

solidarnost je naša snaga

Harassment and attacks on refugees in a park near the Faculty of Economics by the Police and officials of the Commissariat for Refugees of Serbia

August 13th and 14th 2016

On August 13th 2016, after several days of verbal persuasion of refugees from the park in front of the Faculty of Economics by officials of the Commissariat for Refugees of Serbia that they "must" go to a refugee camp in Krnjača, there was a forcible removal of refugees from park to Krnjača.

During the day I walked through the park and saw the usual situation, several dozens of refugees were resting in the park. When I was back around 7.30pm and passed through the park, I noticed that there was no refugees. I also noticed a larger group of police officers and officials of the Commissariat for Refugees, as well as people in civilian clothes who were probably plainclothes police officers and some civil servants.

From the volunteers that I met in the park, I learned that at 7pm buses arrived in front of the park and that the police and officials of the Commissariat began forcing the refugees on the buses that will take them in Krnjača. These were regular buses, which were coming in previous days at 7pm and drive refugees to Krnjača camp, but refugees were able to choose whether they want to go or to stay in the park. This time there was no choice. They were told that they had to leave or they would be arrested and deported from Serbia. Those who refused to go, were by physical force pushed into the buses.



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On August 14th 2016 in a park near the Faculty of Economics protest was organized with motto "Parks are for everyone." The protest was organized by groups and volunteers who are helping refugees. There were about 60-70 people and approximately 150 refugees who have returned from Krnjača. About 10-15 policemen stood aside and watched.

In a talk with the refugees, I heard the details of the events of the previous day. They told me that the police beat them with batons, they were not allowed to pick up their belongings. One guy from Afghanistan told me that police didn't let him to pick up his laundry which was dried on the fence in the park. Another told me that policeman snatched from his hands two blankets and threw them. He was very sad about it, the blankets had great value for him. From a volunteer, I heard that one of the officers of the Commissariat, approach a group of refugees who ate from one large bowl, threw the dirt into food because they did not want to move.

Few of them mentioned a man who works for the Commissariat and that he beat them, they keep repeating "very bad man ...". At one point they saw him and showed him to me. It was Goran Ristic, an official of the Commissariat who was already known for his mistreatment of refugees. The refugees on that day walk from Krnjača walk to park. Some have told me that it took 6 hours because they did not know the way. I asked them how are the conditions in Krnjača, they told me that when they arrived, there was no room for all, that they were then sent to the room in which there were 10 beds, and there was 30 of them in the room. There was only few blankets. They were in the camp until 11am and start walking back to Park. Until that time they still didn't get any food.

And over the next few days, a larger groups of police officers, plainclothes police, officers of the Commissariat came to the park. When they occur, the refugees would moved to the nearby streets, until they leave. Few times I saw members of the Gendarmerie in the Park. Many times I have photographed their presence in the park and every time, someone of them, mostly men in civilian clothes, who I assume that they are the police officers in plain clothes, photographed me.

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