



01.12.2015 Idomeni: Joint protests of refugees who are not allowed to cross © Moving Europe

7. Winter in Idomeni

We postponed working on the last chapter of this timeline, in the hope to conclude the description of the events at the Idomeni/Gevgelija border following the 18th November - the day when the route was suddenly blocked for all migrants who are not from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan - with a turn for the better. However, six months later, Idomeni has become a symbol for European egoism and the „ugly success“¹ of its refugee policy. Here, in a confined space, the drama of the migrants' insurrection and the consistent and unrestrained asphyxiation of their freedom of movement took place, in front of the eyes of a global audience, lightly moved by compassion, reflecting two main paths of European policy which asserted themselves after the summer of migrations: The mobilization and regulation of a mob of those stuck in the past and the drying out of the Balkan route through the dirty deal with Erdogan. The audience had to get used to sad pictures.

In the summer of 2015, we in the *Moving Europe* project spoke of a brief summer of migration - echoing Enzenberger's collage about the Spanish anarchists of 1936: a few weeks in which the world could have changed. Everything seemed possible prior to the grassroots movements getting crushed in-between the millstones of Stalinism and Francoism. But in 2015 a long summer emerged: one underlying reason for this was Chancellor Merkel's resolute standpoint, lasting several weeks – a standpoint she reached out of a concern for Europe's already damaged reputation and stability in the Balkans, and because she wanted to prevent a firing order aimed at migrants during the times of the #marchofhope on the 4th of September. The welcome culture, which spread in Germany despite all prejudices during the arrival of the migrants, virtually

1 <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article155777600/Idomeni-ist-ein-haesslicher-Erfolg.html>

invited the political leadership to adjoin a project of a demographic modernization to this summer fairytale and to use the readiness of countless volunteers wanting to help, in order to enrich the labour market with a new generation of migrants.² A "jolt" had gone through society, as previously demanded by a former President, and it would have been unforgivable for a politician the likes of Merkel to not transform this jolt into politics. Former Chancellor Schröder advised her to transform it into an agenda 2020.³ But things turned out differently.

The undoubtedly decisive moment which made the summer of migration a long one, however, was the amount and perseverance of the migrants themselves. As long as the "humanitarian corridor" through the Balkans functioned, the passage across the Aegean sea was the last considerable obstacle on the way to Europe, and the dinghy-business on the Turkish western coastline had developed in such a way that migrants could expect a relatively safe passage, at least during the summer. Therefore it was no longer predominantly young men crossing the sea, but increasingly also women and children, whole families, disabled and old people. The major events of the summer - the breakthrough at Idomeni on the 22th/23rd of August, the March of Hope on the 4th September and the consequences of the closure of the Hungarian border at Röszke on the 15th of September – continued to have an effect for several weeks. Under the pressure of the continuously arriving migrants, the transit states saw themselves unable to do anything other than to manage the flow of migration as much as possible, while keeping an eye on Austria's and Germany's receptiveness. How the police tried to degrade migrants on the route from claimants to petitioners was described in the previous chapter.

When police and politics from Berlin to the Balkans hoped that the autumn storms of the Aegean sea would solve the "refugee crisis", they were taught otherwise in November and even December. The passages were cheaper in stormy weather, thus now being more affordable for families with less financial resources. The dead children testify the high risk which migrants were prepared to take.⁴ The number of passages declined and the number of the drowned rose.⁵ Nevertheless, 1,500 to 5,000 migrants daily crossed the few kilometers between the Turkish mainland and the Aegean island in November and December, and during the first weeks of 2016, the figures greatly exceeded those of the previous year⁶ - until March, when the dirty deal with Turkey closed the route across the Aegean sea with surprising efficiency.

The border crossing between Idomeni and Gevgelija had already been the site of clashes on the 22nd of August between the police and the army on the Macedonian and thousands of migrants on the Greek side (see Chapter 1). On the 16th of November the Macedonian military began preparing the area near Gevgelija for a border fence, after the Macedonian Council of Ministers had taken the corresponding decision on the previous day. Two days later the border was closed for all "non-SIA" migrants.⁷ With this partial border-

2 According to a study by the UNHCR, between March and September 81% of the refugees from Syria were male, 70% were aged between 18 and 35, 43% held a university degree and 43% finished secondary education. https://www.uno-fluechtlingshilfe.de/fileadmin/redaktion/PDF/UNHCR/UNHCR-Greece_SyrianSurvey.pdf.

3 <http://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article207044095/Altkanzler-Schroeder-fordert-Agenda-2020-fuer-Fluechtlinge.html>.

4 According to UNHCR, 36% of migrants crossing during this time were children. A future for the children is indeed one of the main reasons for deciding to migrate. During the last 6 months, 340 children have drowned in the Mediterranean. Within the first 6 weeks of the year 2016 410 of a total of 80,000 migrants have drowned. <<http://spon.de/aeGHY>> UNICEF: More children and women seek safety in Europe, 2nd of February 2016, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_90000.html.

5 <http://ffm-online.org/2015/11/16/alarm-phone-weekly-report-2nd-8th-of-november-2015/>.

6 data.unhcr.org/mediterranean.

7 Only migrants from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan were allowed to cross the border.

closure of the 18th of November, Macedonia distinguished itself as the “new European frontier state.”⁸ By willingly surrendering to the EU's pressure the right-wing Macedonian government – crippled by inner conflicts - tried to stabilize itself on the European landscape.



28.11.2015: Macedonian military secures the border © Moving Europe

It would, however, be completely wrong to believe that Macedonia took the initiative to close the Balkanroute. The underlying reason was rather a decision made by the EU's Ministers of Interior and Justice on the 9th of November, which stated:

“... to assist the concerning member states in regard to the entry and exit controls at the external borders, in order to enable them to comply with their legal obligations to carry out appropriate controls and manage the external borders as well as to regain the control over their external borders, and strengthen the coordination of measures regarding border management. This will include a series of flanking measures by Frontex and, as long as necessary, the gradual deployment of emergency rapid deployment teams for border security purposes, in harmony with EU regulations ... ”⁹

The fence in Gevgelija was anyways not the only one, it stood within the context of a general militarization of the borders of the Balkan route:

“Hungary had closed its border with Serbia in mid-September, as well as its border with Croatia later on. Reacting to this Slovenia also started to build a fence on its border with Croatia. Austria, on the other hand, has strengthened its border security with Slovenia in the face of the refugee movements. Among other things,

8 Zeit Online, <http://ffm-online.org/2016/01/28/europas-neuer-frontstaat/>

9 http://ffm-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ST_13880_2015_INIT_EN.pdf

a fence is to be erected in one to two months, nearly four kilometers long and 2.20 meters high, directly at the border crossing Spielfeld.”¹⁰

The relationship between the transit countries developed into an anxious state of mutual observation, starting from September. Any rumor about a stoppage of the transit caused reactions and overreactions by the forgoing states. Everybody had a fear that they would not be able to pass on rejected migrants any further. Slovenia was first to finish building its fence and thus negotiated with its neighbors from a relative position of strength and somehow also as the representative of the EU:

“On Tuesday (the 17th of Nov.), high-ranking officials of the ministries of the interior of Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia and Greece met at the Slovenian Egg near Krainburg (Brdo pri Kranju) and agreed on measures to curb, manage and control migrant flows. They agreed on a uniform system for the identification of those traveling through and a joint database. In order to lower the inflow, the absorption capacities along the Balkan route will be increased. Croatia was the only transit state to not participate in the meeting. On Thursday, however, the Croatian Ministry of the Interior announced that it would act in the same way as Slovenia, Serbia and Macedonia at its borders.”¹¹

Then it was Slovenia as well, who began to push migrants "with little prospects of gaining asylum" back to Croatia, merely one day after this conference. Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia immediately followed suit. There was no doubt that “all of these measures had been agreed with other EU countries such as Germany and Austria.”¹² On the evening of 18 November and the following night, a chain reaction occurred:

“Serbia and Macedonia have begun allowing migrant passage to only Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans, the United Nations refugee agency said on Thursday.

