

PUSHBACK FROM NORTH MACEDONIA: VISUAL ANALYSIS



The following report analyzes two pushbacks experienced by a respondent on the 23rd of April from North Macedonia to Greece. During the second pushback, the respondent was able to take several videos while being held at the Vinojug Temporary Transit Center, shortly before being pushed back to Greece. In combining the respondent's testimony of what occurred with an analysis of the visual materials available, this report seeks to provide a detailed account of the incident, key locations and perpetrators, including the foreign officers actively participating in some of the events described.

PUSHBACK 1

The respondent, a 34-year-old man from Tunisia arrived together two other Tunisian men 26 and 27-years-old in North Macedonia on the 23rd of April around 2 AM, along train tracks south of Gevgelija (41°07'41.8"N 22°31'01.9"E).

The transit group waited until around 6 AM before they began walking towards the bus station in Gevgelija. From there, they intended to take a bus to Skopje. They were apprehended along the way by two men in uniform driving in what the respondent identified as a police car. The men in uniform asked the transit group for their documents.

When the respondent and others from the transit group responded that they did not have documents, the men in uniform allegedly brought them to a police station (either the Border Police Station, or the Gevgelija Police Station).

The respondent explained that they did not stay long at the police station and supposedly waited for other officers to arrive who would bring them to a 'camp'. In addition, the respondent could not remember what the uniforms of the officers who apprehended him looked like. He did remember having seen the insignia of the North Macedonian police.



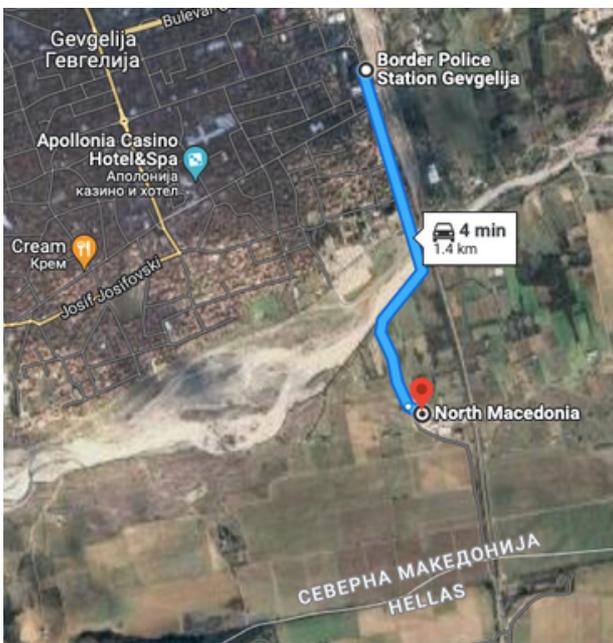


Image description: potential route from police station to Vojinog TTC. [Image Source](#)

A different car came to the police station and brought the transit group to a 'camp'. According to the respondent, the trip from the police station to the 'camp' took only a couple of minutes. The respondent estimated that the events, from the moment of apprehension to the arrival at the 'camp', took about an hour.

The respondent describes the 'camp' as a structure of several white container buildings. Based on this description, the travel time from Gevgelija, and that there are no other reception facilities in the area, and it is reasonable to assume the 'camp' the transit group was brought to is the Vojinog Temporary Transit Centre. This we will later confirm in more depth later in the report.



