industrial actions and the singular workplace.

Moreover, it emerged clearly the fact that the violence exercised on migrants is nothing but the crudest expression of the increasing violence in social relationships, according to which anyone is left to care just about him or herself, provided that he or she is available just in time to produce profits for others at any condition. The actual European government of mobility has then two interrelated faces: the restriction of the possibility to access legal status for newly arrived migrants goes hand in hand with the fact that many other migrants who have been in Europe longer, see their residence permit becoming more temporary and pre-

carious. This situation is one of the driving forces of precarisation of labour and life: with no, or precarious documents, migrants are under the blackmail of the employers and forced to be available to any work and wage condition, often with no access to welfare benefits. The link between new frameworks for regulating the access of asylum seekers and refugees and the labour market and the general imperative of employability for all, migrants and non-migrants, call for new forms of organisation and new claims.

To begin with, in front of this situation it is not enough to complain about this or that legal infringement. Only a European residence permit without conditions would sustain the daily struggle of the people who are anyhow crossing the borders and moving around Europe against violence, the blackmail of traffickers and employers, the racism of the institutions and the police officers. Any other measure, making distinctions between those who have and those who have not the right to enter, between safe and unsafe countries, between refugees and economic migrants should be refused as insufficient and complicit with the current authoritarian turn.

Besides, our aim is to build stable bridges between the fights to gain documents and the permit to stay, and those on wages and welfare benefits that are crucial for all precarious workers. Freedom of movement, wage and welfare represent the points of impact towards which to connect and gather different energies which are circulating in the European space. The claims we can collectively advance on these terrains, such as a European residence permit, a European minimum wage, a European welfare, should not be understood as attempts to fix the fault lines of the system. Our aim is to deepen Europe's crisis by acting on the same scale of our enemies. These claims should have two functions: first they point at the material terrains of the conflict between those who govern and command and those who refuse to obey. Second, they point at the fact that we will not be content with any solution which is less than European, against the deceptive tendency to concede the crumbs to pacifying conflicts locally.

Moreover, we discussed at length the experiences and experiments we took part in, in the last months, that did build political bridges among these fields of struggle: from the struggle against the *loi travail* in France, to the migrants' strike in the UK, to the global women's strike which took place on March 8th all over the world and which was able to address the interlacement of violence, exploitation and oppression which is specific to neoliberalism. By refusing through the strike to play «their» part any longer, women showed how the strike can be transnational and social, that is a global mass practice to overturn the present. In addition, in the framework of the discussion around the logistic transformation of production and labor relationships, we recognised a valuable attempt to build bridges between different terrains of struggle against neoliberalism in the organisation of the anti-G20 mobilizations in Hamburg. The suggestions to block the port and strike the metropolis point for us to the need to connect the opposition to the political agenda of governments with the blocking of logistics, capital flow and wealth. This need goes beyond a single event like a G20 and opens new political questions to rethink organization and mobilisation.

From here on we stated that we need both to further enlarge and to deepen the TSS platform as a political infrastructure, by expanding our knowledge and intervention capacities in new places and situations. Also with this aim, after diving in several crucial spots around Europe, we mean to make a stop where we started, that is Germany, bringing this discussion to Berlin in the next months. We have further questions to discuss and develop: how can we address today the connection between the institutional framework of Europe and the material processes we dived into in these two years? How to give strength and visibility to the current transnational circulation of the strike? How to strike against neoliberalism in all its facets?

More information about the TSS-platform-process:

<http://www.transnational-strike.info>



Budapest 2015 | Rights unknown

## WELCOME TO EUROPE WEBGUIDE

**F**or Freedom of movement – independent information for refugees and migrants coming to Europe“ – that’s the motto on our website as well as on our visitorcards. Since more than six years the Welcome to Europe Webguide exists: an online platform in four languages for refugees and migrants on their way to and through Europe. w2eu.info includes contacts of solidarity and support and practical information from nearly all EU States and also from some more transit countries.

Collecting and updating all information, translation in four languages, responding to requests and technical maintenance of the website: all this work is carried by activists from different countries and various backgrounds voluntarily and without payment. The guide emerged directly from the struggles for freedom of movement and serves for daily support and self-organisation. It is part of the transnational activist network Welcome to Europe.

Since the beginning the Webguide is strongly connected with the Infomobile Greece. The information on Greece is regularly updated by the Infomobile. (See: <http://infomobile.w2eu.net>).