A UNHCR spokeswoman said all other migrants were being turned back, leaving hundreds stranded on borders. A Reuters witness on the Greek border with Macedonia said Macedonian police had begun turning back all non-Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans overnight.

*“As of 6 p.m. (1600 GMT) yesterday evening Serbia started turning back (to Macedonia) all but Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans,” said UNHCR spokeswoman Melita Sunjic. “Macedonia closed the border around 3 a.m and some 100 people remained stranded in no-man's land.”*¹³

This was the beginning of a new era in the short history of the Balkanroute: an era which ultimately replaced the right to apply for asylum with racial profiling, and with the rejection of migrants based on national origin, ethnicity, skin color or dialect.¹⁴

Now there was a differentiation between SIA and non-SIA migrants, and it was only a matter of time until the A would be removed and refugees from Afghanistan would be denied to continue their journey, regardless of the steadily deteriorating security situation in this country (this happened from the 21.02.16

10 <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/fluechtlinge-mazedonien-plant-zaun-an-der-grenze-zu-griechenland-a-1063124.html#ref=RSS> Regarding the fence in Slovenia <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/slowenien-zaunbau-an-den-grenzuebergaengen-a-1063634.html>

11 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/balkanstaaten-lassen-nur-noch-bestimmte-fluechtlinge-durch-13920955.html>

12 <http://mobil.derstandard.at/2000026070370/Fluechtlinge-Slowenien-sorgt-fuer-ein-Dominoeffekt>

13 <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/11/19/uk-europe-migrants-balkans-idUKKCN0T80TY20151119>

14 Many were initially rejected merely because the 'wrong' country of origin was recorded on the Greek registration paper. Only later, when word spread that SIA migrants had the best prospects and the Greek papers were easy to forge racial profiling started to be applied ...

onwards). The fact that UNHCR interpreters participated in this profiling of migrants from the outset was one of the great disappointments for many observers.



26.11.2015: Iranians sew up their mouths in protest against the closure of the border © Moving Europe

What took place in Idomeni during the following days can be read in detail on the *Liveticker*, which was moderated by the Moving Europe team, and is therefore merely summarized here.¹⁵ There are reports in that *Liveticker* of groups of rejected migrants who joined up for open-the-borders protests, of a man who had been killed by an electric shock during the protests, and another one who was heavily injured, of the Iranians who sewed up their mouths and began a hunger strike on the railway tracks, without protection against the cold and the heavy rain showers, occurring time and again. It was reported how SIA migrants were permitted to pass meters away from non-SIA migrants. While buses from Athens were transporting both groups to Idomeni, UNHCR staff constantly attempted to persuade non-SIA migrants to return to Athens, and many, especially families with children, followed this call. On November 26 the NATO wire sent by Hungary was delivered and rolled out on the terrain, as had been planned in the previous week, and then partly removed again by migrants. More buses from Athens kept arriving against the backdrop of rain and cold. Moving Europe writes about this day:

“The tension in the camp of the Eidomeni rises constantly, as more people arrive and perspectives of those already stuck for many days are desperate. Yesterday, around 500 migrants protested intensively against their situation and tried to pass over. 15 persons managed to cross the border. Macedonian police was massively present and used violence to prevent any border further crossings. Those who passed were caught little later by Macedonian police and pushed back to Greek territory. The protesters moved away a big part

¹⁵ <http://livetickereidomeni.bordermonitoring.eu>

of the barbed wire on the border line. The next days will show, in which way the authorities will react on this powerful signal of freedom of movement. In the evening the situation calmed down, but many more people arrived. Even those, who are allowed to pass, have to wait now for some time. Those who are stuck do not have access to adequate accommodation and provision of goods as temperatures are decreasing.”

On November 28, stones flew in the direction of the Macedonian security forces, which were thrown back, then the military also used smoke bombs and tear gas against the migrants. Above all, the Macedonian military continued to work on the fence, and the Greek police remained passive during all these events. A certain disheartenment began to spread as Moving Europe reported on November 29:

“The situation in Idomeni is getting worse. Many people are stuck at this spot for 10 days now. They are refused to enter Macedonia unless they are holding passports from Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq. At night the temperature drops to around 5 degrees, the cold wind blows hard and many people only find shelter in self built tents. Apart from the big NGO Praksis there are now two independent kitchens that prepare food for over 1,000 people, but still people have to wait in long queues ...”

On November 30, for the first time ever, heavily armed Greek police arrived. This was a Monday, but it would last until the following Thursday, December 3, until they intervened to prevent conflicts between SIA and non-SIA migrants. The situation was absurd: Thousands were waiting, with dwindling hope and in ice-cold weather in front of the gate to Macedonia, while others, solely due to a different entry in their registration paper, were able to pass them and cross the border. Of course, this triggered frustration and aggressions among non-SIA migrants. But despite these dividing tactics, there was a strong and peaceful protest of migrants at the border crossing on the morning of December 1st and a protest march of supporters in Thessaloniki with more than 1,000 participants. 30 buses arrived from Athens on this day. The next day, Wednesday, December 2nd, there was a renewed insurgence of the migration movement under the slogan "Etihad", unity between the SIA and the non-SIA migrants.

From Moving Europe's minutes:

13.20: Yesterday evening, about 30 buses arrived. This resulted in chaos this morning at the crossing point. The cage surrounding it, what destroyed.

13.30: Hundreds of refugees tried to pass the fence at its end and just came back to the camp. They reported, that Macedonian army/police was entering Greek territory and on them with rubber bullets. Furthermore, they told about warning shots in the air.

15.00: Hundreds gather at the crosspoint as rumors have spread that border would be opened in 2 hours. Macedonian police/army has strengthened its presence with water cannons and riot units. We have no confirmed information about border opening.

16.00: Protesters have teared down the fences of the crosspoint. Situation tense. Greek police does not intervene.

17.00: Protesters shout 'Etihad' (United) to gather all the nationalities in front of the fence.