Image description: Vojinog TTC. [Image Source](#)

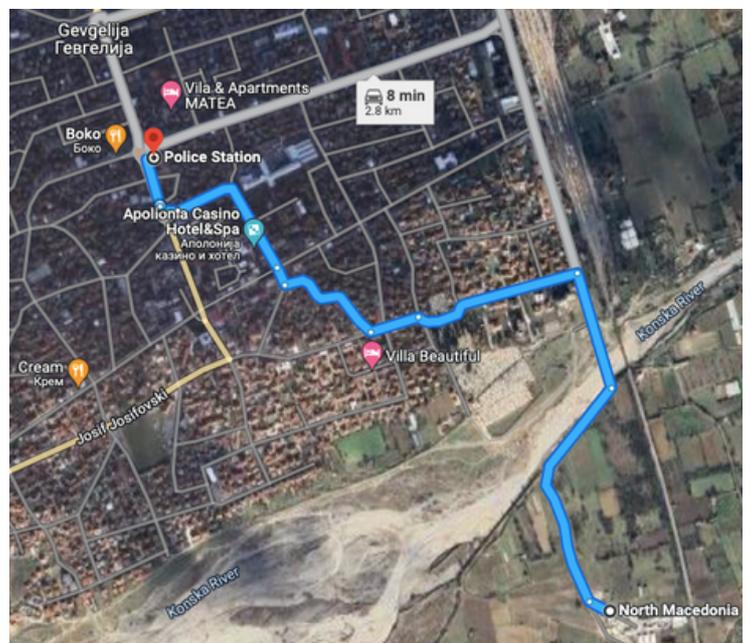


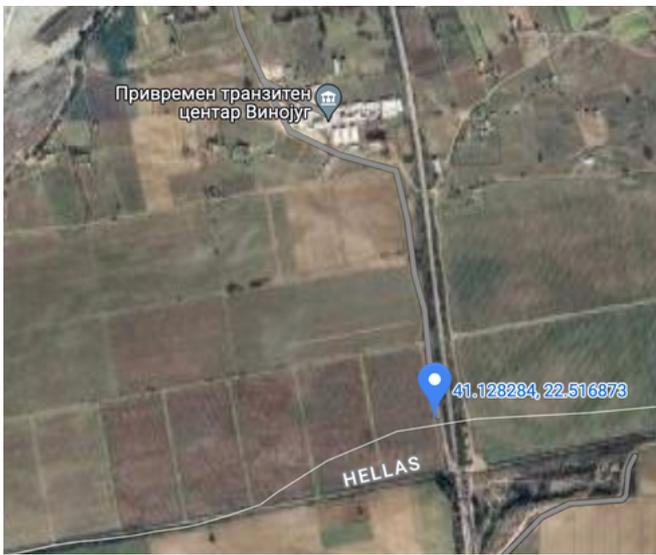
Image description: potential route from police station to Vojinog TTC. [Image Source](#)

The Vojinog Temporary Transit Centre (Vojinog TTC) has been identified in previous testimonies of pushbacks from North Macedonia to Greece, and is discussed in [BVMN's February 2022 Monthly Report](#).

Upon arrival, the respondent and others from the transit group was asked to give their biographical and biometric information (fingerprints, name, surname, country of origin, and age). They were not provided with a translator, nor did they receive food or water. During this process, respondent expressed that he wanted to ask for asylum, which was subsequently denied. He asked to meet with a social worker or lawyer, to which an 'officer' replied "it's not your lucky day, they are off, holiday". The pushback took place during Orthodox Easter weekend, which may be the holiday the officer was referring to.



Image description: Vojinog TTC. [Image Source](#)



After about half an hour, the transit group was put in the back of a car and driven to the Greek-Macedonian border. The respondent identified the location of the pushback as (41.128299,22.516993): close to the Vinojug TTC, where “across the border, you can see the camp”. The location described, closed to border marker 59 along the North Macedonian-Greek border and close to the greek village of Idomeni, has in the last years been a key transit point for many people-on-the-move seeking to travel farther north along the Balkan Route(s).

Image description: pushback point, border stone 59

[Image source](#)

PUSHBACK 2

Around 12:30 PM on the 23rd of April, the same transit group crossed the border to North Macedonia close to train tracks (41°07'41.8"N 22°31'01.9"E). They walked to the Gevgelija bus station, and boarded the 1:18 PM bus towards Skopje.

