

solidarnost je naša snaga

Solidary visit to the refugees in the Belgrade parks

October 17th, 2018

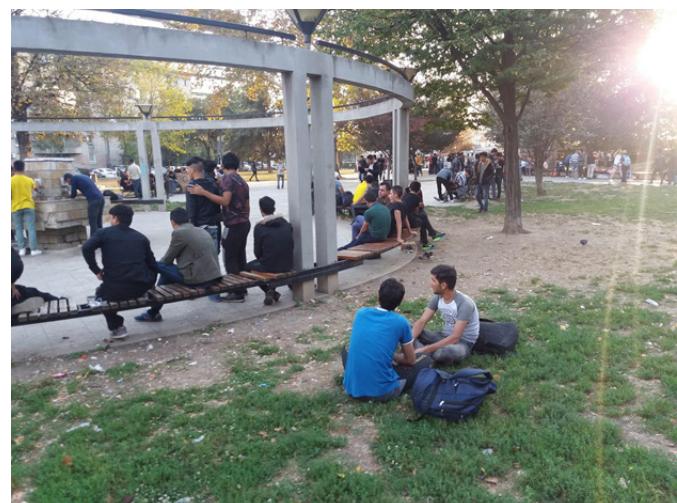
On October 17th, 2018 two Women in Black activists visited the refugees in the two parks at the Faculty of Economics. The number of refugees in the park increased since a few days ago, mostly because the Simpo building is blocked and the camps are full. Goran and I went to the park at the Lasta Bus Station where we gave out chocolate, snacks, wet napkins and cigarettes, and then several young guys from Afghanistan took us to the place where they sleep.

We found out that their only remaining option for sleeping now is under the bridges on the River Sava as well as under the stairs of the coastal terraces in Savamala, the place where the authorities demolished the barracks in which they used to sleep. We returned to the big park at the faculty which was full of refugees, there were even more of them than the last time. We talked to young men from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and we also met a boy from Nepal whose name is Ganesh.

We approached the small group of people with whom Ganesh was sitting on the grass. He told us how he set off on this journey from Nepal by himself but joined the refugees from Afghanistan along the way, with whom he communicates in Urdu language. One of his friends, Khairu from Afghanistan, was celebrating his 23rd birthday that day. Khairu's brother was there too, who showed us pictures of his children who stayed in Afghanistan.

Khairu was deported from Denmark, where he worked for 6 years, back to Afghanistan. Allegedly, the Danish authorities decided that he did not have a strong enough case for getting an asylum. He speaks fluently 8 languages such as Pashto, Dari, Farsi, English, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Urdu, while he also understands Arabic.

While we were sitting on the grass with the refugees, an older man approached us and ordered us in English to move from the grass because, allegedly, it is forbidden to sit on it. Goran then went after him and asked him: "Why are you chasing people away from the grass?" The man replied that such is the



law. Goran then asked him: "And if I was sitting on the grass would that be a problem?", to what the man rudely replied: "No, they are a majority here." Goran told him what kind of a majority when we are the majority here. The man replied: "But 'they' are the majority here", meaning in the park. Goran asked him: "So, for foreigners it is forbidden but for the citizens of Serbia it isn't? If I came from Mars I wouldn't have the right to sit on public surfaces?"

Goran wanted to know who he was and we found out that he was from the Commissariat for Refugees, and then the man asked Goran: "And who are you, from some non-government organization?". Goran replied: "I am a citizen of this country who has the right to ask questions." Goran also added that he will report the man's xenophobic behavior to the man's supervisors. Then Goran turned away and returned to the place where the refugees were sitting.

Khairu asked me to check on the Internet when the next bus to Šid was. It turned out they missed the last one and that there was no other that evening, which meant that they had to spend the night in Belgrade. After we celebrated Khairu's birthday and learned some new words in Pashto, Farsi and Urdu language, we said goodbye to them and returned to the office.

After the meeting in the Women in Black's office Goran and I once again met the same little group of young men we spoke to led by another man towards the city center. We asked them where they were going, they said that they found an accomodation. However, later on I found out from Ganesh, to whom I gave my contact, that he slept outside. He told me that he will sleep in the park tonight as well.



Report written by: Goran and Tomislav