19.00: Still hundreds of protesters in front of the fence. The border crossing is blocked right now. The camp is getting crowded as new people still arrive.

23.00: The border crossing is still blocked by protestors. Greek police has just left the border zone. Right now around ten buses are arriving. UNHCR reports that they have no clue how to accommodate the newly arriving persons. Obviously they have enough stored goods, but no staff to distribute it.

24.00: Update: It's not ten buses waiting, it's twenty. Additional 1000 persons will have to sleep outside tonight.

03.12.15 09.00: The border is still closed. All nationalities are stuck now. Conflicts are rising among those who could pass, and those who cannot. People are trying to walk to other border crossings. UNHCR has left the camp tonight. Europe's strategy of divide et impera has worked out so far.



01.12.2015, Idomeni: Joint protests of migrants, who can not travel further © Moving Europe

The following day the entire UNHCR staff withdrew and the non-SIA protesters were kettled by the Greek police. In the evening ten buses filled with Greek riot police arrived. 2,000 people were standing in front of the border gate, before the armed Greek police formed a corridor the following day, in order to lead small groups of SIA migrants to the border gate. Increasingly more non-SIA migrants got on the buses back to Athens, where they were temporarily accommodated in a former Olympic stadium. On the way to Idomeni the buses were already stopped at near Polykastro, at a highway petrol station 20km away from the border. There the non-SIA migrants had to leave the buses. Many walked to Idomeni. The camp turned into a zone of repression, it was surrounded by police and completely closed off, and finally evicted on December 9.

Shortly before the eviction Bernd Eichner, press relations officer at medico international, gained an impression of the situation. The following are his observations:

“What is the current situation in Idomeni?”

Bernd Eichner: The refugee camp at the Greek-Macedonian border is a miserable camp. It will get evicted in the next few hours. Yesterday we were still inside the camp and we talked with our colleagues, who have already been there for several days with the Moving Europe bus. Today everything is closed off in a perimeter of three kilometers, because they want to disassemble the entire camp. Several thousand people have been waiting here, hoping to cross the border.

What do the controls on the border with Macedonia look like?

There is a large gate, at which there are Greek and Macedonian border guards. One has to show one's registration or ID papers. Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans are able to pass. All others are rejected. The situation is ghastly. It seems as if the gateway to saving Europe is guarded by bouncers of a second-rate discotheque. Whoever is not allowed to pass is simply rejected with a "go, go". This concerns Somalis, Moroccans, Bangladeshis and Iranians.

How did you experience the situation in the camp?

The selection of the refugees has led to violent conflicts between the refugees themselves. The groups of refugees, who are not allowed to pass, have forcefully insisted: everybody or nobody. This is why the UNHCR has withdrawn from the logistical provision of the camp. The situation was dramatic. Meanwhile, the situation has calmed down. The "Moving Europe" bus, co-financed by medico, is helpful. People can charge their mobile phones at the electricity aggregator. There is hot tea for everyone. In recent days, the bus crew has ordered 10 tonnes of wood because the nights are very cold.

What does the eviction mean for refugees?

Everywhere in the villages you can see small groups of refugees who are currently again trying to cross the border via other routes. The smugglers are back in business. There is great fear of the Macedonian military, and many rumors, including one that refugees were shot at during non-legal border crossings. Thus, people turn to more knowledgeable others. The eviction will thus strengthen the smugglers' business. They are the only ones who will be able to profit.

Those who let themselves be evicted will be taken to Athens by buses. They have to pay 15 euros for this bus trip. In Athens they are accommodated in military barracks. They have three options: apply for asylum in Greece, leave the country voluntarily or get deported. This is why refugees in Thessaloniki have occupied a vacant orphanage. This way they are at least closer to the border.”¹⁶

The Moving Europe team, which documented the events in Idomeni as accurately as possible, also took on the task of providing migrants with information and practical help. With its bus a network of contacts along the entire route was set up, so that information could be continuously updated and made accessible to migrants. A good example is the Infosheet, available in three languages on w2eu.info, which contains information about the route from Idomeni to Passau and continues to be regularly updated. During and after the final evacuation of Idomeni on the 24th of May 2016 Moving Europe documented the situation in the Northern Greek military camps to which the migrants were transferred.

¹⁶ <http://moving-europe.org/2015/12/09/schlepper-sind-wieder-im-geschaef/>



04.12.2015, Idomeni: Two Pakistani migrants in front of Moving Europe's info-walls © Moving Europe

Apart from the bus, there were numerous volunteers in Idomeni at the time of the first eviction, whose presence was important for migrants, and this not only due to the supply of warm meals and hot drinks. This presence acted as a certain guarantee that, in times of an absent international media, as migrants were not entirely exposed to police violence without witnesses. Volunteers and independent observers remained there, even after the UNHCR and regular journalists had abandoned the area. Exemplifying this are quotes from a report written by *Grenzenlos Kochen Hannover*:

“On December 9 2015, the migrant camp in Idomeni, at the Greek-Macedonian border, was evicted by the Greek police. The camp had lasted for about four weeks and expanded massively after Macedonia closed its border with Greece and then began to only let people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan pass. As a result, the situation at the border crossing worsened massively, sanitary installations and supplies were only very sluggishly organized by NGOs, which is why we decided to go there as the No Border Kitchen. Together with migrants, we took care of the supply of food in the camp.

During the morning of the 09.12. the police began to evacuate the camp around 8am. The migrants had hardly any time to pack their belongings, many tents were slit open, and the camp was left in a desolated state. The migrants were not allowed to leave, they had to get onto coaches and were driven away, most of them to Athens. However, there is information that people were transported further than Athens or simply had to get out alongside the road.

In some cases the police also used force against migrants who did not want to leave their tents voluntarily, which included children and minors. There were several cries of pain heard from tents which the police had entered by force. Some migrants were separated from all the others during the eviction, beaten

and transported away in police vans.

Any attempt to monitor the proceedings at close range was prevented by the police ...

A remaining part of our group in Idomeni has managed to save thousands of blankets, sleeping bags, etc., which we then brought to Thessaloniki. Shortly after the eviction, the cleanup work already began: blankets, tents etc. were thrown into the garbage by excavators.

Since a week or so, there has been a new house project in Thessaloniki, which was squatted to house migrants. The house project has capacities for 100 to 150 people ...”¹⁷

The first eviction of the camp in Idomeni, however, didn't last long. Buses continued to arrive daily from Piraeus, bringing more migrants from the islands. As before, attempts continued to sort out non-SIA migrants at the Polykastro petrol station. Here the buses accumulated and some had to wait for 20 hours before they could continue to Idomeni. The expelled non-SIA migrants, however, only partially returned to Athens. There, groups of Algerians, Moroccans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were arrested on the streets and taken to deportation detention centres, where they initiated a hunger strike. Suicide attempts were also reported. Many, on the other hand, walked to Idomeni and got into conflicts with the police. After the eviction the Greek government had issued a ban, for example to Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF), forbidding the use of its tents in Idomeni. Only those who would immediately cross the border were allowed to be taken to Idomeni. Thereby, thousands of warm and more or less good accommodation tents were left empty in Idomeni, during the coldest days of the year, while MSF had to treat frostbites and hypothermia at the petrol station in Polykastro. MSF vehemently appealed to Greece to be able to use the tents again. At some point Greece could not maintain its practice anymore, and the camp in Idomeni filled again. A callout for independent volunteers of the 5th of January illustrates the situation:

“Each day between 600 and 3000 people arrive at the Greek-Macedonian border Idomeni. But only those fleeing from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq are allowed to cross it. Arbitrary decisions are taken regarding the authenticity of any evidencing papers. NGOs, e.g. Doctors Without Borders carry out tasks such as the distribution of blankets and medical care on the ground. However, the entire distribution of clothes and the tea kitchen were only provided by independent volunteers.

