

Swedish border policies in Greece

Because of the EU's common migration policies, the external borders of the union are also those of Sweden. As a part of the research done for the cabaret Europa Europa, members of the research group travelled to a part of Sweden's external border that is one of the most commonly used ways of entry into Europe for people seeking refuge – Greece.

European authorities are actively playing a part in the many deaths that take place every year at Europe's external borders. These tragedies are often called accidents by the media and politicians, when in fact they are a direct consequence of European migration policies, which have been developed through decisions made by Sweden and other EU governments. In Italy, for example, it is illegal for civilians to assist boats in need, if they suspect that the passengers of the boat are people seeking refuge. There have been many reports of police and border patrols that violently force human beings, or boats or other vehicles over the border to the closest country outside the EU, or out onto international waters.

In January 2014, nine children and three adults died in Greece, when the coastguard violently towed their boat back towards Turkey. As part of the research process, *Europa Europa's* project and communication manager Anneli Cernelid visited Athens, where she interviewed Ehsananullah Safi who lost his family due to the actions of the coast guard.

– There were children on that boat, between one and ten years old, they were killed, who does something like this? Asks 38 year old Ehsananullah Safi from Afghanistan, after a memorial ceremony in a mosque in Peristeri outside of Athens, a couple of days after he lost his family. He says that the engine of the tiny wooden boat with 28 people on board broke down only 100 meters from the Greek island Farmakonisi. The coast guard turned up only a couple of minutes later but instead of helping the people on the boat ashore they towed the boat back towards Turkey.

Ehsananullah Safi says that the coast guard drove with full speed towards Turkey and this caused the boat to take in water. The people on the boat held up a child and appealed to the coast guard to "stop, stop" but still the violent towing continued.

The coast guard finally stopped when their own engine became overheated. Some of the passengers, Ehsananullah Safi among them, were able to sneak onboard the coast guard boat, where he continued to appeal to the crew to let him save his family from the sinking boat, but they overpowered him. Several children and women were stuck in the small cabin of the boat. They sunk with it.

"I was imprisoned for two days for no reason"

– We mostly stop people who look like foreigners, says Mary, who is working with the police in an operation called Xenius Zeus, something that can be described as an extreme variation on the Swedish REVA project. The official goal of the operation is to find people who have committed crimes of various kinds,

but mostly arrests are made for completely different reasons, and the police didn't pretend otherwise while we followed them do their work one morning.

Between 30 and 300 people are arrested every day in Athens, under the operation Xenius Zeus. In the afternoon, those who are arrested are put in a bus and driven to a big police station in Petro Ralli where the authenticity of their papers is examined. Some are released, others are sent to one of the Greek detention centers, or kept in custody at the police station overnight and sometimes for as long as months, according to human rights organizations.

Addis is 18 years old and has been in Greece for seven years. Ze has been stopped by police from the Xenius Zeus operation many times.

– I was imprisoned for two days for no reason. A police officer stopped me on the street, asking for my papers, and even though I showed my pink card (that proves that you are an asylum seeker) ze threw me in prison. I was imprisoned for two days without having done anything wrong.

Addis' two year old, Hero, is sitting in a pram next to hir, wearing pink nail polish and nibbling on potato chips. Ze is quiet and calm, but every now and then ze coughs.

– He was with me in the prison, we had to sit outdoors and the nights were cold, that's why he got sick. There is something wrong with his breathing now, ze says, hir distrustful eyes filling up with tears that ze quickly wipes away.

Earlier today, Addis visited the police station in Petro Ralli to try to renew hir pink card that expired six days ago. Without it, ze can't take Hero to see the doctor. Ze has been at the police station several times before the card expired, but has not got it renewed yet. This time they told hir to come back at six in the morning the following day.

Addis is originally from Ethiopia, but moved with hir mother to Sudan when ze was six. When ze was eleven, they left Sudan for Europe with the help of smugglers. There was a severe storm the night they were going to travel the last bit to Greece overseas, and Addis' mother drowned. A man that they travelled with helped Addis ashore, and ze ended up in a hospital for two months due to the injuries sustained during the sea passage. Ze was released from the hospital when ze was considered healthy enough, to manage on hir own. Ze lived on the streets of Athens and scraped along without papers for a couple of years. When ze was 15 years old, ze found out that ze was in hir fifth month of pregnancy, and to get access to obstetric care, ze had to apply for asylum. Ze has been waiting for a reply ever since, and now ze, like many others, has to visit the police station in Petro Ralli every six months to renew the pink card that proves that ze is seeking asylum.

– The whole system is wrong. We are not allowed to study, we don't attend school, we don't work, everyone here hates us. They won't renew our pink cards, they don't accept us as human beings, we get treated like animals. We are not animals.

Despite of the rules of the Dublin Convention many countries make an exception when it comes to Greece – asylum seekers can apply for asylum again in a different EU country because of the "inhumane conditions for asylum seekers in Greece" – still the very same union is making it as hard as possible for people to leave the country. Asylum seekers are not allowed to leave Greece to go to another EU country, and the internal border controls between Greece and other EU countries have become stricter. People are forced to pay thousands of Euros to be able to get out with the help of smugglers, and many have to try several times, if they succeed at all. Most people can't afford to even try.

As a single parent, Addis is trying to support himself and his child by cleaning the houses of some families one or two days a week. In one day, he earns seven Euros. He is staying at a friend's place, a friend that is caught up in the same wait for answers on his asylum application.

– I thank God that I have friends to help me. But I don't want to show Hero this life. I know from my own experience what it's like not to be able to go to school, I want him to be able to go to school. But I have no money to pay a smuggler to help us get out of here, Addis says.

This text is an excerpt from Anneli Carnelids "Rapport från Sveriges yttre gräns" (Report from the outer borders of Sweden) that was published in BANG 1/2014.

Facts: Fortress Europe

Today, it's basically impossible for people from certain countries without a European passport to get into the EU legally. The chances of getting a visa are close to non-existent for individuals suspected of having reasons to seek asylum, something that can only be done within the country where one is seeking protection. Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan and Iraq are some examples of war-torn countries where the citizens don't stand a chance of getting a visa, not even for visiting the EU. This is why they are forced to try more dangerous roads to get into Europe. Even though it's a human right to seek asylum, the EU is refusing to grant people this right, and those who make their way into the EU anyway are considered criminal and illegal. When in truth, it's the member countries that are criminal, the legislation that is illegal.

With visa requirements that are almost impossible to meet and the founding of Frontex (EU's bureau for border management) together with other investments in border control, the countries of the EU are working together to strengthen the outer borders of the union. In 2004 Sweden introduced a carrier liability following EU directives, which made it punishable to allow people without valid identification to board a flight or a boat. In Greece, EU financed heat sensitive cameras that are used to monitor a 12,5 kilometre long barbed wire fence that has been built to block one of the areas where people used to cross the border from Turkey by foot. The fence has led to a remarkable decrease in the amount of people seeking refuge who are crossing the border there. Instead, more and

more people are forced to take the far more dangerous sea route or enter the EU through Bulgaria. As a result of this, a fence is right now being built there as well.