

solidarnost je naša snaga

Visiting Reception Center for war refugees in Preševo

Preševo, November 27, 2015.

Women in Black (Violeta Đikanović) and Women for Peace activists from Leskovac (Milka Rosić) visited Reception Center for war refugees from Middle East in Preševo on November 27th, 2015.

The trip was slowed down by a very rainy day and there were works on Leskovac-Vranje direction, on Koridor 10, so the situation could have been considered as an emergency. The police were visibly nervous and ready to write tickets, while redirecting us to side routes. They informed me that one part of the highway is opening and that the visit of Serbia's Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić was announced. The trip to Preševo lasted unusually long.

Arrival to the Reception Center was shocking. The street where refugees, humanitarian workers and Commissariat were, usually would be full of people, children, buses... We found the street deserted, with few refugees, mostly women and children and much less police.

There was only one bus parked in front of the point of REMAR humanitarian organization with whom we have been working. It was waiting to be filled with passengers and be on its way to Šid located at the border with Croatia. The REMAR point was completely empty. Improvized kitchen was removed, there was none of their activists to give us any kind of information. There were only two tents.

I phoned Zorana Parezanović, Atina NGO activists who then met us after ten minutes. She told us that the situation in Preševo is terrible, that Remar was forbidden to distribute cooked food, that they left the place and that she didn't see them since morning and that she didn't know where their activists were. By this time around 500 refugees had entered the country and a 1000 more were expected to arrive during the day.

UNHCR buses still drive for free from Miratovac to Preševo. That 2 km distance from the border to the village the refugees are crossing by foot. They get registered in Preševo, even though none of the NGO's and international volunteers have the access to the Registration Center. The procedure to enter the Center is following: first you have to write a request to Commissariat for refugees, then they reply that they have no authorization and they direct you to the Ministry, then the Ministry replies that they are not authorized either and send you to Commissariat. The point of this is for the applicants to give up. Those who would be witnesses of what the government is doing do not have the access to the Center for registration of refugees. We also found out that the bus tickets for children under 6 have been charged 35 euros each since last week, even though they were free before. Train ticket



solidarnost je naša snaga

is half the price but there are only two lines to Šid, so some refugees travel to Niš and then continue to Šid via Belgrade. Zorana told us that one Syrian woman with six children spent two days at the train station because she didn't have money for the trip. Zorana's activists organized themselves and paid the trip to Šid for her.

She told us a story about five boys, minors, who traveled from Syria by themselves. One of them got stomach ache and had a surgery in Niš. His friends were waiting for him for days on the street. The Social Work Center was not interested in that story and it wasn't until the activists of Atina engaged in this issue that the Center reacted.

The European volunteers have moved to Miratovac because of the incorrect relation towards them by the Commissariat. Zorana told us to take the humanitarian aid that we have brought, mostly food, to their point in Miratovac. So we went with her to Miratovac and arrived just when new refugees arrived. It was a very sad scene to see them walking up the hill to the first point where hot tea and biscuits were waiting for them. They were very grateful for these offers, which you could tell by the smiles on their tired faces.

It was raining the whole time...



Reported by: Violeta Đikanović