

## **URGENT: Support structures for migrants in Belgrade under attack**

The political management of migrations on the *Balkan Route* has entered into yet another phase. Ever since the *EU-Turkey Deal* came into force at the end of March, one of its main parts was the repression targeting both the people traveling through the Balkans and the people involved with support and solidarity structures. Enormous amounts of violence was and still is being deployed at many points along the route: from the Greek islands up to Macedonia and Bulgaria. On the other hand Serbia was up until last Sunday's parliamentary elections the only country along the Balkan Route in which people could move more or less freely and were faced with relatively little state repression. But the worrying developments of today mean that also the situation in Serbia is changing fast and to the worse.

For more than two weeks there has been a No Border Squat in Belgrade, sheltering up to 80 people against the harsh weather and giving some privacy and resting space to people who otherwise had to sleep in the parks in town. Today at 10am a group of uniformed and civil clothed police officers entered the premises and ordered everyone in the house to move to the asylum camp Krnjaca outside of Belgrade. As the reason for this intrusion they cited the provisions of a new law that obliged people who had not been registered with the authorities yet, to move to the camp immediately. Thanks to the local and international legal support on the spot this argument of the police officers was soon discredited as it turned out that the law in question had indeed been passed but will not come into force before 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2016. But the deceiving behaviour of the police officers did not end there, rather it was just a first of many highly problematic and possibly even illegal acts that followed in the course of the day.

As seven people that stayed in NoBorderHostel were taken to the police station in order to register them there (see picture), the fear arose that the authorities will tear down the squat quickly. International supporters were intimidated as police conducted harsh ID checks that involved screaming and other threatening behaviour. The police officers talked to some construction workers who were also present at the scene. It was at that point that the news reached us that 'Miksaliste', a container park that is situated right next to the NoBorderHostel is being emptied. Since early December 'Miksaliste' has hosted many different NGOs and other basic support structures for migrants providing toilets, clothing, food, tea, showers, medical treatment and child care. Thus it became clear that it is not only the NoBorderHostel that is being targeted but that the whole support structure for migrants in Belgrade is about to be erased. It turned out that yesterday evening Miksaliste got an eviction notice from the police in which they were told to vacate the container camp within 48 hours. In case of their non-compliance the NGOs were threatened to lose their permission to continue with solidarity and support activities.

Putting these incidents into the big picture of the recent Serbian elections and the general climate towards people on the move in Europe, the repression in Belgrade clearly fits in the well established framework of pushing people into illegalization and further out of sight into the shadows of remote areas on the one hand and criminalizing support structures on the other. Eight weeks after the official closure of the Balkan Route between Macedonia and Greece, the repression and neglect of basic human rights moves further north as Serbia too steps in the EU's line. The intention of defending Europe's wealth becomes extraordinarily obvious in this case as both Miksaliste and NoBorderHostel are located in the area of the Belgrade Waterfront Project. Investors from Serbia and the United Emirates clearly have no interest in tolerating non-profitable venues in their interest zone.

### **Gentrification uncovers its ugly smile**

Outrage and anger about this illegal evictions was taken into the public scene in form of a spontaneous protest at 6pm. A dozen of freshly painted banners was unrolled in the two parks around the train station that are the main stage of the migrants movement since last summer. The police showed up as soon as they heard slogans echoing from the walls. When the protest was over and the banners were collected they asked for IDs and charged four activists with a hilarious made up fine multiplied by the number of banners - for 'littering'. Again another sign of solidarity that became target of arbitrary police repression.

What is politically symptomatic is that the sudden 180° turn of the Serbian government came immediately after the ruling party of the master of political spectacle Aleksandar Vucic consolidated its grip on power at the Sunday's elections. His party aimed at and ultimately gained an absolute majority and while everyone was busy dissecting the electoral results, the old and new government decided to use the opportunity and redefine its policy towards the migrants. The move of the Serbian authorities should be understood in the context of decidedly repressive regime that the EU has managed to implement along the whole Balkan Route over the last weeks. Deportations of migrants as well as destruction of solidarity structures on the Greek islands, heavily militarized and extremely violent operations on the border between Greece and Macedonia and the excessive use of violence against people on the move in Bulgaria and Macedonia are the context in which the latest move of the Serbian government can be seen as an implementation of the same Balkan-wide regime of total closure of the route. **Another political fence along the walls of Fortress Europe is being built on the Belgrade Waterfront.** Clearly, media-savvy government of Serbia did not want to expose itself during the election campaign but now this caution is no longer necessary and the implementation of EU plan in Serbia can happen.

For the people involved in support and solidarity work in Belgrade and across the Balkans this is just the latest in a series of attacks on the freedom of all of us. But even as gestures of solidarity get

criminalized and people are pushed into the hands of criminal associations, our resolve and determination to fight Fortress Europe does not vain. We will continue to open NoBorder squats, to cook in NoBorder kitchens and to support the people with whom we want to build a new and better Europe together in other practical ways. We are inspired by the infinite acts of resistance and courage from our co-travelers from other parts of the world. It is because of them that the border regime broke down in the first place and it is because of them that our solidarity efforts make sense. You cannot evict a movement.

NoBorders Hostel collective

#BelgradeRefugeeFront

26<sup>th</sup> April 2016