### Welcome to Greece Guide

In October 2016 we produced the Guide „Welcome to Greece“ for the third year. In English, Arabic and Farsi it provides the most important information and contacts to support structures in Greece. For the newcomers who got stuck on the Aegean islands since the EU-Turkey-deal came into existence – and for those who are stuck on the Greek mainland since the “closure” of the Balkanroute. Besides this we produced Info Sheets on Relocation and family reunification which have been used widely also by other groups in Greece

Links:

English: <http://w2eu.info/greece.en.html>

Arabic: <http://w2eu.info/greece.ar.html>

Farsi/Dari: <http://w2eu.info/greece.fa.html>

### Welcome to Italy Guide

In May 2017 the Welcome to Italy guide was updated another time. The group Feltrinelli and the association Razzismo Brutta Storia «Racism ugly story» have decided to support the printing of 20’000 copies and distributing them for free in the stores of Feltrinelli in 17 Italian cities. “The guide “Welcome to Italy” is written by the network “Welcome to Europe”, which was formed by hundreds of activists and organisations that since 2009, have

offered direct support to migrants and refugees throughout, have promoted freedom of movement and equal rights for all. This guide is addressed to all the migrants who arrive in Italy. Our goal is to offer you information and support in cities and areas where we live to help make you independent and able to continue on the path you have chosen or you will choose in a self-organised way.”

Link:

English: [http://w2eu.info/tl\\_files/doc/Italy/GuideItaly2017EN\\_web.pdf](http://w2eu.info/tl_files/doc/Italy/GuideItaly2017EN_web.pdf)

### w2eu.info in countries of destination

Within last year – taking into consideration the incredible “long summer of migration” of 2015 – the “clicks” and requests on w2eu.info increased a lot and we started to update in particular the contact lists for the main destination countries of new coming people.

Especially for Germany where most of the people arrived, we provided updated information which was widely used in the reception centres and camps. In some places we also did mass-counselling for bigger groups of newcomers and understood again how important information is for empowerment and to break isolation.

A wide outreach we had with the information sheet „Deportations to Afghanistan - Information against the fear“ – especially into the Afghan communities. It was meant to counter the propaganda of fear and deterrence with information and solidarity. It was shared a lot via social media, but also in public events, teachers brought it into language courses and it was used by many counselling places in various cities.

Links:

Deportations to Afghanistan - Information against the fear:

<http://w2eu.info/germany.en/articles/germany-deportation-afghanistan.en.html>

Dublin III: What to do against Dublin-deportations:

<http://w2eu.info/germany.en/articles/germany-dublin2.en.html>

Asylum in Germany: <http://w2eu.info/germany.en/articles/asylum.html>

How to stop deportations:

<http://w2eu.info/germany.en/articles/germany-deportation.en.html>



## MOVING EUROPE A SUPPORT AND DOCUMENTATION PROJECT ALONG THE BALKAN ROUTE

**M**oving Europe has been a project that combined practical assistance on the route with critical analysis and publications against the EU border regime, in order to support the struggle for freedom of movement. It is an alliance between no border activists, people from various groups, and medico international. The foregoing groups and their activities (w2eu, bordermonitoring, and ffm), and medico shall be described separately.

The conditions along the Balkan Route have changed dramatically in the recent two years. We started in October 2015 at the Austrian-Slovenian border and supported people on the move providing them with independent information. Via Zagreb and Belgrade our group went to Idomeni at the Greek-Macedonian border, where we documented the deterioration of the situation and supported the ongoing protests. With the complete closure of the official corridor in March 2016, and the eviction of the self-organised camp in Idomeni in May 2016, we shifted our focus towards the area around Thessaloniki, where we documented the precarious conditions in the military-run camps.

On the *No Border Camp* in Thessaloniki in July 2016 we helped to organize a Balkanroute networking conference. After this we finished our continuous presence on the route. Lack of capacities came together with a lot of open questions concerning further strategies. Until November 2016 we nevertheless continued to collect, to compile and to distribute information for people on the move, mainly through the live feed of Welcome to Europe, which was renamed as Balkanroute Info (<https://live.w2eu.info>). We focussed on spreading updated information regarding the route, scandalising state violence – mainly about push-backs – and reporting on ongoing protests. We gave legal advice and information concerning the rights for family reunification and we produced two more film clips about the systematic delay. In Belgrade we supported local solidarity networks

and helped to establish a rest house for people on their way from Greece towards Austria. We gathered information about the situation in Hungary and Bulgaria, we participated in transnational networking meetings and we supported the Free Röszke 11 campaign. And just now – in the frame of the *We'll Come United* mobilization – we support to organize an info-tour with activists from Thessaloniki and Belgrade through eight cities in Germany to rediscuss our experiences and perspectives.

All the time we have had our focus particularly on supporting self-organising processes of refugees and the development of a “collective memory” of migrant struggles. This brochure is an outcome of our efforts, and it is as well an outcome of the networks that we have been part of.

The persistent determination of refugees and migrants made the historic breakthrough of the EU border regime in the Aegean Sea and in the Balkan Route possible. We are convinced that the everyday struggles of people on the move will shape the social reality on this central escape route to Europe in the future as well. At the moment it is still an open question whether and in which way Moving Europe will continue its work. Meanwhile several members left our group. But all of us, in various contexts, will definitely continue to stay on the side of those on the move and support their struggle for freedom of movement and the right to stay.