After approximately 1 hour, the bus was stopped by what the respondent identifies as North Macedonian police officers, wearing blue and gray uniforms and driving a white police car. The respondent recalls that the point of apprehension was close to a gas station, surrounded by mountains. Based on this description, the approximate location of the apprehension is:

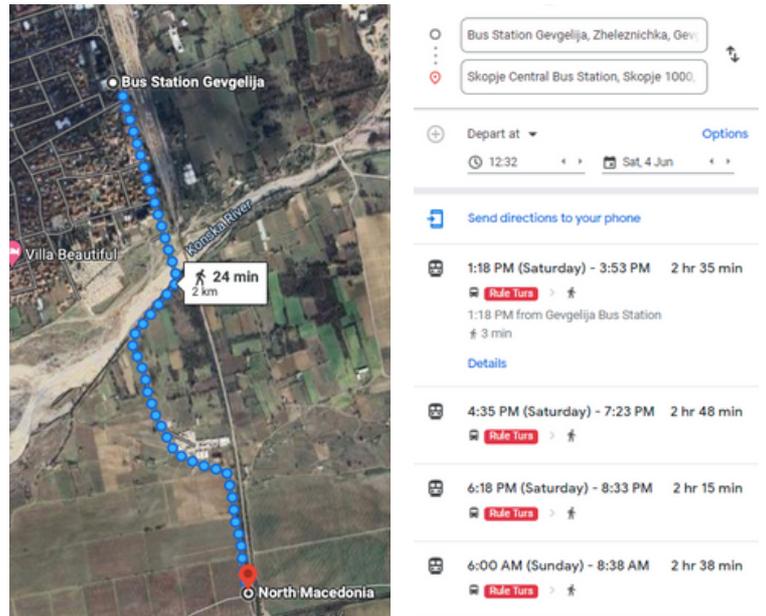


Image description: route from border to bus station and bus time table. [Image source](#)

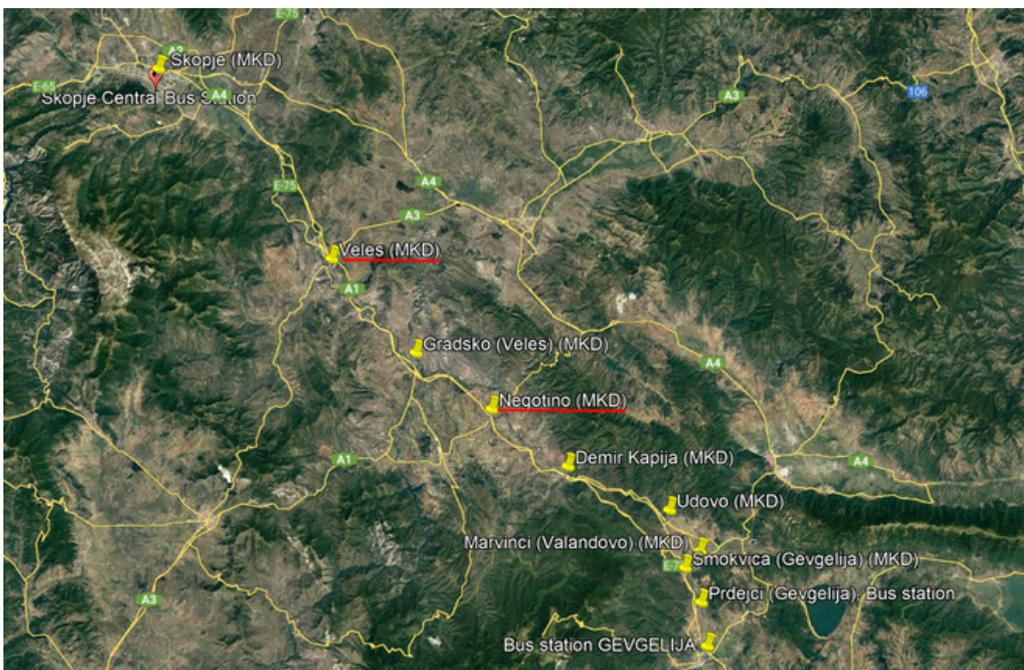


Image description: The respondent said the bus was stopped approximately an hour into the journey. From the timetable, this would approximately place the bus between Negotino and Veles on the A1 road. The stop occurred close to a gas station, in a mountainous area. From the satellite imagery, this aligns with the approximate location of apprehension. [Image source](#)