** Here we urgently need people who can support us in order to sustain the supply.*

The situation for those migrants from other states who are rejected here at the border is particularly precarious. Many people, particularly young men, are stranded here without a cent in their pockets. They are mostly forced to return to Athens by bus. However, many of them come back and find themselves here in the surroundings of Idomeni, in the woods and old barracks, and try to either cross the border on their own or get smuggled. Yet in Macedonia they are mostly picked up by police and the military, beaten up, robbed and pushed back to Greece.

The supply of provisions for these people is extremely bad. A small group tries to reach them and distribute tea, food, warm things and informations.

** For the support of these people a replacement is urgently sought!*

¹⁷ <http://grenzenloskochenhannover.blogspot.de/2015/12/13/bericht-aus-thessaloniki-zu-idomeniathenslesbos/>

Some independent volunteers are also present at the border to monitor the practices of the border police and to try to intervene when possible. The screening, as well as the opening and closing of the borders, is often governed by the arbitrary will of the border police officers.

Generally the atmosphere at night is much rougher than during the day. The police and the migrants are more stressed. Some really nasty scenes play out then.

** Here people are needed as well!”*



30.11.2015, Idomeni: Macedonian border guards control the papers of a family, who is allowed to cross the border a bit later. The family belongs to the the SIA-migrants (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan). © Moving Europe

An internal report by Moving Europe on February 2 highlights the fact that many non-SIA migrants did not want to surrender to a fate of rejection and removal:

“In the evening, we were informed that a large group of non-SIA people are making their way from Athens to the border with the intention to march to the border together. We planed to support them, however the number was far lower then expected, only around 50 and they dispersed on the transportation towards he border. We nonetheless spent the day yesterday around Idomeni and met the people coming from Athens in the forest close to the border. This is the starting point for non-SIA people to walk across Macedonia. A group is bringing food, clothes and sleeping bags there every day. They also inform people on the route across Macedonia and tell them where they can look for food and support. They do a really great job there, and it was great to see what they are doing.”¹⁸

One day later this was reported:

18 Internal report by Moving Europe. This report will be subsequently quoted without citation.

“Yesterday around 1.500 people started to march from the petrol station in Polykastro along the highway towards the camp in Idomeni. They didn't want to wait any longer. Many many people are arriving right now in Idomeni and Macedonia is really slowing down the transit (partially because of a new taxi driver strike in Macedonia).

We were supporting those people marching and as well later in the totally overcrowded tents. It's crazy right now there and also quite tense, we'll see what happens.

People already twittered about a new #marchofhope.

Right now the camp is totally overcrowded, thousands there and thousands at petrol station in Polykastro. Still many march towards Idomeni (20km).[...]

1) Breaking: Thousands have decided not to wait any longer at the petrol station in Polykastro/Greece. Now they are marching towards the Macedonian border on the side of the highway. Lots of families and children. This is a massive act of civil disobedience against border closures and the European strategy of slowing down the movement.

2) Buses are collecting people who are walking on the highway and bring them to the border camp in #Idomeni. Their movement forced the to act and bring them to the border. They are fighting for their right to move on, even if the cost is bloody feet and lots of tears. We will see how the situation in the overcrowded camp in Idomeni will develop.”

Meanwhile, the Macedonian border authorities repeatedly initiated new forms of harassment even against SIA migrants. Documentary requirements were changed arbitrarily, the border was completely closed for a few days during the third calendar week, and then only people with registered destinations of Austria or Germany were allowed to pass.¹⁹ At the same time as the EU's Interior Ministers Conference was taking place in Amsterdam on January 27 2016 there was another backlog at the border. Macedonia, of course, did not take part in this conference, perhaps fearing being taken by surprise by the conference's resolutions. Only small contingents were allowed into the country. What was actually discussed at this conference in Amsterdam was the option of expelling Greece from the Schengen area and keep hundreds of thousands of migrants there, in mass camps. Fenced-in central Europe seemed to be willing to sacrifice Greece, and even Italy had a hard time negotiating to remain in it.²⁰ Tsipras' government came under so much pressure due to this threat that it offered no resistance to the upcoming negotiations with Turkey in the aftermath.

A few days later, on February 3, the interior ministers of Macedonia, Austria, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia convened. As a continuation of the Amsterdam conference, they agreed on a continuous exchange of information and additional border patrols as well as the further slowing down of movements through the introduction of a new travel document, which would only be granted to migrants after a 30-minute interview:

“From today, every refugee entering Macedonia will undergo a 30-minute interview at the border. The

¹⁹ Supporters on the Macedonian side have aided migrants in Gevgelija for many months until exhaustion. They published daily dossiers during the days described here, which would be worth a separate documentation.

²⁰ http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/01/30/news/renzi_e_franceschini_a_ventotene_luogo_simbolo_dell_europa-132346075/?ref=HREC1-7; also compare <http://ffm-online.org/2016/02/07/griechenland-krise-fluechtlinge-und-umbau-europas/>

questions will seek to prove nationality. A new registration document will be introduced and additional European police forces will be deployed to patrol the border.

The announcements followed an emergency meeting today of representatives of the Ministries of Interior - the Directors of Police - of Macedonia, Austria, Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia. The meeting was called by the Macedonian Bureau of Public Security to discuss the current status of the migrant crisis.

The border between Macedonia and Greece has been subject to a sharp deceleration in refugee movement due to changing registration practices, and has been officially closed three times this year.

Currently Macedonian taxi drivers are blockading the railway on the Macedonian side of the border, demanding the opportunity to transport refugees through the country for a fee.

Today there are reports of thousands of refugees who are waiting to enter Macedonia, on the Greek side of the border at Idomeni camp and at the Polykastro Gas Station.”²¹

The driving forces pushing for a closure of the route at that time were the governments of Austria and the Visegrád states. Macedonia had profited from the transit movement of migrants. On February 15, Austria and the Visegrád states renewed their offer to Macedonia to secure the border with Greece through joint military forces, so that not only Austria and the other states along the route, but also Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, with their nationalist and right-wing governments, could be prepared to protect the frontier, with violence if necessary.²² At the same time, the Visegrád states openly opposed all redistribution policies and Merkel's domination in the EU.²³ They announced their intention to close the route in any case, and they could count on the support of Austria. The actual exclusion of Greece from the Schengen zone and the division of Europe seemed to be the plan.