Moving Europe is a joint project of *bordermonitoring.eu*, *Welcome2Europe*, *Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration e.V.* and *medico international*. It is funded by individual donations.

- <http://moving-europe.org>
- <http://bordermonitoring.eu>
- <http://w2eu.info>
- <http://ffm-online.org>
- <http://medico.de>



## SOLIDARITY CITIES

In Germany we have seen the change from „welcome culture“ towards „culture of deportation“. In spring 2017, a McKinsey report has made the recommendation for 485 000 persons to be deported in 2017. These figures are definitely too high, due to continuous every day struggle of the people concerned. In the longer run, we think there will be rising numbers of Sans Papiers, and we think it is necessary to prepare for this. And yes, there are still 5 million people in Germany who have supported refugees and who are still carrying on. Solidarity City Network is an initiative of support for refugees, trying to politicize this welcome-culture and at the same time trying to switch from “national” to “communal” agendas for the radical left. The project takes the “Solidarity City” initiative from NOII-Toronto as a model, and we are trying to transpose this model to meet German circumstances in various places.

The basic parole for Solidarity Cities is “No Deportation”, and in some cities there are quite good structures to interfere with deportations. Alternative structures of stay are being developed. Two more paroles are “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell”, which means no racial profiling and nobody shall be asked to produce identification papers, and “Access without Fear”, which means that communal resources, schools, universities etc. shall be accessible for all without risk. Some sort of City-ID-Card for all inhabitants would be a desirable next step.

As NOII Toronto has shown to us, making a Solidarity City is a long process. One of the first things to do is supporting self organization of migrants\* and their communities, because communities are the main structures of support for illegalized migrants\*. There will also be campaigns about housing, and issues of urban labour market, as well as campaigns for access to culture and transportation, and these will be a processes where all people in town, regardless of residential status, can join. There will be alternative forms of habitation, work, and life. Our first aim is to develop Solidarity Cities from the grassroots level, and developing commons in a City for All. In the course of these struggles, the city councils may decide to tolerate residence of Sans Papiers, but this is only part of the process. In the long run we think there should be forms of Urban Citizenship that undermine the national determinations.

Meanwhile there are initiatives working in 15 Cities in Swiss and Germany, and soon there will be more. At the moment we feel that we could develop to be something like a movement, because we find allies a lot and support from various people.

We are dreaming that similar structures might develop along the Balkan route, in the cities of Athens, Thessaloniki, Sofia, Skopje, Belgrade, Budapest, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Graz, Vienna, and Munich. All these places may be lovely places to live there for everyone. After the summer of migrations, all these cities might turn to be Cities of hospitality.

Barcelona is planning to be a City of Refuge, and we also could imagine this model to be appropriate for quite a few cities of the Mediterranean. There is an initiative like this in Palermo, there are possibilities in Marseille, there are good comrades the lot in Athens and Thessaloniki. And yes, why not thinking about all these lovely cities along the North African coast. We visualize a struggle for Cities of Refuge around the Med. This would be the places of destination for ferries, and places of making the right to move and to stay anew.

And these Cities of Refuge and Cities of Solidarity might be places of alternative welcome, with migration not only directed towards the workfare of the North, but towards good life in the South as well. There might develop a Solidarity of the Med. And may be this spins over to the North. This is what we are dreaming of. We will support it as good as we can.

### Further Info:

- <http://toronto.nooneisillegal.org/demands>
- <http://solidarity-city.eu/>
- <http://ciutatrefugi.barcelona/en/plan>

### Charta of Palermo

- [It] [https://comune.palermo.it/js/server/uploads/\\_20032015172842.pdf](https://comune.palermo.it/js/server/uploads/_20032015172842.pdf)
- [En] [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/ICP/IDM/2015\\_CMC/Session-IIIb/Orlando/PDF-CARTA-DI-PALERMO-Statement.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/IDM/2015_CMC/Session-IIIb/Orlando/PDF-CARTA-DI-PALERMO-Statement.pdf)

# WATCHTHEMED ALARM PHONE INTERVENTION, DOCUMENTATION, NETWORKING – TOWARDS THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT!

A self-organized call centre as a 24/7 support structure. Carried by 150 activists with different backgrounds and from various cities all over Europe and beyond. Able to intervene in real-time to support migrants and refugees in distress at sea and seeking to create grassroots networks against the EU-border regime to empower the struggle for the right to move.

The WatchTheMed Alarm Phone is a transnational initiative that was launched in October 2014. In the following fragments we briefly describe the structure, the methods and the political approach of this hotline project. We include a chapter on the situation in the Aegean sea as one route which we follow, and we conclude the text by outlining the context and the conception of our daily solidarity practice for the freedom of movement. Finally we add the amazing story of Safinaz\* who contacted us from a boat in distress in September 2015 and who is living now with her whole family in Germany.