Image description: North Macedonian police uniforms .
[Image source](#)

Following the apprehension, the transit group was made to wait for a second vehicle to arrive. The respondent describes the second vehicle as a blue “small prisoner car or bus” with no rear windows and a dirty interior. The second vehicle was driven by an ‘officer’ who brought the transit group to the same ‘camp’ as in the first pushback, while the two other ‘officers’ stayed behind.



Image description: North Macedonian police uniforms .
[Image source](#)

In the Vinojug TTC, the respondent recalled seeing two women and a child. He further added: “I think they are lucky, maybe the social workers there or Red Cross, that’s why. But if there is no social worker, lawyer, nobody, they don’t let no one stay in the camp”. The transit group’s biographical information were again recorded. This time, the respondent was able to record most of the process, as well as his surroundings.



Image description: North Macedonian police vehicles
[Image source](#)



Image description: North Macedonian police vehicle visible in video taken by respondent
[Image source](#)

VIDEO 1

The first video is 11 seconds in length, and depicts one of the members of the transit group standing at the window of the small office, while one of the 'officers is inside'. Officer 3 approaches another member of the transit group and asks for his bus ticket.

Audio Transcript:

08-11 sec.: Дај ми го твојот (неразбирливо) стик (мисли: селфи стик). Give me your bus ticket



VIDEO 2

In second video (2:18), one of the respondents asks for medical and psychological care. Another respondent later asks one of the officers if they will be pushed back, and to stay in the camp. In the background, one of the officers is taking the biographical information of a respondent. In the video, the surrounding area is also visible. At one point in the video, the respondent asks if they will be sent to Greece, which the officer confirms.

Audio Transcript:

01-22 sec: (Officers talking in the background about something happening the previous day with the local doctor. Officers speak in local dialect, swearing and it's very unintelligible.)

45 sec: (Respondent) I need doctor, doctor psychology. You know, I have big problem

48 sec: (Officer) A, ok, no problem, and psychology (laughs)... Floor, Floor, right, right, floor...

01.07 – 01.20: (unintelligible conversations among officers)

1.20 – 1.40: (Respondent) Excuse me, my friend. Why my friend here and you will push me back? Let me stay in the camp please.

Person asks about push- back; ask to stay in the camp

1.40 –1.54: (Officer) Name, male. Officer asks for name (male pronunciation wrong, indicates he is asking for the name of a male person)

1.55 sec: (Respondent) We will go to Greece, or we stay here? Please. We go to Greece, pushback?

1.56 sec: (Officer) Greece, yes!

1.58 sec: (Officer) Just a moment

02.10 sec: (Respondent) You know it is not legal to go to Greece, to push back to Greece?

02.14-15 sec: (Officer) Finish!

2:15: (Respondent) Ok.



VIDEO 3

In the third video (2:12) the surrounding area is visible, as well as several of the officers present. In the video, the officers are joking about the process of bringing people to the border (00:26-00:30), and mention recognizing the respondent potentially from the previous day. Later in the video, the biographical information of one of the respondents is taken by the officer in the small office, and the respondent asks again if they will be pushed back (to which there is no response).

Audio Transcript:

001-09 sec: Officer 1 (outside camera) informs other officer 2 (also off camera):

A legal representative is here, he said he knows the procedures...

10 -20 sec : (Officer 2): Aaa, he knows the procedures... (something unintelligible) I should come and tell him about procedures

here, how they go PROCEDURALLY

20 – 23 sec: (Officer 2): I say to him, you will bother me here all day... (someone interrupts)

23- 24 sec: (Officer 1): They want to go up...