Hence, the EU summit on February 18 in Brussels took place under much pressure. In the meantime, Merkel had also come under pressure, regarding both internal and external policy, so that she had to (even though quietly dissenting) give way to Austria's weird interventions. A deal with Erdogan, at whatever price, seemed to be the only solution in the current situation. Europe's unity could seemingly only be preserved through the prevention of a further influx of migrants across the Aegean sea. The following extract is taken from the summit's official statement:

II. MIGRATION

4. In response to the migration crisis facing the EU, the objective must be to rapidly stem the flows, protect our external borders, reduce illegal migration and safeguard the integrity of the Schengen area. As part of this comprehensive approach, the European Council assessed, on the basis of detailed reports from the Presidency and the Commission, the state of implementation of the orientations agreed in December.

5. The European Council welcomes NATO's decision to assist in the conduct of reconnaissance, monitoring and surveillance of illegal crossings in the Aegean sea and calls on all members of NATO to support this measure actively. The EU, in particular FRONTEX, should closely cooperate with NATO.

21 <https://newsthatmoves.org/en/?p=1139>

22 <http://www.dw.com/de/fl%C3%BChtlingskrise-visegrad-gruppe-positioniert-sich-gegen-berlin/a-19049172>

23 <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article152228130/Visegrad-Staaten-gegen-Deutschlands-Migrationspolitik.html>,
<http://www.dw.com/de/visegrad-macht-eigene-migrationspolitik/a-19049803?maca=de-rss-de-top-1016-xml-mrss>

6. *The full and speedy implementation of the EU-Turkey Action Plan remains a priority, in order to stem migration flows and to tackle traffickers and smugglers networks. Steps have been taken by Turkey to implement the Action Plan, notably as regards access by Syrian refugees to Turkey's labour market and data sharing with the EU. However, the flows of migrants arriving in Greece from Turkey remain much too high. We need to see a substantial and sustainable reduction of the number of illegal entries from Turkey into the EU. This calls for further, decisive efforts also on the Turkish side to ensure effective implementation of the Action Plan. The European Council welcomes the agreement reached on the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and calls on the Commission and the Member States to implement swiftly the priority projects. It also welcomes the progress on preparing a credible voluntary humanitarian admission programme with Turkey.*²⁴



March 2016: Idomeni sinks in the mud

In the camp in Idomeni, however, thousands of people were camping at the border and followed these political debates avidly. They knew, that their destiny was being discussed and decided over during these days and that in every discussion this camp was the dominant issue. Hope hadn't dwindled yet, in spite of the freezing cold and the mud. However, on February 21, the next step towards the controlling of migration was already taken: The borders were now also closed for people from Afghanistan. Turbulent scenes ensued following the measure. Here is Moving Europe's report on February 22:

“13:45 At the moment there are about 600 Afgan people in Camp B separated by police and don't get access to Camp A where there are facilities like showers, food, cloth, electricity doctor etc. The Tension is high. Independent Volunteers and MSF and Praksis are handing out food and trying to help as best as they can. It is difficult and chaotic. It is absolutly unclear what will happen to the people who are stuck in Idomeni at the border and are not allowed to pass because the states have decided to close fortress europe even more.

People have started a hunger strike in Camp B and about 3000 people from different nationalities just

24 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/18-euco-conclusions-migration/>

started to arrive to the camp as they decided to walk from Polikastro Gasstation. Also there are rumors of a couple thousand on the way from Piraeus, but not yet confirmed.

Update 14:08 The Afghans are trying to cross over to camp a and trying to force a way into Macedonia. Riot Police all over.”²⁵

A day later the Greek police had enforcedly brought the situation under control again:

“Early this morning Greek riot police removed by force 200 Afghan migrants who were blocking train tracks since yesterday afternoon at the Greek/Macedonian border. They also removed 400 more Afghan migrants who were in the area.

Access to journalists was not allowed, the same way they did it when they „evacuated“ Idomeni past December.

The migrants will be moved with buses to Athens, probably to Schistos „relocation center“.”

Athens had rushed to set up the demanded hotspots just before the EU summit on February 18, in order to detain and register the migrants.²⁶ Only five days later the Greek government was under pressure again. Austria had summoned a summit with the west Balkan states, in order to substantiate the further “reduction of the refugee stream”. Greece and Germany had not been invited invited.²⁷ While the German government issued a pro-forma veto, the Greek government felt exposed to a coup, and that any participation in the decision-making, about what would happen to the route in the future, had effectively been eliminated for them.²⁸

Meanwhile, around 4000 people were still waiting in Idomeni for an opportunity to continue their journey.²⁹ And migrants from the camp in Polykastro and other provisional camps in northern Greece were still moving towards Idomeni- *A whole Region on the Move*, as Moving Europe wrote:

“Refugees arriving in mainland Greece are being placed in different, partly newly opened camps. [...]

The situation in northern Greece has changed in an almost unprecedented way. According to MSF, 12 000 refugees are currently stuck in Greece. They want to travel on and their immediate goal is to be as close to the border as possible. Today (25.02.16) has shown, that the Greek government’s strategy to split up groups of refugees and lock them up in different camps along the way does not work. In northern Greece, thousands have started to walk towards the border: that is, Idomeni. The whole region seems to be on the move.

Hundreds stuck in the newly inaugurated former military camp in Diavata near Thessaloniki broke the fence today and started to walk towards Idomeni (70km). The camp in Diavata is completely closed off by police and military. No NGOs, no media and of course, no independent people were allowed to enter the camp. Also, no one was allowed to exit. However, the refugees could not be restrained by police, military and fences. They forged a way out and moved on, northbound.

25 <http://livetickereidomeni.bordermonitoring.eu/2016/02/22/22-01-16/>

26 <http://m.dw.com/en/refugee-hotspots-in-greece-last-minute-compliance/a-19054977>

27 <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/eu-fluechtlingspolitik-wiener-balkan-gipfel-spaltet-europa-1.2878124?>

28 <http://mobil.derstandard.at/2000031715775/Griechischer-Migrationsminister-Grenzschiessungen-sind-wie-ein-Putsch>

29 <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/balkanroute-mazedonien-schliesst-grenze-fuer-afghanen-a-1078540.html#spRedirectedFrom=www&referrer>

In the meantime, those stuck at the Polykastro gas station decided to walk to Idomeni as well. Around 800 people were on the highway towards Idomeni this afternoon. There were further unconfirmed reports about other spots along the way, where people decided to walk.

Meanwhile, the camp in Idomeni is overcrowded. According to the UNHCR statistics of today, no one has been able to cross from Macedonia onwards. Macedonia, in accordance with the other Balkan route northern states and Austria, have declared more thorough identity checks. This will mean further slowing of the registration processes and travelling speed of the refugees.