### What we do and who we are

- Up until October 2016, we received distress calls and calls for support from more than 1750 boats in the three regions of the Mediterranean Sea. Thereof, 1450 calls came from the Aegean (from boats between Turkey and the Greek islands and mainly during the long summer of migration), about 150 from the Central Mediterranean (predominantly from boats that had left from Libya), and about 150 from the Western Mediterranean (from boats that had embarked from Morocco, seeking to reach Spain).
- In general, we alert the European coastguards as well as civil society actors involved in Search and Rescue operations at sea, pass on current GPS positions, and ‘accompany’ and support the ‘boat-people’ until arrival or rescue. Monitoring whether coastguards respond to distress calls, and potentially denouncing their inaction, is one of our central tasks. An important part of our work also consists of charging the satellite phones of the boat-people with credit, as well as calming them down and encouraging them in desperate situations.
- Our 30 teams are on alert every day around-the-clock, organised into three shifts. Our work follows collectively developed emergency protocols: our alarm plans for the different regions describe in detail who is to be contacted and what needs to be asked when speaking to boat-people. When dealing with emergency cases, we also make use of vessel-tracking websites and weather services.
- From Tangier, Tunis or Izmir, from Barcelona, Marseille or Palermo, from Zurich, Amsterdam or Berlin: By now, our

network consists of close to 150 activists who are situated in many cities throughout Europe, Turkey and North Africa. Some amongst us had to themselves experience what it means to cross the Mediterranean on a small boat. Most of the Alarm Phone activists are part of shift-teams, and many also contribute by doing background research, by distributing and circulating the Alarm Phone number, and by doing translations.

- The central desire of our project is to directly and immediately support people in distress at sea. At the same time, we connect our interventions in real-time with critical forms of documentation and public engagements in order to struggle against migration control and the deadly EU border regime. We demand ferries instead of Frontex to finally end the calculated mass dying in the Mediterranean. For us, the right to the freedom of movement is intimately tied to broader struggles for global social justice.
- To this effect, we engage in collaborations with local grassroots projects on both sides of the Mediterranean and support self-organisations of refugees and migrants in transit on the respective routes.

### Aegean Sea: Following the EU-Turkey Deal and the closure of the Balkan Route

The EU-Turkey deal has led, since the 20th of March 2016, to increased controls and interceptions of boats on the Turkish side of the border. Moreover, those who are still able to make it to the Greek islands are prevented from moving on to mainland Greece. Following 25 days in detention and fast-track procedures in the so-called ‘hotspot’ camps, people are supposed to be deported to Turkey, a ‘safe third country’.

From January till August 2017, only 4.000 people in the whole arrived on Lesbos’ island, in the whole Aegean it have been 12.000 crossings – and thus our contacts to boats in the Aegean have reduced. Nevertheless we are still regularly contacted by people on boats in distress also in the Aegean Sea. In these direct contacts we witnessed a massive and painful roll-back that changed the face of Lesbos and many other islands in the Aegean Sea. Those who finally make it across the sea report, that they had to attempt it several times until they made it. Today’s crossings are prepared again in a completely clandestine fashion. Nothing is visible anymore, which means also that sea crossing are – compared to 2015 - becoming increasingly dangerous.



## THE STORY OF SAFINAZ\*

In the first week of September 2015, our shift teams were involved in 62 emergency situations in the Aegean Sea. On one of the many rubber boats sat Safinaz with her husband and dozens of other travellers from Syria. All of a sudden, their small engine failed them, and they were adrift in Turkish waters. Panic broke out, many were unable to swim and thought they would die. Some were in so much panic that they wanted to, somehow, return to Turkey, but most were set on reaching Lesbos Island. While waiting for the departure of their boat, Safinaz had neither slept, nor eaten, and now on the unstable boat with waves coming in, she felt sick. But she took her phone out, thinking about ways to reach out for help. A fellow traveller had written a phone number onto his arm and while nobody really knew what this number was about, Safinaz dialled it, and this is how she reached the Alarm Phone.

In our first anniversary brochure, we showed some of the WhatsApp distress messages from Safinaz that had reached our shift team member Berta\*. They stayed in touch, also after Safinaz had reached Lesbos safely, and we could thus follow her migration trajectory throughout Europe - via the Balkans to Germany. Nearly two years after our first exchange on WhatsApp, Berta and another friend from Alarm Phone drove to a small town in northern Hessen to visit her. When she opened her door to us, we also met her two children, who had only recently come to Germany from Damascus, through family reunification. They had been apart for one and a half years.

