

Young Afghan Refugees in Hungary

“Dublin II means they play football with us, shooting us from one country to another, playing with us and wasting our time.”

Milad* (17) from Afghanistan is living in a facility for minor refugees in Frankfurt, Germany since October 2010. For almost two years he has been on an Odyssey across Europe. He fled via Pakistan, Iran and Turkey to Greece. In late summer 2009 he arrived at the Greece island Lesbos. His Odyssey across Europe had its starting point in a detention camp named Pagani. It was this camp that attracted international attention due to its inhumane detention conditions. Milad was detained there for 10 weeks. In the course of a revolt mattresses and blankets were burnt in the completely overcrowded cells, in which 83 people - most of them minors - were detained. The next day Milad was released. He had to spend some nights sleeping out in the streets before he could get a ferry to Athens. In Athens he had to spend the nights in public parks, where he became a witness to the racist attacks on refugees. Milad tried to continue his flight. On his first attempt he was caught on a ferry to Italy and sent back to Greece. Again he was imprisoned, this time for 8 weeks. Milad describes the conditions in the detention centre as horrifying: not enough food, overcrowded cells, too less mattresses. As a minor he should have had a guardian, but as there was none available Milad was detained for a longer period than the others. After he deliberately injured himself he was released. He was still trying to reach Norway where his aunt is living. On a very cold night in 2010 Milad was arrested together with a group of other under-aged Afghan refugees in Hungary right behind the Serbian border. While talking to him on the phone he sounded hopeless and tired for the first time. In Hungary he applied for asylum after he was threatened to be detained for months and afterwards deported back to Greece, if he did not apply. He witnessed maltreatment by the Hungarian border police. He was put through a medical age assessment, his collarbone was x-rayed. In the age of 16 he was transferred to Bicske, where he was kept in isolation for several days. Very soon he realized that the living conditions in Hungary are miserable and again food was served only twice a day. At night he could not sleep, the images of the European prisons he was held in kept haunting him. Milad escaped and finally reached Norway. There he had to hide because he was in danger of being deported back to Hungary. When the police came to pick him up and deport him he had to hide himself under a friend's mattress. Again he had to flee. This time he went to Sweden - one more time seeking asylum. Everywhere he told his story, and said it's impossible for him to go back to Hungary and that he is terrified. In October 2010 he finally reached Frankfurt, Germany. Traumatized by the experiences during his flight and the many detention centres he was kept in he still can't sleep at night: „In Hungary I will be put in jail again. I can't take it another time.“ Milad says. A justified fear: He is recognized as 30 years old in Hungary, although being registered as a minor during the time he was there. Neither the German, Norwegian nor Swedish authorities doubted that he is under-aged. In case of a deportation back to Hungary he is most likely to face months of detention, according to the estimation of Hungarian human rights organisations. Despite all the uncertainty Milad started settling in Germany. „Do you think I'm crazy? I feel like home here.“ he says in German. He hopes to have finally found a place to stay.

Sohail (18) was one of the minors who were arrested in Hungary in that cold night in February 2010. He was also detained for long periods of time despite being a minor – first in Greece and later in Macedonia. Like Milad he was detained in Hungary and had to undergo a medical age assessment: his teeth were examined and his collarbone was x-rayed. By the age of 16 he was transferred to Bicske from where he went to Austria on his own. Austria decided to deport him back to Hungary, although he gave a detailed description of the maltreatment he suffered in a Hungarian police station. After being deported from Austria in summer 2010 the Hungarian authorities changed his age. He was now two years older and had to be detained in Győr for 6 months. Later

he was interviewed for his asylum procedure and although Sohail speaks Dari the interpreter was translating into Pashtoo. Since weeks another problem is bothering Sohail: „The fights between the different refugee groups in Debrecen are particularly bad. Currently the fights between Afghans and Arabs are the worst. Especially at the end of those days when more people receive a rejection it gets worse. Last week 50 people were involved in a fight in the yard. One man was kicked so badly in his face that he couldn't go outside. It was that bad. Some drink a lot because they don't have a future. They are totally disturbed. I'm afraid one day something bad will happen.“

Ali (21) was deported from Munich to Budapest in autumn 2010. There he was detained for 3 months in a prison in Nyírbátor close to the Ukrainian border. Now he is living as an asylum-seeker together with 300 others in a bleak refugee camp at the outskirts of Debrecen. His time in Nyírbátor was a catastrophe. On top of the lack of prospects for those inside the biggest problems in Nyírbátor are the systematic maltreatment by the staff as well as the administration of strongly sedating psychotropic drugs. „They go from cell to cell with a tablet full of pills. If you take them you will forget. The pills make you look like a zombie, you can't move your face.“ Ali's friend Reza tells about a friend who was imprisoned in Nyírbátor for 6 months. As he refused to take the pills he was beaten heavily – until he swallowed the pills.

