



# Serbia's Big Heart

Since mid-June 2015, when the influx of migrants to the Republic of Serbia increased, those employed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia have been working in three shifts. A small number of them were already working within centres for the accommodation of asylum seekers while others, in accor-

dance with the circumstances of the unfolding situation, left their office jobs and transitioned to work in the field. Presevo was the first stop, followed by Kanjiza and Sid as also all other points where a need had been identified. Those engaged in the aforementioned field activities were not subject to regular working hours and they worked irrespective of the prevailing

weather conditions, outdoors, whether rain or shine.

All of those employed, in cooperation with other governmental bodies, international organizations and the NGO sector, were charged with the important task of helping persons escaping persecution and the atrocities of war. This issue of the bulletin will be dedicated to them.



PHOTO: SCRIM

►► **SLOBODAN SAVOVIC:**

## This job has become a part of me

I went to Presevo for the first time on the 24th of June 2015, to a factory which had been abandoned and had out of use for over a decade. The centre was opened on the 8th of July. Since that time, we have been diligently working towards the improvement of conditions and services being offered to migrants therein. I remember many pleasant moments, for instance when it was Aid al-Adha. On this occasion, the local residence organized of-

fering gifts to the migrants, over 500 of them. I wish that you could have seen that queue, heard that silence and felt that gratitude. It was in their eyes. That moment left a strong impression on me.

I remember also when around a hundred of them were given bureks from the local bakery; a hundred souls gratefully eating in silence. There were also many difficult moments, many separated families. You cannot imagine the feeling when

you see children looking for their parents. It is their suffering that I find most difficult to bear. Of course, one eventually becomes satiated, emotionally overcome on a personal level. But, no sooner have I arrived home, then some half an hour later, I begin once again thinking about these people, wondering whether or not they have found cover from the rain, the Sun, whether or not there is enough water and everything else that is necessary. This job has become a part of me.

We have achieved much, but wish yet to do more for these people. One should always strive towards loftier and nobler aspirations, because this is the only way to move forward. Perhaps there are certain things which now, with the benefit of hindsight, I would have done differently, but overall I am satisfied with and proud of all my colleagues working here.



EMILIJA KAMERIC:

# I know now that life cannot be stopped

After so many days spent in the field with the migrants I feel a certain sense of attachment to these people. I committed myself to helping whenever I could, particularly mothers with children, the elderly, infirm, pregnant women and others irrespective of whether they needed accommodation, food or some other manner of help I could offer. For us, working hours were more of an idea than a reality. We worked up to 20 hours a day a times. None of which was problematic for either myself or my colleagues as we understood just how much our efforts meant to the migrants. There were many emotional moments, but I remember one particular instance from the Acceptance – Transit

Centre in Presevo. The migrants had lit a fire inside one of the tents on account of it being cold. People responsible for the security of those within the centre saw this fire, came over and put it out, whereupon the migrants began exiting the tent. One woman offered me her child to hold while she went back inside the tent for her remaining two children. I realized that the baby was not moving, neither its hands nor its feet. In shock, I ran to the ambulance where the doctors on hand were successful in resuscitating the child after a considerable effort. That moment when I felt warmth returning to her little hand I will never forget. I know that the little girl's name is Esma and I will remember her for as long as I live.



PHOTO: SCRM

It was an equally emotional moment when we witnessed the birth of a baby in the ambulance room in Adasevci. To me all this is indicative of the fact that

life cannot be stopped. People are born, marry and demonstrate their love everywhere, under any and all conditions, even these.

SHEMSI JASHARI:

# I often wonder how far have these poor people gone



PHOTO: SCRM

I have been working in the Reception – Transit Centre in Presevo since the 8th of June 2015. I am very happy that I have been afforded the opportunity to help these people. In the beginning, while all this was new to us, it was quite difficult, but once you are committed to the job you are doing, all obstacles can be overcome. At times we were working for 15 hours at a time, sometimes longer. There were times when there was up to 10,000 persons within the centre per day. One had to approach each of these persons, to speak a couple words of encouragement, all of which I was more than happy to do, as I never found it difficult to offer what assistance I could when the opportunity for doing so presented itself.

All of us were encouraged by the looks of contentment which we could read in the eyes of these unhappy people when we would offer them any manner of assistance. Their gratitude was our greatest reward.

I heard many sad stories. I was talking to a boy who was travelling in the company of his mother. I asked him where his father was, to which he responded that he had died in the war. It was very difficult to continue that particular conversation and ask anything else of them. We, the translators, have been entrusted an important responsibility, which we attempt to adhere to as best we can. I feel that the Republic of Serbia has similarly conducted itself towards these people and has afforded them what assistance it could to the utmost of her capacities. I often ask myself how far have they come, those who have left Presevo and what fate awaits them as they continue their travels? To some, I even gave my telephone number and they promised that they would call me once they reached Germany. Some of them actually fulfilled their promises and called to inform me that they have found their better life. I wish them all nothing but happiness.

ROBERT LESMAJSTER:

# We have shown ourselves to be good hosts

In this job of ours, happiness and misery are themselves interchangeable. I remember scenes of family reunification when parents are once again reunited with their children. This oftentimes happens given the fact that over the course of their long and uncertain journeys, children get lost. The challenge is finding them. Sometimes this is done with our assistance while at other times they do this of their own accord. But irrespective of how this transpires, such scenes are always particularly touching and we are happy to see them reunited.

There are of course other, less pleasant moments for which reason this job is considered as one that is emotionally exhausting. Sometimes the migrants get into arguments amongst themselves which becomes very trying to us in as much as it is for them. I remember when the Asylum Centre in Banja Koviljaca was filled to capacity and it had become very difficult indeed to continue our work. Still, despite the

challenges and dangers they meet on their perilous journeys towards a better life, these people have proven themselves as being very decisive, resolute in their desire to achieve that which they had set out to do.

I feel that we have shown ourselves to be good hosts. All my colleagues from the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration worked selflessly and in a manner becoming of true professionals. I honestly feel that we all gave our maximum efforts in offering the migrants what assistance we could. There were cases when some of the migrants contacted us after they had left our company. I know that some of them have arrived in Germany and have managed to integrate themselves therein. Amongst their number there are many intelligent people, for which reason I believe that they will successfully acclimate to their new environment and will be of considerable benefit to those communities which receive them.



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The views in this publication are those of authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SDC and the Swiss Government.

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