In fluent German, Safinaz recounted their experiences on that day, the 2nd of September 2015, when she feared for their lives. She said, if she had known how it would turn out to be, she would not have migrated in this way. Several attempts to cross the Aegean Sea had failed, and when the engine broke down still in Turkish waters, it seemed that they would have to try it once more – if they survived. She said that knowing that Berta was following their distress case, and thus knowing to be seen and heard, was encouraging and relieving. At some point the engine reignited and the Greek coastguards that we had alerted after the boat entered Greek waters did not need to intervene – the boat reached Lesbos independently and landed on a beach in the north of the island – like hundreds of other boats around that time. In Turkey, Safinaz and her husband had 'adopted' a Syrian boy, promising his parents to bring him safely to Germany to his uncle and the three of them were stuck on the Greek island for about two weeks. During that time, thousands of travellers reached the island, and tens of thousands had to stand in line in the scorching sun for days waiting for their registration, with tensions running high and fights breaking out frequently.

The three made it to Athens, and took some days to rest. Only a few days earlier, thousands of travellers had left the Keleti train station in Budapest and had launched the March of Hope, which opened the Balkan corridor and thereby cleared the path also for Safinaz. They made it to Hungary, just in time before the fence was put up, and swiftly moved on to Vienna. They decided to go to Hamburg – a place they had heard good things about – but on their way the police stopped them and they were sent to Beberbeck, a district of the small German town Hofgeismar in Hessen. She felt welcome, but struggled to find reception for her phone, so that she could reach out to her family in Syria. Back then, she told Berta via WhatsApp: 'This place is suitable for horses .. cows .. not for human beings'. But at least it was a quiet place to rest, after their strenuous journey, where she could take up her great passion again. Safinaz is an artist and designer, who draws impressionist paintings and makes sculptures from whatever material she can find. After moving to northern Hessen, she offered art courses to refugees and she is currently working toward an exhibition of her work. In the living room we see her painting of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, one of the oldest mosques in the world.

Before we leave, we promise to meet soon again. She agrees to be filmed for a video clip, in which she tells her story and encourages those who are still on their way to stay strong, to keep struggling. She asks us to send her some questions, so that she can prepare what to say in German. But the video is meant for travellers and travellers to be, so we ask her to speak in Arabic. She laughs and says, 'in that case, I don't need to prepare, I know exactly what I want to tell them'.

\* Name changed

## **More Push-backs exist again but violence is not (yet) systematic**

Nevertheless it is not like before 2015, when everybody who went near the beaches in Lesbos at night was in high risk to be criminalised. Still some NGOs remained on the spots, who observe the shores. Still volunteers gather and there is a shrinking but still lively observation on what happens at the sea. And also some local people still remain alerted – not only on Lesbos, but also on other Aegean islands. Maybe this is the main reason, why push-backs by the Greek coastguard and by Frontex still remain more exceptional and there is not (yet) a come-back of the old practice of daily push-backs using brutal methods and even torture.

### **The following case-report illustrates also recent conditions**

It was on Friday the 21st of July 2017, at 5.03am, when the Alarm Phone shift team was alerted to a group of 26 travellers, amongst them 2 children and a pregnant woman. We received a GPS-position, showing that they had reached Greek territorial waters. Not even one hour later we have been informed, that the Greek coastguards were trying to return the boat to Turkey. A video showed the boat of the coastguards circling around the travellers, creating waves which resulted in water entering the boat. The next day we managed to recontact the travellers. They reported that the coastguards had been very offensive by creating big waves that caused their boat to rock left and right. On the coastguard vessel, men were wearing black and carrying weapons. Water started coming into the boat and the passengers started panicking. Although they pleaded with the Greek coastguards, declaring that they had a sick child with them who needed medical treatment, the Greek coastguards insisted on sending them back to Turkey. Fearing for their lives and those of the children they had on board, including a paralyzed child and an 8-months-old baby, they went back to the Turkish coast where the Turkish police showed up to pick them up. Apart from the boat of the Greek coastguards, the travellers informed us that another boat with a Greek, French, Croatian and German flag painted on it was present during the pushback without intervening.

In their statement following this incident the Greek coastguard obviously lied. They declared that the boat of the refugees was still in Turkish waters when they arrived. According to the position we received they had entered already Greek waters. They declared that they just observed the boat and did not touch it. The video shows the Greek Coastguard boat approaching them and creating waves to scare them. And finally they state that a Frontex-vessel was also present at the spot.

This case shows that these violent practices still exist – and it shows in the same moment the obstacles the authorities face, when they continue to use these kind of methods. Different from the years before 2015 many more refugees know about the importance of documentation. In this case it did not help them directly, but they immediately documented and commented the scenery and sent it out to the world. Different from the years

before 2015 they found people to accompany them at sea. Still some of the monitoring groups of Syrian and Iraqi communities exist and do their best to empower the travellers. Finally there are groups like our Alarm Phone, ready to make public.