24 sec: (Officer 2): A?

26-31 sec: (Officer 2): This lawyer, a? Maybe I should show him how things go on 59 (meaning Stone 59 - demarcation at the border. a vague threat, in effect is saying that the procedure is to bring people to the border: 41.128277,22.517183. this is the same point the respondent mentions being pushed back)

33 sec: (Respondent 2): speaks about the people being push back to Officer 2, the he asks someone:

33 sec: (Officer 2): How is it stated your documents?

34 sec: Mumbled reply

39 -46 sec: (Officer 2): This one is the one that was falling and dying yesterday. He ask for a doctor. Hospital. Doctor.

51 – 1.07 sec: (Officer 2): Aaaa, yes. Wait a minute...

1.07 -1.12 sec: (Officer 2): No, there is no one. No one has given the right name

1.12 – 1.14 sec: Someone in the background: They change their names all the time... (huh)

1.15 sec: (Officer 2): Yes, yes

1.15 -1.24 – unintelligible

` 1.24 – 1.31 sec: (Respondent) My friend, excuse me. We will stay in the camp, or you will push us back to Greece.

1.33 -1.34 sec: (Officer 2): A Moment...

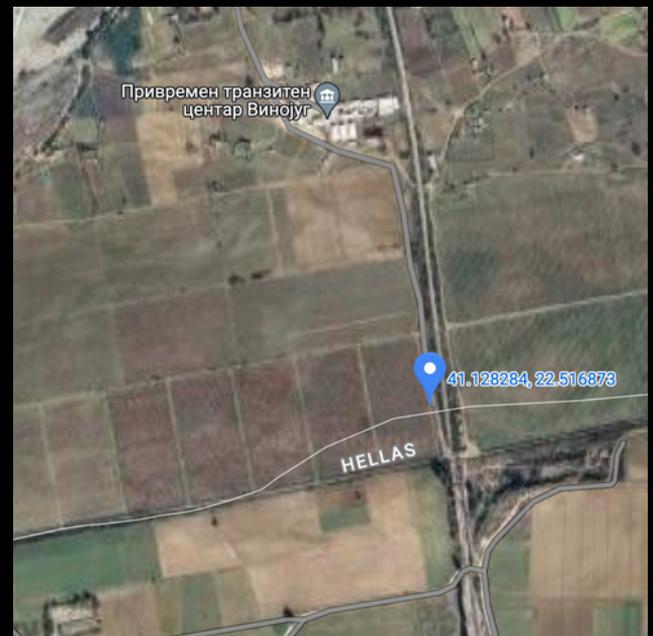
1.36- 1.41 sec. (Officer 2): Now, I will first see... Give me the one... (pauses) the one that wanted to see a hospital...

1.42 – 1.51 sec: (Officer 2) *whistles* come here (hand gestures to a person to come)

1.54 sec: (Officer 2): Name?

1.55 – 2.08 sec: (Officer 2) Wait, wait, wait...

2.08 – 2.10 sec : (Officer 2) Surname?



WHERE?

