



MIGRANTS PROTEST IN BALKANS OVER CAMP CONDITIONS

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Hundreds of mostly male migrants joined a protest in Bosnia on Saturday, February 15. The news agency Reuters reported that scuffles broke out as Bosnian police arrived to try and prevent the migrants breaking out of the Miral camp in western Bosnia. No injuries were reported.

The Miral camp is situated in the Velika Kladusa Municipality, about 10 kilometers from the Croatian border. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Miral camp was one of several opened in October 2018, built to house primarily single men.

The IOM's latest report, updated January 2020, notes that the numbers of migrants transiting Bosnia in the hope of reaching the EU has "increased * ████ the end of 2017." Since then, the IOM has been providing support to the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) "to effectively manage a functioning reception system that is in line with international standards."

However, the protests broke out, according to Reuters, partly in protest at conditions at camps like Miral. Reuters wrote that Miral currently hosts about 1,000 migrants, which is "300 more than its capacity."

Protesting for freedom

The protestors chanted "freedom," "give us our money back" and "stop beating us," according to Reuters. Several people were detained. The Austrian tabloid newspaper Kronen Zeitung reported that two activists, a Briton and an American, were also detained following the march.

Krone also reported that similar marches took place in North Macedonia and Serbia, all countries which sit on the border with the EU.

The biggest protest, however, took place in Bosnia. Krone reported that some 700 men gathered to shout slogans. One of the camp residents, Salam Batu, told Reuters that "the Croatian police are very, very bad. We want the border to be opened. Please dont hit us anymore. Dont remove our jackets, shoes, and socks. They take it all." Another man, from Pakistan, also alleged that the Croatian police "burn our jackets and shoes and take [our] mobile phones."

The Croatian authorities deny that the police force are committing abuse.

Increase in migration through Bosnia

According to Reuters, Bosnian authorities say that in 2019 as many as 50,000 migrants passed through Bosnia on their way to Western Europe. The majority of migrants came from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Morocco and Syria.

According to the IOM, there are around 7,000-8,000 migrants in Bosnia "at any given time, mainly concentrated around the Una-Sana canton."

The IOM said that they registered 29,232 migrant arrivals in 2019. Many however do not want to stay in Bosnia. In response to the increased numbers, the IOM has opened several new temporary reception centers: Sedra in the Cazin municipality for families and vulnerable migrants; Bira in the city of Bihac for single men; Miral, also for single men; Usivak in Hadzici municipality for single men, families and vulnerable migrants; and Borici in the city of Bihac. In winter 2019, an additional temporary reception center opened in the Sarajevo Canton at Blazuj. IOM says that camp will "continue to scale up its capacity and to improve living conditions." The centers are also supported by EU funds.

Migrants want to go to Western Europe

"Everybody here wants to go to the border and go to Italy, Germany or France," a man from Pakistan wanting to be known as 'Simon' told Reuters.

Croatia is hoping to join the EU's Schengen area (which allows for free movement across borders) during the course of 2020. To do so, they need to be compliant with EU standards on border controls and human rights as well as providing proof that they can "effectively manage the blocs external border."

In October 2019, an EU statement said that Croatia needed to "focus on the management of external borders." Former EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said he believed that Croatia would take the right steps "to become a full Schengen member soon."

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, a US-government funded broadcaster, based in the Czech Republic and broadcasting across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, quoted a spokesperson from Doctors without Borders (MSF) who testified that conditions in many of the improvised camps in northwestern Bosnia "do not meet basic living standards."

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/22824/migrants-protest-in-balkans-over-camp-conditions>

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