The reduced level of violence used against refugees at sea in the Aegean is a clear result of the remaining presence. In times of militarization our presence is more than needed, especially when the bigger NGOs turn away from these spots. Sea-Watch has fortunately decided to restart its activities in summer 2017 and returned with a “Monitoring Mission Aegean” to observe and document the massive impact of the EU-Turkey-Deal on human rights and its violations. Many others decided as well not to leave.

### **Solidarity on Transit Routes – Create everyday support structures!**

The stubbornness of flight and migration movements enabled the historic resistance against the EU border regime in the Aegean and on the Balkan Route in 2015. It is crucial to keep this truth within the collective memory of migration struggles, also in order to resist the racist repercussions that we see unfolding throughout Europe. From Turkey via the Balkans up until Germany or Scandinavia, but also from South-Italy via France, or from Morocco via Spain to Calais or Malmo: everywhere new support structures have emerged or been reinforced. Aren't, in the end, these growing everyday support structures, for and with those affected and resisting, the most sustainable answer to a racist mainstream which continues to rapidly spread toxic discourses in Europe?

We understand the Alarm Phone as a concrete enactment of solidarity with those in transit, as part of what has come to be called the ‘underground railroad’ of flight-movements. We see ourselves as a transnational and multilingual node with varied connections to a growing network amongst those struggling for the freedom of movement.

“If only there were legal and safe migration routes, nobody would have to die at sea. The dying at sea is not a natural catastrophe and also no accident. It is, in fact, the calculated outcome of the EU border and visa regime. The dying at sea is human-made and already tomorrow, through the opening of borders and free access to ferries, it could fade into history as a dark chapter. The long summer of migration in the Balkans has demonstrated that once borders are open, there are no ‘smugglers’ anymore. One pays high sums and takes dangerous paths only when one is forced to do so by Frontex and co. A world without borders is possible and both Frontex and the ‘smugglers’ would then have disappeared”.

<https://alarmphone.org>



The charitable association bordermonitoring.eu e.V. was established in Munich in 2011. The focus of the association's work is on the debate about the politics, practices and events surrounding the European border regime and about migration movements.

To this end the association combines scientific research, political commitment and critical relations activities with concrete support for refugees and migrants. In this way the association contributes towards a change in the realities at the borders and in their consequences for European society. Currently, bordermonitoring.eu related projects are focusing on Bulgaria, Hungary, Turkey (Harek(et)Act) and the Balkans.

<http://bordermonitoring.eu>



Idomeni 2015 | Moving Europe

*What do we want to achieve with this blog?*

We aim to contribute to a critical and analytical knowledge production concerning the question of migration in general, with a focus on the case of Turkey in particular. Hence, this blog should serve as a collective platform to monitor, increase and share various debates and information on migration, asylum and border issues primarily in Turkey, and secondarily on the general European context as far as it is connected to Turkey. Thus, by creating a network among researchers, activists, journalists and other people who are involved in these issues, we aim to provide an accessible, reliable and critical source that elaborates on struggles, practices and discussions of migration related to Turkey.

*What is our background and who are our partners involved in the project?*

This blog is initiated by a network of researchers, activists and artists from Turkey, Austria and Germany and it keeps a close contact with certain groups and organizations in the migration field such as kritnet (Network for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies), GAR (Migration Researchers' Platform), Mülteci-Der, borderline-europe and bordermonitoring.eu.

*Who do we want to address?*

The texts published in this blog could reach whoever is concerned with migration, asylum and border issues in and around Turkey, most particularly migrants, activists, researchers, NGOs as well as journalists and a broad public interested in the issue of critically observing, questioning and altering the current migration regime.

*What are our common values?*

Any text, (or comment) involved in this blog should commit to using a non-discriminatory, non-sexist, and anti-racist language, and to providing reliable information and critical analyses.

*What texts do we publish?*

Both academic and non-academic texts, research or opinion pieces, policy briefs, news on current events and reports from the field that are short, concise and supported with reliable information. Furthermore, we will provide internet links to other platforms having similar perspectives.



**FFM**e.V. was founded in 1994. We have done research and publications regarding the situation of refugees in the periphery of EU, especially regarding the external borders of EU and situation in refugee camps. We principally respect any reason for flight and migration. Our focus is the interests and right of migrants, and a critical view on policies and border regimes. We support self-organisation of refugees on a transnational level.

The publications of the years 1995 – 2005 can be seen under <http://ffm-berlin.de/publchron>. Until 2002, the main focus of research was the making of borders in Eastern Europe. Since 2002, migrations and the fortification of borders in the Mediterranean were in the focus.

Since 2012 our focus is documentation out of press- and journal articles which follow the main routes of migrations. In 2015 and 2016, the Balkan Route was main focus. The collection was an important source for the Moving Europe publication about the Summer of Migrations. In the last months, the Med is in the focus again.