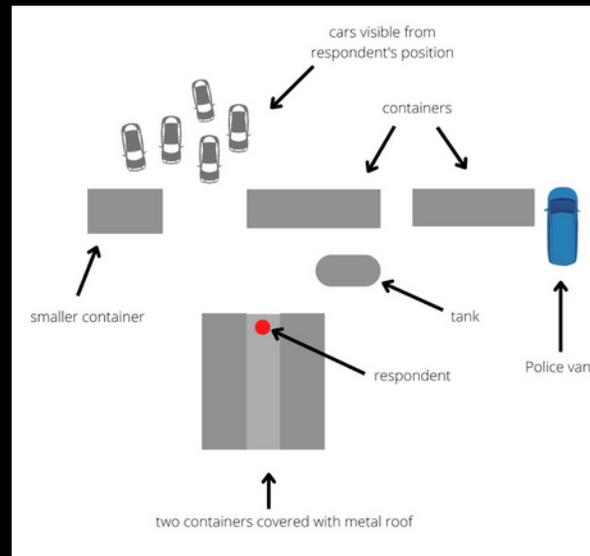
While it is already fairly clear that the 'camp' the transit group was taken to was the Vinojug TTC, the videos taken by the respondent help to confirm this. The respondent describes the place he was taken to by the uniformed men prior to being pushed back as a 'camp' 5 minutes from the North Macedonian-Greek border, visible from the border and just outside of Gevgelija. In both incidents, the transit group is taken to the same place.



Here are two panoramas pulled from the video taken by the respondent, depicting their surroundings while in the camp:



Based on the vantage point of the respondent in the videos, the layout of the surrounding buildings is as follows:



Comparing this layout to satellite images of buildings in the immediate area of the border, it appears to match the southwestern corner of the Vinojug Temporary Transit Center (see map above).



Image description: gate in border fence close to Idomeni.

[Image source](#)

From the Vinojug temporary transit center, the transit group was transported in the same van with the same driver as from the point of apprehension. They were taken to what the respondent describes as a “door” in the fence, which matches the description of a gate inside the border fence close to Idomeni, which has been mentioned frequently in past testimonies in the area. Here, the officers “opened the door” and told the group to “go”, pushing them back across the border into Greece. The respondent recalls that this occurred around 6pm. He recounted that, during the second pushback, the transit group was threatened by the officers: “the third time, they’d break our bones”.

WHEN?

Based on the video footage, we can also confirm the time at which the respondent was in the transit center, which matches the timeline shared in the respondent’s testimony of the incident. The respondent recalls taking the 1:18 PM bus from Gevigelija toward Skopje. After about an hour (around 2:30 PM), they were apprehended by officers who stopped the bus and checked the passenger’s documents. From there, they waited some time for the van to arrive, before being driven back to the Vinojug Temporary Transit Center, which would have been another hour’s drive—so arriving likely after 3:30-4:00 PM, depending on how long they waited at the apprehension point for the van, and before around 6 PM, when they report being pushed back to Greece. Based on the sun position visible in the video, the estimated time at which the respondent was fingerprinted in the Vinojug Temporary Transit Center is between 5:00-5:30pm.

Image description: calculation of time of day, based on sun position in videos taken by respondent

