

# solidarnost je naša snaga

## Doors of apartheid

### *Diary from the border crossing Serbia – Hungary*

**Monday, September 14th, 2015.**

Only one day after I returned from Vrnjačka Banja from the meeting of the Network of Women in Black, suddenly Nataša D. called me, she is an activist from *No Border* collective and she asked if I wanted to go with her to the border, that Sara (*No border* activist) would wait for us there. Without much thinking I said I will go.

Natasha told me that she will book us a train ticket from Belgrade to Subotica and that I should be at half past eight in the evening at the station. She asked me to bring two megaphones and several banners, and at the end of the conversation she told me that just in case I should bring my passport.

I stopped my sewing and began to plan what to bring, thinking I would not need a lot of things because I assumed that we will be there not more than a day or two.

In a hurry, I went to buy some food for the road and to take megaphones and banners from the van next to the building of Ana V. in Pancevo. I was very tense because I did not have much time before the train departure and I was afraid that I will not be able to do everything.

Around half past eight in the evening I met with Natasa at the cafe near the railway station. With her was her friend who was cheering us the whole time, but also warned us that if there are any conflicts between the people and the fascist police, to stand on the side and be sure to wear scarves around our mouth in case of tear gas.

It was around 9:35 (evening time) and a train that was going to Budapest was supposed to start at 9:40. We come next to the train and we went to the other wagon, but saw Natasa's friend knocked on the window and gestured to get out of the wagon. We quickly ran out because we have not settled. When we went out, she told us to go into the first wagon because she saw that there is the place where refugees entered. At the door of the wagon there were two conductors. One of them was puzzled and surprised that we want to get into the wagon. He told us: "Do not go here, here are those who stink," and we told him: "Well we want to get into this wagon, to be with the ones that stink!" And of course, we went without question!

In the wagon, there were no "regular" travelers; there were about a dozen refugees. Passing through the carriage I saw a woman lying with a small child on the floor, exhausted from harassment and walking, they could not sleep while sitting in chairs.

I saw a baby sleeping peacefully, wrapped in a blanket on a chair while her mother and sister were lying underneath a chair.

In the wagon there was also the men who slept sitting, huddled on the seats, and one guy was sleeping curled up on the floor. On the other side of the wagon like a sad scene, men and women were trying to sleep, not paying attention to us.

One woman sat in a chair with her head bowed, holding her head with her hands, looking all the time at one imaginary dot. She seemed depressed and anxious while her son was lying next to her feet on the floor, only his foot was sticking out from between the seats.

When the conductors entered, they asked us to review our tickets and said we had to go back, because on our tickets said *Wagon 2* or that we have to pay 3 euro if we want to be in the first wagon. I rudely answered that I would not switch to the other wagon and that we will not give him 3 Euros. Miraculously conductor relented and said in a low voice that the other conductor talks in Hungarian language and that we can stay where we are, that they will not charge us, but we should keep quiet and we should not "interfere". We were confused as he left us, and on the other hand we were not sure what he meant by that?

The conductors went on the wagon and told everybody (in Serbian) that they must give 3 Euros, or to go out! They did not tell them that they can go to another wagon.

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After the conductors went out, I went into the hallway, through the doorway and I saw "ordinary" passengers who safely stand on the other side of the door. Smoking, talking, laughing, not knowing what was happening on the other side of the door. And there were people who did not feel joy and laughter, confused and tired lying on the floor of the wagon. Their faces shone out only weariness and sorrow ... I had the impression that these people are condemned to something terrible, it was like watching people who were loaded into a wagon traveling to a concentration camp.

In the dark lobby of wagon, a man joined me offering me a cigarette, he said his name was Omar and he was from Iran, that he arrived from Presevo. He told us that the police took him back halfway from Presevo to Belgrade with the whole bus to Presevo again, because in the bus no one had paper for asylum. He told me that he wanted to get to England because his mother lives there.

