

Movable Fences or Gates

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Unlike Slovenia, Hungary and Serbia, Croatia has not erected a **fence, wall or wire** on its borders to its eastern or southern neighbors. One of the reasons for this is, allegedly, the relationship between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, its neighbor and the country with which Croatia shares its longest border. This relationship is presented, in the prime minister's speech before the European Parliament, in two fundamentally different ways, as a relationship "between friendly countries and peoples" and as a relationship between Croatia and "the area inhabited by Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina". However, even though Croatia has not erected fences or wires on its borders, for whatever reason, it still uses a type of movable fence for combating unwanted migrants. The object in question is a fence or a gate, as it is referred to by the terms in official documents, which are placed at the border crossings, at only one point, not along the border. The first such Croatian movable fence on the border with a neighboring country was installed at the Batina/Bezdan border crossing, shared with Serbia, back in the summer of 2016 "in order to prevent a possible attempt to illegally enter the Republic of Croatia" and due to "a stronger influx of migrants". At the time, the Ministry of the Interior referred to the Batina fence as technical obstacles placed as a precaution, and which "can be activated, if necessary and in accordance with the security situation, in order to completely block the bridge, i.e., the road leading to the mentioned crossing". Three years later, in June 2019, the same kind of barrier was erected at the Maljevac border crossing, on the bridge leading from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatian territory, also as a means of defense against migrants. The barrier was described as a movable metal fence, a protective fence against an inrush, as it is called in official documents, in order to, according to the Ministry of the Interior, prevent the violent intrusion of migrants without the need to bring in a large number of police officers or set up other obstacles, all this because of the experience from the previous fall "when the migrants at that crossing [...] tried to forcibly enter the territory of the Republic of Croatia several times". The characterization of that attempt to enter Croatia as violent, which was emphasized as the justification for erecting the technical barrier, was connected with the complete decontextualization of that event, which was also presented in the media as an attack on the Croatian border, even though it was actually a protest and a request for passage that had "special symbolic weight" precisely because it happened at one of the official border crossings.

The foundations for installing barriers similar to the one at the Maljevac/**Velika Kladuša** border crossing were also made at the Gejkovac/Drmaljevo and Pašin Potok/Zagrad border crossings at that time, as stated on the Ministry of the Interior's website, which also explains that the movable physical barrier, i.e. the fence on at the Maljevac border crossing, was set in accordance with what is stated in the "EU Schengen Catalogue for external borders control, removal and readmission", that "border crossings and the immediate surrounding area should be technically monitored" and that border crossings, "as a rule, should be divided by a fence". The same technical obstacle, referred to in the documents as a gate to block the road, was placed, for example, at the Ličko Petrovo Selo/Izačić border crossing. All of these, as well as other similar obstacles, were part of the preparations for Croatia's accession to the **Schengen area**, and although their symbolic meanings are not as clear at first glance as those related to the **barriers erected along the borders**, they can be likened to them in various ways. When talking about one such fence erected not along the border, but at select points along the border, the one erected at the Maljevac border crossing, an activist from the Zagreb Centre for Peace Studies concludes that even this kind of "fence, like wire, is the face of violence."

16/1/2023