

Letter from a Hiker

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In June 2019, the H-Alter portal published a text, signed as a “letter from a hiker”, in which the events at the mountain lodge on Risnjak, related to the passage of a group of refugees through that part of Gorski Kotar, were described and commented on in first person from the position of an observer and witness. The area in question, a **weaponized landscape**, is a section of the **Balkan route** used by people on the move to reach other countries of the European Union. From the letter, we learn that several of them, who stopped by the lodge late at night to take a break and ask for water, were attacked by members of special police forces who were posted at the lodge and the surrounding **forests** at that time and tasked with *guarding them from refugees*, as the manager of the lodge explained to the gathered hikers. In addition to the actions of police officers, armed and “in full combat gear”, towards people who were “bare-handed, thirsty and hungry, wandering for days on mountains they are not familiar with”, the author of the letter was horrified by the reaction of those present and the justification of violence against people: “Only then did I feel a chill, (...) when I saw how the narrative focus (...) began to shift from what we had witnessed – the needless violence against refugees asking for water – to the argument that they were dangerous beasts” (cf. **wild animals**). The letter from a hiker is an example of the public reaction from a so-called ordinary observer to the actions of the police against people on the move – actions which, according to available reports, are often a prologue to **pushbacks** – rare both at that time and today not (only) because such actions were mostly hidden from direct insight, but also because of a kind of normalization of such operations. The letter from a hiker had a significant public reach, but the reaction from the competent authorities could be characterized as nonchalant, to say the least, while the letter itself was published at a time when the violence and cruelty of the policies aimed at refugees and other migrants were not publicly evident nor normalized to the extent they would become in the following months and years.

1/6/2022