Whilst the camp in Idomeni remains overcrowded, protests and escalations can be expected there in the coming days. And as the recent developments have shown, thousands more can be expected to continue their journey onwards on foot along the highway towards Idomeni. The sight of hundreds walking along the highway are impressive and evoke the images of Keleti, Hungary in September 2015. They show the will of the refugees to reach the border and travel on. Once more, the different governments have made their plans without considering the agency and determination of the people on the move.”

On the whole route restlessness began to spread. Slovenia rejected all migrants with invalid papers back to Serbia via Croatia.³⁰ In Tabanovce, before Macedonia's border with Serbia, 800 Afghans kept waiting for a passage across the border. In addition, from February 19 onwards transit papers weren't issued in Serbia anymore; the migrants, including those who had immigrated from Bulgaria via Dimitrovgrad, were required to get one of the new biometric documents issued in Gevgelija (Macedonia), which they would never actually receive. Humanitarian documents were only given to women and children and families were separated. At the same time, the Serbian police was hunting migrants, some of which had already been staying in Belgrade's parks for weeks. Hundreds cut their way through the Hungarian border-fence³¹ and they were encouraged to do so by the Serbian police:

“Today, about 200 people blocked; they walked on the highway towards Croatia from the camp at Sid train Station. Finally, they were taken with four buses to an open camp only some meters away from the Serbian/Croatian border. Furthermore, we learnt that people we forced to enter buses at the Sid camp to the Serbian/Hungarian border, where they were told to cross the fence. Partly, they managed to go back to Sid on their own and started the protest on the highway. I guess, others crossed the fence to Hungary. Official statistics from the Hungarian police seem to confirm that:

<http://police.hu/hirek-es-informaciok/hatarinfo/elfogott-migransok-szama>

Officially, Afghans are not allowed to cross into Croatia anymore as well, seems that the Serbian government somehow tries to find „other ways“ for the ones, who are already in the country.”³²

From February 26 onwards, the Greek government discontinued the transportation from the islands to Piraeus³³ and the bus transport to Idomeni ceased to operate as well. Nevertheless, the camp in Idomeni was filling up with more people each day. 22,000 to 25,000 non-SI-migrants were stuck in Greece at this point -

30 <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/en/significant-changes-in-the-treatment-of-refugees/>

31 <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/ungarn-hunderte-fluechtlinge-ueberwinden-stacheldraht-a-1078704.html> The statistics of the Hungarian border-police: <http://police.hu/hirek-es-informaciok/hatarinfo/elfogott-migransok-szama-lekerdezes?honap%5Bvalue%5D%5Byear%5D=2016&honap%5Bvalue%5D%5Bmonth%5D=2>

32 Balkanroute, Marc Speer

33 <http://www.ekathimerini.com/206379/article/ekathimerini/news/greece-seeks-to-stem-migrant-flow-from-islands-to-mainland>

in an atmosphere in which a revolt was still a promise for success, from the migrants' point of view.³⁴ The number of people who were waiting in Idomeni had doubled within a week, now there were 8,000. On February 29 some tried to push down the fence. They were met with tear gas. This provided new images for the press:



29.02.2016, Idomeni: Migrants try to open the fence

“Idomeni at the border with Macedonia; The Greek village has become a symbol of shattered dreams. Dreams of a future in Germany. For most of the refugees, it seems that the journey has ended here. Idomeni is the place where Europe's shameful answer to the crisis becomes visible.

The refugee camp at the border was designed for 1,500, maybe 2,000 people. Now 8,000 people seeking help are waiting here. Every third person is a child. They want to continue further towards Macedonia, further to the north.

But the border is closed.

Around noon a couple of hundred of people have had enough of waiting. They occupy the railway lines at the border, they reach the barbed wire fence - Macedonia's first line of defence. Then they press against it. Some refugees throw stones at the police on the other side, and thereby officers are injured. When the fence is almost torn down, the Macedonian security forces answer with teargas.

The crowd draws back. A bit later many of them are back again.”Go back, go back”, a Greek officer is

34 The drama of these days are illustrated by the entries published by Moving Europe in its liveticker: <http://livetickereidomeni.bordermonitoring.eu/> For a good overview about the situation in Greece see: <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2016/02/28/open-the-borders/>

shouting. “Whatever you do, the border will open when the governments decide to do so.” His words trail away. “Why aren't they letting us through?”, a refugee shouts back. “We don't want to stay here. Tell them that we want to go to Germany.”³⁵

The days after the break-through attempt were marked by bad weather and an ever slower processing at the border to Macedonia. The Balkanroute was eventually completely and finally closed on March 8. The atmosphere of these days is illustrated in an interview, conducted by Ramona Lenz (medico international) with Lukas Gerbig of Moving Europe, on March 3:

“You are travelling with the Moving-Europe bus along the Balkanroute since October. At the moment you are in Idomeni at the Greek-Macedonian border again, where more and more refugees arrive but they are not allowed to travel further. Can you give us an impression of the situation on the ground?”

The transit camp in Idomeni is designed for the accommodation of a maximum of 1,500 refugees. Since the Balkanroute is closed for nearly everyone, around 10,000 people are stuck here. They sleep in small tents on the fields or under the free sky. They do this in the conditions of rainfall and nightly temperatures of 10 degrees. Every hour more refugees arrive. Due to the fact that no more official buses commute here anymore, they come on foot or via different means. In the meantime, the Greek government has erected new camps in northern Greece in empty military buildings, but people don't want to stay there. They travel further towards Idomeni and hope for an opening of the border.

Is there still any hope that Macedonia will open its border again?

Now and then they let small groups of refugees pass, around 100 every day. We assume that this strategy is meant to prevent an escalation of the situation. Even though the number is very low, everyone hopes to be among the chosen ones to be allowed to pass. That's why they behave relatively calmly.

But protests still take place occasionally, and people have tried to storm the border.

Yes, the people are desperate. The camp is full of children, women and old people. The fact that the family reunification programme has ceased to operate, has contributed to the way in which these people travel on to Europe. They thank us when we offer them something to drink, but they actually only want one thing: to travel further. As soon as possible. Some days ago there was a rumour that the border will be opened, but nothing happened. This infuriated people so much that they pushed down a fence. Enough reason for the border guards on the Macedonian side to deploy tear gas, even against the children who were near the fence. The presence of police and military from different EU member states is very strong on the Macedonian side. Yesterday a military helicopter was hovering over the camp, a fact which caused extensive fear among the people fleeing war-ridden areas. “I know this noise very well, from Syria”, said a 50-year old man, who was standing next to me while trembling.”³⁶

At the beginning of March the closure of the route was imminent.³⁷ New forms of harassment were being invented: eventually all migrants from Damascus, Dairazor, Rakka and Mosul as well as migrants with a Turkish entry stamp which was dated too early were no longer accepted. The EU-Turkey-summit on March 8 loomed overhead. Marc Speer reflected on the atmosphere:

35 <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/mazedonien-in-idomeni-zeigt-sich-europas-versagen-a-1079936.html>

36 <https://www.medico.de/alle-wollen-nur-eines-16397/>

37 <http://livetickereidomeni.bordermonitoring.eu/2016/03/07/7-3-2016/>

“(Frankfurt/Main/Idomeni) On the occasion of the EU-Turkey summit the human rights and aid organisation Medico International criticises the planned closing of the Balkanroute for refugees.