The adress now is <http://ffm-online.org>.

For over 45 years the aid and human rights organisation medico international has fought for social change. In solidarity with socially excluded and marginalised people in the global South, medico works to promote good living conditions for people which maximise health and social justice. The goal is not merely to reduce poverty, want and violence, but to identify and overcome their causes. The problem in the world is not too little aid, but rather the conditions that make more and more aid necessary.

For medico, aid is part of comprehensive political action in solidarity. Our efforts to support emancipatory processes are made in the awareness of the ambivalent consequences of aid. We operate on the maxim 'Defend, criticise and overcome aid'. The core issue is cooperation in partnership with actors in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Rather than exporting aid materials, staff or projects, we support local structures and initiatives. Our partners are not passive recipients of aid – instead, they are competent actors, themselves organising aid in the struggle for better living conditions and fighting for the human right to health.



Idomeni 2015 | Moving Europe

## FIGHTING FOR RIGHT TO STAY & FOR SOCIAL RIGHTS

Action Days  
2. – 9.9.2017

Antiracist  
PARADE +  
commUNITY  
CARNIVAL

BERLIN  
16.9.2017

PREPARATION  
CAMP

11:00 Ministry of  
Interior

PARADE  
13:00 Ministry  
of Interior to  
Oranienplatz

<http://welcome-united.org>

We won't get used to what is happening right before our eyes and what is declared as normal: The situation is not getting better. Suffering and death are no exceptions anymore. They shape the daily lives of all those who still do not belong to this country and of those who still seek to come here. People are being insulted, spat on and beaten. The solidarity of hundreds of thousands is mistreated and stamped on. We are looked at with a lot of suspicion. They build fences to prevent us from entering. They deport us to make us disappear. But we are here. We will stay. We have our hopes. We have our dreams. We live. Welcome united.

### The memory is fresher than ever

We will not give up. We remember the summer of 2015. Hundreds of thousands opened Europe's borders. No one could stop them because they didn't let anyone stop them. They just began to walk. They started moving in order to arrive somewhere. From the train station in Budapest to the Austrian border. Freedom of movement did not remain a demand anymore. The movement took its freedom. For the right to have rights, for the right to presence, to protection, to help and to a future. The "march of hope" remains an unforgettable event in the long history of struggles for the right to escape and migrate.

Still today, we are many. We are still here, and maybe our number even grew. Day in day out, we seek to resist the injustice of the current order. The small and the large protests have become part of our lives. The hopes of 2015 have not yet been suffocated. These hopes have found expression in the acts of solidarity of thousands of people in Germany and Europe. We continue to fight for the refugees' and migrants' right to presence, and also for the right to our presence. We provide everyday support. We protest state persecution and deportation. We rise up against the new right-wing populism and old forms of fascism. We are here and we stand with those who came. We are the ones who arrived. Welcome united!

### From solidarity to politics!

Existing migration policies have to change – this is non-negotiable. This is and will remain the central position from which we conduct our political work. And this goes out to all politicians:

### FOR THE RIGHT TO LEAVE AND TO COME: STOP THE DYING!

The dying in the Mediterranean Sea has to stop. Now. Immediately. There's nothing to discuss about that. We refuse to accept the normalization of death and suffering at this murderous border: Who drowns is being killed! The deaths of thousands could end already tomorrow if people could board a plane or a ferry to Europe. But

instead the oppressors persecute those who help and support. We demand a reversal of Europe's migration policies! For safe passages, freedom of movement and a welcoming Europe!

#### **FOR THE RIGHT TO STAY: STOP THE FEAR!**

Over the past few years, hundreds of thousands have made it to Germany. But hundreds of thousands still don't know if they can stay. Without the right to stay they still encounter fear, insecurity and uncertainty instead of being able to start and to create a future. This also includes that we as women don't have to experience discrimination and violence any longer. Or that the countless families who were torn apart can live together again. We call for a clear stance of all those taking part in the political decision making process: an unconditional right to remain and an end to deportations – now! All those who are here, are from here, and will stay!

#### **FOR THE RIGHT TO SOLIDARITY: BREAK THE SILENCE!**

The law differentiates between different countries of origin and classifies us accordingly: those with a good and those with a bad perspective of staying. Countries are constructed as safe, unsafe or half-safe. The ones affected the most by this exclusion, members of minority groups such as Roma or people who don't fit the norms of society, are left to stay in a waiting loop of non-approval. We demand the extension of a solidarity which doesn't make any divide based on ones origin.

