

Croatia Will Not Let Illegal Migrants In, Says Interior Minister

✘ ✘ ZAGREB, May 17, 2019 - Interior Minister Davor Božinović said on Thursday Croatia did not and would not let in illegal migrants, and that the police were complying with the law in handling migrants.

He was commenting on a Swiss Radio Television report the day before which showed Croatian police allegedly using force to return illegal migrants to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Over two days in late April, Swiss reporters allegedly documented, from concealed positions, four pushbacks in which 70 migrants, mainly from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Algeria, were transferred against their will to BiH.

Responding to the footage, Croatia's Interior Ministry said it showed "official action in line with the Schengen code, aimed at preventing illegal entry into the EU."

Speaking to reporters, Božinović said the TV report "was conceived so as to show that Croatian police use violence, and it's not the first time." He said the footage showed "everything but violence," and called it "another futile attempt to accuse the Croatian police which, I repeat, are enforcing national and European legislation."

For some time now, the Croatian police are faced with accusations of unlawfully returning migrants to BiH, instead of giving them a chance to apply for asylum in Croatia, and of beating them and stealing their property. The Interior Ministry has rejected the accusations, saying it "discourages" migrants from attempting to illegally enter the country.

Božinović said Croatia, as a sovereign country, did not and would not allow illegal entry. He said parts of the border regions, notably in Sisak-Moslavina County, were believed to contain leftover mines and that migrants risked being killed. "Croatia is enforcing the Schengen legislation by enabling people to seek asylum," he said, adding that 80% of those who applied for asylum left before their applications were processed.

“After being identified by the authorities of Austria, Germany or any other EU member state, they are returned to Croatia. They don’t want to stay in Croatia but go to third countries which don’t want to receive them and return them to Croatia, which should care for those who don’t want to stay in Croatia.”

“This return of secondary migrants to Croatia and the fact that Croatia keeps detailed records of all such asylum seekers, notably in the last 18 months, discourages them from seeking asylum in Croatia because they know they will be returned sooner or later,” he said.

This year through May 1, there were 4,309 illegal attempts to enter Croatia and the police arrested and tried 251 perpetrators for people smuggling.

Božinović said that in every county there were enough police to deal with migrants, reiterating that migrations were not a local issue. “Migrations are managed at national level, from the national task force formed within the Police Directorate,” he said, adding that “we can respond to any challenge.”

Police Director Nikola Milina, too, said the Croatian police acted in line with the law when dealing with migrants. “Last year alone there were more than 1,000 asylum applications. It’s not true at all that people are being prevented from seeking asylum.”

He said the police were first and foremost focused on preventing people smuggling, and that they were also saving lives. He urged NGOs not to encourage migrants to expose themselves to danger, notably in potential mine fields.

More news about the migrant crisis can be found in the Politics section.

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