I gave him the paper (sheet) on which was information and advice about seeking asylum. It said about how much fees and hostel/hotel in Belgrade costs, a warning not to fall for the threats to the police and do not give them money in the case of "illegal" border crossing, to document any attack or discrimination. Then, how much can they be in Serbia when they receive asylum card and how/what transport can reach the refugee center, where they are all located in Serbia ... Natasha was involved in the conversation and she tried to explain to him what he should do when he arrives in Subotica given that the Hungarian authorities announced that after midnight (on 15 September) they will close the border.

Natasha told me that Sara is waiting for us in Backa Topola and we'll go out there and that she will take some food and stuff for Omar. We took his phone number so he can keep us informed of what is happening in Subotica and let us know if he arrives at the border before us.

When we arrived at our station, the train stopped, I pressed the green button to open the door, and in front of the station stood Sara. I pressed the button to open the door, but the door did not want to open?! I was totally confused, we tried to open the wagon doors, it didn't work, so we moved to the other wagon because we saw that there people go out there. Neither door did not want to open! We realized that we are trapped and conductors locked all the doors so the refugees would not be able to exit the train, nor to cross to the other wagon! We were trapped in the wagon together with all these people! The conductors were systematically locking the wagon and exit doors to isolate refugees from other passengers!

I started yelling to Sara through the door that we are locked in a wagon and to inform all what's happening here is apartheid!!! Sara called the woman who worked at the station and she tried to open the outer side of the door, but she couldn't do it. Then she entered the wagon up to us to open the door on that side and she could not, she called the conductor. When he arrived, he took a key and unlocked the door for us! It was proof that everybody in the wagon was locked!

We ran out of the train, Sara quickly smuggled a bag for Omar that she made for him. The train left. We were alone at the station, in the dark, amazed at what happened to us, not knowing that this is just the beginning.

## **Tuesday, September 15th, 2015.**

When we got up, we went by a car to the border, the crossing of Backi Vinogradi.

The first thing we saw from the car, was the police and the army standing at the border crossing. Policemen and policewomen stood at the border dressed in dark blue uniforms with red berets. The soldiers were in camouflage uniforms, with the rifles in their hands.

Beside them behind the bushes along the wire fence sat a family with small children.

Between the police and them was a red line which separated them from those in uniform with guns on the other side who were setting the limits.

Soon, after a few minutes, from the nearby fields in the distance, we saw a group of people approaching us. It was a group of refugees of about sixty people from Syria. People were with small children and pregnant women, without water and food!

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A woman who was seven months pregnant, separated from the group, approached a police officer at the border and knelt on her knees. She clutched her hands fixed on the officer and said: „Please, let me go!“

The woman begged the policeman to let her pass the border. A policeman stood still with folded hands, not wanting even to look at her. The woman was no longer able to walk, she was afraid she might lose the baby.

People gathered around the police, trying to persuade them to let them go. During this time, Natasha and Sara ran to the car to take banners and megaphones. During this time at the border crossing the van arrived. Soon they took out the equipment to set up barricades. First they spread the barbed wire, and then in the second row behind the wire they put metal bars. Everything was done instantly.

All men sat down in the middle of road in front of the guide wire, one from the group yelled: *“This is a shame of humanity”*.

We opened the banners:

TERROR AGAINST MIGRANTS MUST STOP!

OPEN THE BORDER!

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT!

NO ONE IS ILLEGAL!

SAVE PEOPLE, NO BORDERS ...

Natasha began to shout slogans. Suddenly, to my surprise, people have spontaneously started to come to us, looking at the banners and shouting slogans.

I've never seen a group of people who without restrains approached and joined the protest. Some of them understand what we were saying and what we yell, and others did not, but I think it didn't matter to them. It was not necessary to understand the words in Serbian, English or Hungarian. It was all clear even without saying a word.

I had the impression that they are part of us, we were part of them, as if we all came together here with one clear goal.

During this time the children were scuttled around us, taking the megaphones from us and shouting the slogans in Arabic. Later, they explained to us that they were saying: „Come on, come on!“

While I was watching the people sitting next to the border, a boy I was often approached by asked me for a megaphone to play with it. After some time his father came and explained to him in Arabic to thank me and he should go with him. The boy came up to me and hugged me and kissed me on the cheek.

We put banners on the barbed wire that separated us from them.