#### **FOR THE RIGHT TO EQUAL RIGHTS: STOP RACISM!**

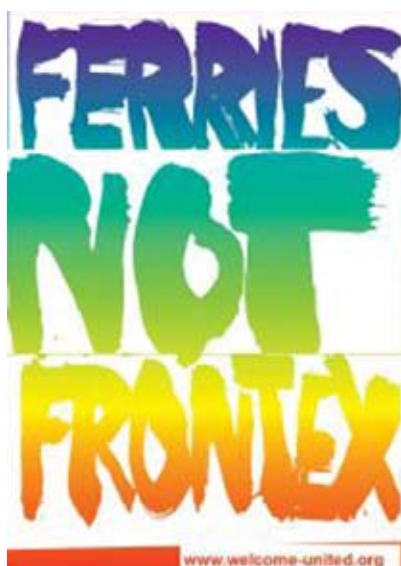
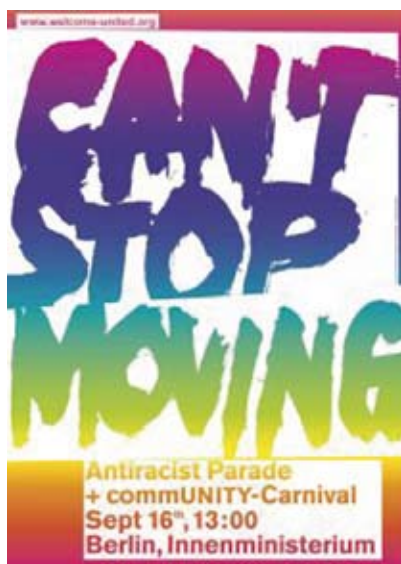
For hundreds of years now, and not only for the past two years, our society has always consisted of a diverse multiplicity. Who actually still lives where their ancestors were born and who actually still works at their place residence? People have always been coming. People have always been leaving. There is no justification for unequal rights. Whether you are from Syria, Greece, Macedonia, Nigeria, Morocco or Baden-Württemberg. Whether it's about the right to housing, education, work, mobility or the right to health care. Social and political rights exist for all those who are here. Without exceptions and from the very start.

#### **FOR THE RIGHT TO STAY: LET'S PUT AN END TO GLOBAL INJUSTICE!**

For hundreds of years, some countries have robbed other countries' resources. Slave trade, natural resources, appalling labor







and corrupt governments. The wealth of the west is built upon exclusion and exploitation. Europe continues to export a rampant predatory capitalism which kills every day. People escape to Europe because they are left with nothing and want to save their lives. We demand equal rights for all. Everyone has the right to physical integrity, to happiness and a future – everywhere in this world and not only in the west. Nobody wants to have to escape.

### Our voices count!

A week ahead of the general elections, we want to show our face. All of us, united on the streets of Berlin. We want to create spaces for all those voices and stories that are usually not heard or that are supposed to remain unheard. These stories remain hardly audible, even in this current 'electoral campaign for social justice', not least as many still do not have the right to vote. We say: Welcome United!

When we take to the streets, we want to be many. Everyone who cares about the common good and solidarity should come out. Everyone who can no longer bear that people are forced to stay in miserable conditions or left to suffer and die at Europe's borders, should come out. We know well that many have fought for years for their future. Now is the time to raise our voices together. We are more than we think! We'll come United!

That's why we call for decentralized actions and local meetings around the anniversary of the march of hope, starting from the 2nd of September 2017 – in your city, your village, your district. Be creative!

We call for a national demonstration on the 16th of September in Berlin – come and join a large parade struggling for societal participation, equal rights, and solidarity. Welcome united! We'll come United!

Aktionsbündnis gegen Abschiebung Rhein-Main / Alle bleiben! / Antira\_K / Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat / borderline-europe / Boza Tracks / bundeskoordination internationalismus (buko) / Bündnis gegen Abschiebungen Münster / Bündnis gegen Rassismus Berlin / Café Exil Hamburg / Caravane Munich / Club Al Hakawati / CommUNITY Carnival / Corasol / Daily Resistance - Media Group opplatz.net / Flüchtlingsrat Hamburg / Glasmoorgruppe Hamburg / GRIPS Theater / Gruppe "ausbrechen" Paderborn / Institut für Theologie und Politik Münster / Interventionistische Linke – IL / Kein Mensch ist Illegal Darmstadt / Lübecker Flüchtlingsforum e.V. / medico international / NAFS (Neue Alternative für Flüchtlinge und Solidarität) / Nijinski Arts Internacional e.V / No one is illegal Hanau / No Stress Tour / Noborder Darmstadt / Ökumenische BAG Asyl in der Kirche (German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum) / Recht auf Stadt – Never mind the papers! Hamburg / Refugees for Change Rhein- Main / Refugees4Refugees Stuttgart / Roma Center Göttingen / Sächsischer Flüchtlingsrat / Solizentrum Lübeck / Stop Deportation Group / URBB (Union des Réfugiés de Berlin Brandebourg) / Watch the Med Alarmphone / Welcome Refugees Café Darmstadt / Welcome to Europe / welcome2stay / Women in Exile / Youth Without Borders



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**'Balkan Route'**