“We don't dare to imagine what will happen if refugees realise that they are actually not able to continue anymore”, says Marc Speer from Medico, the partner of Moving Europe, which provides information to the people at the Greek-Macedonian border crossing and observes the human rights situation. “There is big danger that panic will burst out here.” The situation is already dominated by chaos. Children lose their parents in the crowd and every once in a while some refugees collapse due to exhaustion and desperation.”

Only small steps were left until the final closure of the Route on March 8, coordinated by all the concerned states except for Greece. The great disappointment which spread among the supporters along the route is illustrated by the following input written by two women, who were supporting migrants on their route, day in and day out for many months in their respective countries:

“Dear comrades,

as of midnight borders on the Balkan route will be closed, according to Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian police. This is an absolute catastrophe bearing in mind how many more lives will be endangered and to what extent political trade can be blinded and dirty. This compromises not only the people at risk and but all our societies.

Do we have enough of strength to react together? Tomorrow at noon in Zagreb we will have a press conference and a protest action. We are mobilising people for a larger mass protest in a few days.

What are your thoughts and plans, comrades? —

Thank you so much dear ... for this email. I suggest we do not go into a negative spiral, we must keep on fighting. This is not the end, it is the beginning of a new struggle. There will definitely be some action (protest or sth) in Macedonia these days, if necessary, I will do it alone.

Solidarity, comradeship, strength and love to all the fellow fighters ♥“

The dirty deal with Erdogan was negotiated and agreed upon the same day, on March 8. Neither the use of Frontex vessels nor the opening of hotspots had decreased the number of migrants crossing on rubber dinghies from Turkey to the Aegean Islands. But now the Turkish police had succeeded in stopping nearly all departures on the Turkish coastline within a few days, right after the dirty deal came into effect on March 20. The content of the dirty deal was pre-announced by *Reuters*:

“Turkey to readmit all “irregular” migrants crossing into Greek islands from Turkey;

** For every Syrian readmitted by Turkey from the Greek islands, one Syrian refugee will be resettled from Turkey to the EU member states;*

** The EU will completely evacuate refugees from the Greek islands, readmitting only those who crossed into the islands after a date to be determined;*

** The EU will accelerate the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish citizens in the Schengen zone, so that this takes place, at the latest, by the end of June 2016;*

** The EU and Turkey will cooperate in any joint endeavours to establish humanitarian safe areas inside Syria;*

** The EU will provide Turkey with an extra 3bn Euros (on top of the 3bn Euros already made available) to help Turkey deal with Syrian refugees through to the end of 2018.*

According to Reuters, the statement also makes reference to steps in the process of negotiating Turkish accession to the European Union.”

Those who are familiar with the European management of migratory movements will not be surprised by the fact that today, at the end of July 2016, even though all sanctions against migrants have come into force, many still remain in the Greek hotspots and military camps and the numbers of relocations tends towards zero,³⁸ that there are still no safe areas in Syria and that the three billion are only slowly arriving in Turkey. Merkel left the dirty work to others, and Seehofer announced the end of the 'welcome culture'. Since then, Lithuania has accepted more migrants, proportionally to the overall population, in the EU relocation program than Germany! The accommodation centres in Germany are empty, humanitarian workers wait to no avail. The facilities are empty in Germany, aid workers wait in vain.

But this story is about Idomeni, at the beginning of March 2016. The camp, which then had more than 10,000 people hoping that the border would still open, had gained a broad publicity due to daily reports in global press outlets. Photographers trode on each other's toes and documented the first steps on the way to a self-organized daily routine. Moving Europe opened a small open-air cinema. Other activists cooked or organized playgroups for the children. Norbert Blüm (German politician) arrived, followed by another legion of journalists. The people of Idomeni occasionally felt like animals in a zoo. On March 13, Moving Europe reported on the ongoing bad weather as well on the protests in Idomeni and Polykastro:

“Just when we thought the conditions in Idomeni could not get any worse, they have. The rain keeps pouring down. The mud is everywhere. The border is closed and people are still trying to figure out solutions for themselves, among the total lack of information and transport options which are available to them.

In the morning, there were protests in the camp against the distribution center. The people further illustrated that they did not want to eat, just for the border to open. The distribution center closed after the protests. There were also reports of protests at Polykastro, at the gas station.”³⁹

The next day, on March 14, 2,000 migrants formed a march to cross a river away from the Macedonian fence and then carved a path northwards. A rope was spun across the river, people helped each other across, and families and children arrived on the other shore unharmed. The previous day, two people had drowned in the torrents of a large river whilst attempting to cross it. The expression of a new #marchofhope was immediately on everyone's lips.

“BREAKING: A new #marchofhope has just started from the Idomeni camp to find a way to Macedonia. Moving Europe is joining the march, reporting that more than 1,000 people are participating (see their tweets on the right side of this page).”⁴⁰

38 <http://ffm-online.org/2016/07/27/zahlen-zum-eu-relocation-programm/>

39 <http://livetickereidomeni.bordermonitoring.eu/2016/03/13/13-03-2016/>

40 <http://livetickereidomeni.bordermonitoring.eu/2016/03/14/14-3-2016/>



14.03.2016, Idomeni: new #marchofhope

A description of the events can be found on Deutsche Welle:

“Hundreds of refugees are trying to get to Macedonia

Hundreds of people have left the Greek refugee camp Idomeni to find an alternative route to Macedonia. The Greek police gave them free passage. The refugees marched, carrying all their belongings, towards the nearby border village Chamilo, approximately two kilometers southwest of Idomeni. After marching for eight kilometers, a few hundred of them crossed a streaming river on the Greek side, with the other bank still being 500 meters away from the Macedonian border.

According to correspondents, a border fence seems to be missing there, which could hinder the people on their way to Germany. Later on the group of refugees was surrounded by Greek police forces. The Macedonian police was initially not to be seen.

The people are mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. During the crossing of the river young men helped weaker refugees, so that they would not get carried away by the current. Afterwards, Greek riot police units arrived and they told the people that their endeavor was meaningless: The refugees were already being expected on the Macedonian side and they would be pushed back across the border to Greece by the authorities. While the riot police tried to stop the group, they were then allowing them to pass, without resorting to violence.”⁴¹

41 <http://m.dw.com/de/hunderte-fl%C3%BCchtlinge-versuchen-nach-mazedonien-zu-gelangen/a-19116023>. A similar report in the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/14/one-thousand-people-camp-macedonia?>

Shortly after crossing the border, the march was stopped by the Macedonian military and the activists and journalists accompanying the march were separated.

“The people that made it are now being taken back to Greece with organised transport. The flow of people crossing the river has stopped for now. No violence for the time being.

600 people deported with army trucks. The other 800 crossed the river before but never reached the village so they are still somewhere in the fields ...

The police do not allow any humanitarian aid. Even the UNHCR were denied access to the village.”