Said (24) was deported from Rotterdam, Netherlands to Budapest in October 2010. In Afghanistan he was working as an interpreter for the ISAF (*International Security Assistance Force*) and was threatened with death. His face looks pale and he seems very tired. As he reached Hungary a year ago he was detained and his fingerprints were registered. Said left Hungary after a short time and escaped to the Netherlands. His cousin lives in the Netherlands, who was supporting him during the recurring psychological breakdowns he suffers from: „I need to be with my family, otherwise I will go crazy.“ Said says. He is heavily traumatised and suffers from severe headache attacks, racing heart, bone and back pain and insomnia. In the Netherlands he was in psychiatric treatment. Despite that Said was deported back to Hungary in October 2010 – accompanied by two police officers and a doctor from Netherlands. In Budapest his medical file was handed over to the Hungarian border police in the presence of the Hungarian Red Cross. Said's medical file contains doctor's reports and a list of the prescribed medication. The Dutch doctor who accompanied him as well as the Red Cross explicitly pointed out that Said must not be detained due to his bad state. Still he was taken to Nyírbátor where he was kept in prison for more than 5 months. Instead of the medication prescribed to him in Netherlands he received the usual administered pills in Nyírbátor. Because he already had been treated with psychotropic drugs in the Netherlands they did not have an effect on him. Said was awake and the time did not pass. He massively injured himself, by cutting into his arms: „I was so tired, I didn't want to live any more.“ The doctor of the prison explained to him that he can get the medicaments prescribed to him if he pays it from his own pocket. But Said did not have 120 Euros per month to pay the medication, and how could he get that amount of money while being detained? Representatives of the Red Cross visited him twice, trying to intervene against his detention without success. Only after more than 5 months he was finally released from prison. At the open refugees camp in Debrecen where he is now they told him that he has to pay his medication alone. Only Paracetamol they can give him for free. Beside housing and food Said does not receive any kind of support at all. He is planning to go to the Netherlands again: „I will try it one last time. If I can't stay there I will put an end to this.“ He seems calm and clear while he talks. Calm and determined with his terribly tired eyes.

Reza (16) was arrested together with two unaccompanied minors in Hungary close to the Serbian border in February 2011. The teenagers tell that they had to face brutal beatings by the police during the arrest. They felt most humiliated when they had to completely undress at the police station. The next day Reza was detained in Kiskunhalas. The 25th of July 1993 is noted as his day of birth. „I was scared all the time,“ Reza remembers, „and I was hungry, because they gave us only very little food to eat. Besides, I never understood why they put me in prison. I just wanted to go to where my brother is.“ A few days after his arrest a lawyer from the Helsinki Committee in Budapest came to visit Reza. Shortly after he was removed from that prison and deported back to

Subotica in Serbia. Also in Serbia he was detained for some days. After being released he managed to flee to Hamburg. Meanwhile he is living in a youth-aid facility in Hamburg together with his brother, who arrived 3 years ago and has a secure residence status. Since Reza escaped from Afghanistan the prison in Kiskunhalas was not the first European prison he had to face. After crossing the land border from Turkey to Greece he was arrested by Greek border patrols and taken to a completely overcrowded prison in the Evros region. After a few days he was released with a paper reading that he has to leave Greek territory within 30 days. Reza tried several times to get to Italy from the Greek harbour town Patras. „Many times I tried to lay below the axle of a truck. I was afraid to die.“ Reza went to Athens and decided to use the route via Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Hungary to get to his brother in Germany. In all the countries he transited he was put into prison and experienced violence. The severe human rights violations Reza had to face on his way to his brother at the EU's border as well as inside Europe led to a heavy post-traumatic stress disorder. „Although I'm with my brother now, I'm still scared. What is going to happen to me in Germany? Will they leave me to stay with my brother? At night it is difficult to find sleep. I'm not the same any more.“

All these teenagers have their own story – their own tears, dreams and wishes. Nevertheless their stories are not occasional cases. In youth facilities all across Germany one can find teenagers with similar stories, with a long history of escape across Europe - like the one Milad went through.

Most of the refugees in the camp in Debrecen have been deported back to Hungary at least once and were arrested at arrival and kept in detention for many months.

Milad and Reza are willing to give interviews: contact@w2eu.net

** all names changed*