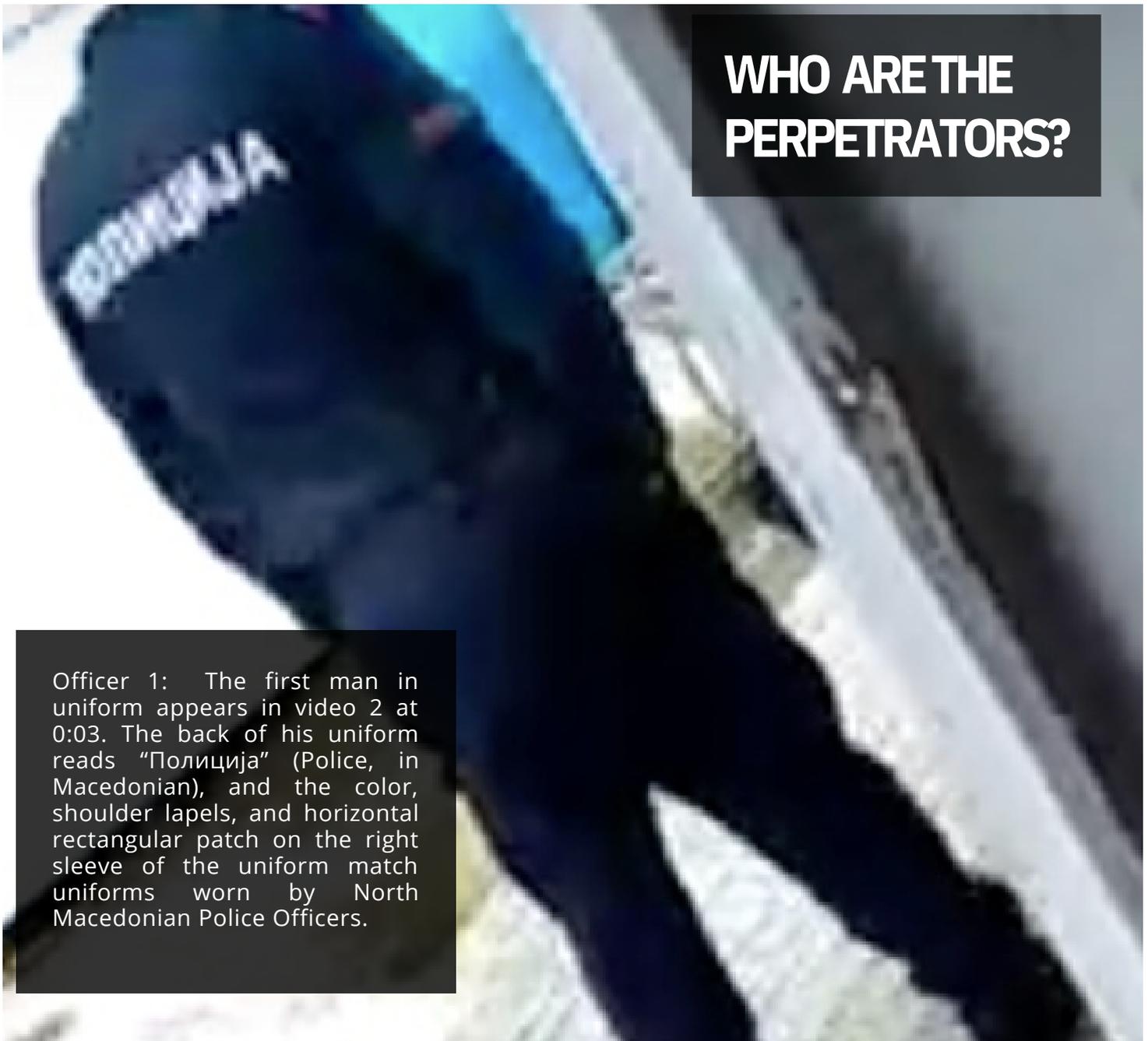




Image description: North Macedonian police uniforms .
Image source



Image description: North Macedonian police uniforms .
Image source



WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

Officer 1: The first man in uniform appears in video 2 at 0:03. The back of his uniform reads "Полиција" (Police, in Macedonian), and the color, shoulder lapels, and horizontal rectangular patch on the right sleeve of the uniform match uniforms worn by North Macedonian Police Officers.

Image description: North Macedonian police officer visible in video recorded by the respondent.

Officer 2: The second man in uniform appears in video #3 at 0:04 to 0:07, as well as 0:44 to 1:10. He is later seen in the small 'office', registering the POM, asking for their fingerprints and biographical data.

He is wearing a navy blue uniform, with "Policie" written across the back upper torso, as well as on his chest on the right side. "Policie" is the Czech word for police, which is relevant given that North North North Macedonia has been supported by the Czechia since 2015, when a bilateral cooperation was built to assist in the so-called 'migrant crisis'. This support and cooperation has been continually expanded. In December 2019, the Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš visited North Macedonia and vowed to help the country 'cope with the onslaught' of migrants by sending Czech police officers to protect its borders. In 2019, 460 Czech police officers and 8 police dogs were dispatched to North Macedonia, while a further 246 officers and 6 police dogs followed in 2020. This was reportedly the 32nd contingent of Czech officers sent to North Macedonia as part of bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

Most recently, in September 2021, a bilateral meeting between both Ministers of Internal Affairs, Jiri Novarek (Czech Republic) and Oliver Spasovaski (North Macedonia) took place, where further collaboration has been preconcerted, including "the implementation of joint training courses and seminars, aimed at exchanging experiences and improving tactical skills and capacities".