Adrienne Homberger, of Moving Europe, reported these events the following day, from the perspective of the activists:

“Yesterday was an intense and very emotional day. We marched the whole way with the people in a very cheerful atmosphere at first, helping out with carrying luggage and kids. After the crossing of the river and before the border crossing people were getting exhausted and more anxious. All of a sudden we were facing the Macedonian military and were separated from the refugees. While they had to wait in groups of 50 out in the fields, we were brought to the police station in Gevgelija together with all the journalist and other supporters. We were among the last ones to get processed by the police and spent the entire night there.

After paying a 260 Euro fine each for illegal entry and being banned from entering the country for the next 6 months, we got back home at 6am.

When we picked up the car in Idomeni there were a lot of people walking back from the highway who were just pushed back from Macedonia. Some said that there were more groups still waiting to be pushed back.

We will go back to the camp now and make some interviews and collect testimonies from the people who were pushed back and find out in more detail what happened to them after we were separated and how they were treated.”

The dubious flyer in question, which shows a roughly sketched map, signed by the "Kommando Norbert Blüm" - was instrumentalised in the German and Austrian media, especially in the Bild and Kronen tabloids, to portray the marching migrants as the victim of outside influence and thereby criminalize the supporters. Spiegel-Online pursued this question as well:

“But where did the leaflet come from? What's it all about? According to the research carried out by SPIEGEL ONLINE, the leaflets were already distributed in the night before Sunday. They arrived at the camp in a white mini-van, with a falsified symbol of the Red Cross on it.”⁴²

However, Spiegel-Online at least also reported that the route over the river had been discussed in a Syrian Facebook group for weeks:

“According to SPIEGEL ONLINE's information, the origin of the action goes already three weeks back. At that time Macedonia refused to allow Afghans access, the border was nearly closed. A Syrian, who managed to flee to Germany before this, sent a message to some fellow Syrians on Facebook. He explained how he crossed to them, and called on them to take the same route. Therefore, the author of the news is therefore not

⁴² <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/idomeni-fluechtlinge-sollen-flucht-in-facebook-gruppe-geplant-haben-a-1082613.html>

a German citizen, yet his flight could have been assisted by German-Syrians.

Following this about 300 people discussed their potential flight in a closed Facebook group, mostly young men from Syria and Iraq. The flyers were then probably printed in the neighboring villages of Kilkis or Polykastro.”



14.03.2016, Idomeni: new #marchofhope

Moving Europe condemned the misleading reports in a statement. They were derogatory to those 2,000 people who had taken their fate into their own hands, and who had collectively opted for a march. The team decided to gather testimonies of some of the people which they had met on the march:

... These are testimonies from people the Moving Europe team marched with and visited again today. These people have all been pushed back illegally from Macedonia to Greece, without having been given the possibility to ask for international protection.

The first testimony is of a family of five; two adults and three children one of which is a three-month old baby. When they crossed through to Macedonia, the crowd they were in was separated into groups of about 50 people and were made to sit on the ground. Guarded by the military, they were made to sit for 10 hours outside. They were not given any food and when they asked for water the military refused their request, even when it was to mix the water with powder for the baby's milk. They witnessed both women and men being beaten by the army. After the long wait, they were brought to a hole in the border fence and pushed through it back to Greece. They could see the hotel close to the official car and truck border crossing in the distance so they started walking towards it because they knew it was close to the camp. The walk back to Idomeni camp lasted 1 hour.

The second statement comes from an elderly couple, a man and a woman, who both have a heart condition. They crossed the border to Macedonia and were stopped by the army. They were kept in the village close to where they were stopped for several hours together with a group of about 100 people. At first, they were

outside in the cold and wet. Then they say they were taken to some kind of shelter, where it was still very cold. Here, police and military were drinking alcohol, laughing a lot and making fun of them. The army would beat whoever spoke up against them in this setting. All the people were then loaded into an old truck and brought to the fence. Here, the couple saw the soldiers cut a hole in the fence. Whilst they were being pushed back to Greece, the soldiers insulted them with animal names such as cow, dog and donkey. They also told them they were “Muslim dogs”. The walk back to the camp took them around one hour. ...”⁴³

Our chronology ends with this last great uproar at the Macedonian border. Further protests took place in Idomeni during the following weeks as it remained a thorn of Europe's bad conscience until May. The camp was evicted on May 24, and its inhabitants were resettled to military camps. There, they were deprived of their previous networks and encountered barely improved conditions than those in the mud of Idomeni.⁴⁴

The migratory movements, about which we have reported in the preceding seven chapters, set the pace of the European crisis for many months and should not be conceived as anything else than an epochal turning point. Between the TINA policy and media orchestrations of somewhat saturated central Europe and the military control of its periphery, there seemed to be no mediations prior to the summer of migrations. From the point of view in Berlin, Brussels and Paris the Mediterranean Sea appeared as a pearl chain of tourist events, interspersed with no-go zones, which were circumnavigated in an airplane or on a luxury cruiser. (There seemed to be no relationship between the militarization of Europe's external border and the TINA policy and media spins within central European states prior to the the summer of migrations. Glancing from Berlin, Brussels and Paris, the Mediterranean Sea appeared as a tourist destination, including no-go zones, which are circumnavigated via airplanes or luxury cruisers.)

Migrants transported an awareness of their own rights and messages of dignity across the borders. They also carried the last glow of the Arab revolutions into Europe.⁴⁵ Even for the European population, bombed people turn into children. But women and men who, despite all their hardship, represent themselves and demand their rights, will not beg for nothing. The link between European prosperity and the poverty of the periphery is becoming more and more visible, and Europe must decide whether it wants to get used to images of misery or if it is willing to change itself.

The real issue is not the sheer number of migrants: even ten or twenty million should not have to starve and could be welcomed to Europe in a dignified way. The political and media orchestration of the topic matches the importance of the topic. It poses questions: opening the borders of the fortress of prosperity, opening society, or militarization and shooting orders. These key questions about the future of Europe were debated during the long summer of migrations. And migrants continue to pose these questions to us, even whilst more than 50,000 of them are still detained in Greece and 2,000 are stuck in Serbia, and multiple thousands are choosing the dangerous route to Italy via Libya or Egypt. Behind these migrants are hundreds of thousands of others, who demand as well as actualize their right to mobility. They will not leave us in peace. Idomeni is not the end of the story. Europe is being moved.

43 <http://livetickereidomeni.bordermonitoring.eu/2016/03/15/15-03-2016/> A reconstruction of the events in an ORF-broadcast, with the help of the Moving Europe activist Fanny Müller-Uri, can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6WGwSW7ILY>

44 A description of the camps is consistently updated on Moving-Europe.org; for the hygienic conditions in these camps see <http://www.ekathimerini.com/210759/article/ekathimerini/news/health-agency-says-migrant-centers- must-be-closed>

45 Helmut Dietrich, <http://ffm-online.org/2015/12/15/das-jahr-v-der-arabischen-revolution/>



07.12.2015, Idomeni: A few days before the (first) eviction of the camp © Moving Europe