Sarah and Natasha were quickly left by the car, and came back in twenty minutes with three crates full of apples. Pregnant woman took a few apples and gave them to the police over the barbed wire, they refused to take an apple.

In the meantime, news crews were coming, the people who wanted to cross the border with the car. All of them were send back to different checkpoints, no one could cross the border.

After an hour or two, the police came from the Serbian side and disperse people from the border. The desperate and disappointed people were again sent away without knowing what awaits them next.

The husband of a woman who was pregnant came up to me and said that if anything happens to his partner if she loses a baby, that this will not end well. I saw anger and despair in his eyes. It was a look of desperate human, who after all he had lived, after this humiliation of human dignity, was ready to do anything.

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A man with a small child who has fallen asleep, asked me to give him a banner to put the boy, so he can sleep on in it, and not on the ground.

Nataša was putting stickers all over the border crossing which said "BORDERS KILL". The police wanted to arrest her but Sara managed to calm the situation in Hungarian and defend Nataša.

After that we went to the Horgoš 2 border crossing. It was already dark. The situation there was even more dramatic. There were around 5000 people there who were surrounding the border and the field which led towards the Horgoš 1 border crossing.

People were lying around in silver and golden foil so they could "warm themselves up" during the night. The night was silent with a terrifying scene of people who were wrapped up in foil, lying on the concrete... The night was freezing!!!

People told us that - that day the police and the army fired rubber bullets at them. There were many people at the Horgoš 2 border crossing that night. One woman in the crowd was about to collapse to the ground and the people were holding her not to fall. Her face looked exhausted from all the walking and her look was distraught. The Doctors Without Limits came to her help and took her away from the crowd. Later I saw that woman giving birth on the side of the road, behind a car.



The barbed wire was also set along the border with bars and police behind it. Some of them had masks over their faces, holding gas spray in their hands.

There we came across an organized protest. It was organized by a brave young man from Afghanistan who was with a friend who had no legs, sitting in a scrappy wheelchair!

The protest lasted well into the night. People were holding transparents with us and one of them took our megaphone and yelled in it the whole time. We gave them the other megaphone and transparents as well. They put them on the apartheid wire!

We were desperate as we believed that the whole libertarian and antifascist Europe should have been there at the fascist border at that moment!!!

We didn't see not one non-government organization for human rights from Serbia. There was only us. Volunteers from Miksaliste (Belgrade) came by themselves, UNHCR, Red Cross from Czech Republic, Doctors Without Borders, and two organizations came by their own truck from Germany and Sweden that night.

That night, people screamed at the protest:

"PLEASE, PLEASE, OPEN THE BORDER", "SHAME ON YOU", "FREEDOM NOW", "LET US GO", "THIS IS A SHAME OF HUMANITY", "WE ARE PEOPLE LIKE YOU, WE HAVE A FAMILY", "PLEASE, OPEN THE DOOR"!



The protest was well organized. First a young man would yell at the megaphone, then everybody would sit down on the ground and repeat after him "NO FOOD, NO WATER". Then everyone would get up and he would continue to speak up, then we would sit down again, and so on into the night.

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**Wednesday, September 16, 2015**

When we got up in the morning the news came up that we were on the Internet. Somebody published the photographs from yesterday's protest at the Bački Vinogradi border crossing and wrote that "radical leftists" from Serbia are agitating people to riot and revolt. I was told that there was a photograph of yesterday's protests from the border of Bački Vinogradi and it was written that "radical leftists" from Serbia incite people to revolt and unrest. They told me that the plate on the car was photographed and that people wrote under our photos that we should be "shoot, stabbed and raped ..."

We went back to *Horgos 2*, where we were waiting for people to give them back megaphones that their BUNT could be heard!



When we arrived at the border of *Horgos 2*, (about 13 o'clock), we heard that the tear gas was thrown at people before twenty minutes. Among the people we could feel fear and panic. It was expected that something terrible will happen, on the border of apartheid there was more people than last night. Since it was the day, everything was clearer, it was the sea of desperate people who have nowhere to return and the fascists will not let them continue their road! Women with small children stood by the fence and cried, men were shouting that they should open the doors! We spread the banners and shouted slogans, along with other people.