Czech police officers have reportedly been responsible for the apprehension of 28,647 people on the move in North Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovenia from 2017 to 2020.

Reports from 2020 state the apprehension of 8,306 people on the move on the North Macedonian-Greek border by Czech police. The Minister of Foreign Affairs in North Macedonia, Oliver Spasovaski, stated in September 2021 that, "the project to intensify control and surveillance of the southern part of our state border currently employs 131 foreign police officers, including 40 Czech police officers". Of the 53 reports of violent pushbacks in North Macedonia collected by the BVMN to date, 9 involve Czech officers.

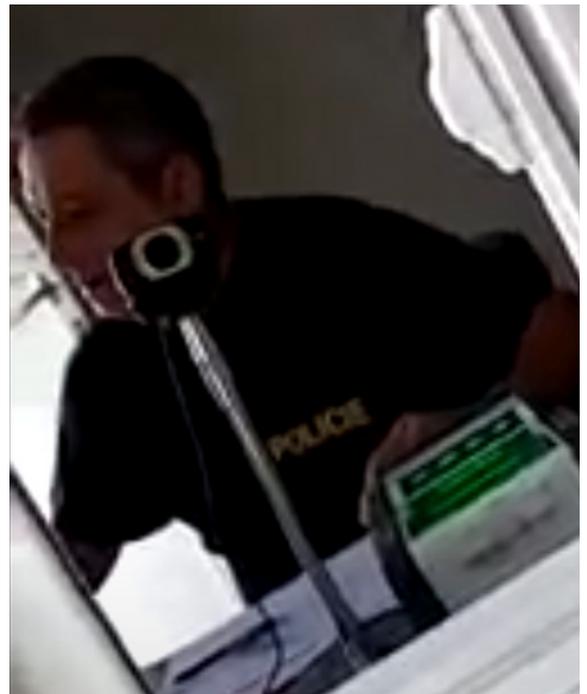


Image description: officer 2, potentially a czech police officer, visible in video taken by respondent



Reports from 2020 state the apprehension of 8,306 people on the move on the North Macedonian-Greek border by Czech police.

Image description: Czech officers in Vinojug TTC. Image Source

Officer 3: The third man in uniform appears in the video 1 at 00:10, and is wearing a black or navy blue uniform. It is difficult to identify much from his uniform as seen in the video, however when he turns to the side, you can see a similar rectangular patch on his left arm, and shoulder lapels similar to officer 1, which suggest that he is also a North Macedonian police officer. This officer asks the POM for their bus tickets, and otherwise assists in the process of registering the POM along with the two other officers present.



Image description: 3rd officer present in video taken by respondent

Officer 4: Officer 4: Appears in video 2 first at 00:07, speaking with other officers, much more is unclear from the uniform.



Image description: 4th officer present in video taken by respondent



CONCLUSION

In both incidents, the respondents were denied access to asylum procedures. Their biographical and biometric information was taken without a translator present to explain what was going on, and they were pushed back to Greece. Requests for medical care and legal counsel were also denied. In at least the second incident, foreign officers were present and actively participating, making references to the practice of pushing people back to Greece. Questions remain as to the reasons for which the respondent's biographical information was taken at the Vinojug Temporary Transit Center, as they were later not subject to reception and identification procedures and to lodge applications for asylum. In videos of the incident taken by the respondent, when asked, an officer affirms that the transit group will be returned to Greece, and makes reference to the specific point on the border at which the respondent would later be pushed back. Finally, the actions of the authorities follow similar trends previously documented by BVMN testimonies of pushbacks in this location, suggesting the systematic nature of such practices.