After a few minutes someone from the crowd, desperate of all that he survived, fleeing from the war and humiliation, threw the empty plastic bottle of water to the police over the fence, and after that it was a nightmare! The police started throwing tear gas, water cannons sprayed out and there was the throwing of stun grenades. It was a horror and chaos among the people. Among the mass there was a lot of people on the crutches and in the wheelchair! The children were screaming, women with children in their arms were running, people were lying bloody and wounded.

One pregnant woman went into labor behind the van, where they moved here because they had nowhere else to put her but on the concrete. We do not know what later happened to her, we could not find out whether she gave a birth.

One boy in the chaos lost a friend who was a stationary invalid, it is not known what happened to him in the end ...

Teams of journalists and ambulances were also present and the shock bomb was thrown on their vehicle! Police opened a fence and used violence against civilians!

I'm went running through the wire fence into the woods along with people on the right side of the road. After about ten meters, I noticed that my passport is not here and some other things of less tangible values. I tried to get back in the bushes through which I fled into the forest. Suddenly I felt a sharp smell and my eyes started to water. It was a tear gas! I started to choke, I ran back into the woods. I lost Sarah and Natasha. I was left alone, surrounded by desperate people. They asked what should they do, where to go, where they can cross the border! Why are they treated as they were cattle? After a few minutes I tried again to get back near the fence to try and find my passport.

Through the wire I saw people throwing stones at the water tanks, that they are returning with the water hoses, it was utter state of war! I went into the bushes searching on the floor my passport. I was suddenly towed by a jet of cold water from the water cannon, I was all wet and in the fear, I quickly returned to the back of the woods! In the woods I heard shooting coming from the direction of the border. There was the sound of an ambulance. All the time our heads were overflown with two helicopters. Smoke from the gas continued to expand in the woods, I did not know where to go. I was wet and scared, every time I expected that there will be police or army to arrest us or beat us.

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I was in the woods whole the time. Finally, through the field I got back to the starting point. There I found Sarah and Natasha, they were sitting next to an abandoned house with a group of Afghans. We stayed with them until the end of the day. In the evening we started writing together with the people of Afghanistan and Iran banners. When the TV crew was preparing for directly engaging at night, Sarah and Natasha leapt with a big banner "THIS IS TERRORISM! THIS IS WAR" in the background of the journalist who was standing in front of the cameras during the direct transmission in the studio!

In *Horgos 1* we talked with people who were in a desperate state, in utter hopelessness. We saw one boy who suffered a nervous breakdown and in front of all of us in all his desperation tried to kill himself. Above it, the apartheid fence, there was one white T-shirt hanging on which was written with black marker "EUROPEAN SHAME YOU FOR THIS!".

## Thursday, September 17th

In the morning we again saw a guy who was at the head of the column the day before on the protest. Completely desperate, he told us that "he is unable to find his best friend", who he cared about, and he was afraid his friend was injured, he knows nothing about him!!! He could not find him and he is afraid also that perhaps his friend was arrested when the fascist apartheid fence was broken!!!

Many families were separated the moment fascists opened the fence to throw tear gas and water hoses. Among them there were children who were sent to jail while their mothers were on this side of the fence.

Almost the whole day we've all been without food and water, all of the "humanitarians" told us "No water"!!! The only ones who organized grassroots kitchen were a group of anti-fascists from the Czech Republic who came in their own van. The four of them cooked two days for the people!

We ended up at a police border post and we found a fountain with water that was yellow and that we could not drink but only poured on ourselves because it was very hot. Inside the tents was unbearably. Outside, we had nothing to protect ourselves, mothers protected their babies with their hands so the babies won't get sunstroke! However, people have shared everything with us, all they had. Food and water!

The buses came from early morning and for 20 Euros transported people to the Croatian border.

Of the approximately 5,000 people who were at *Horgos 2* the previous day. It has remained only around 1000. They are slowly prepared to move towards the Croatian border.

*That day, at the Horgos 2 border activists of Women in Black and the Autonomous Women's Center also came. And that day was the peace action of solidarity with refugees.*

*Written by: Goran Lazin (Women in Black)*

*Belgrade, 28th September 2015.*

