

Velika Kladuša

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Velika Kladuša has been inscribed on the map of the **Balkan migration route** since 2018, when it became one of the key stops for illegalised people on their way to northern countries. The town has around 45 000 inhabitants, located in the extreme north-west of Bosnia and Herzegovina, right next to the border with Croatia, and has been confronted with the presence of a large number of people on the move – waiting for a favourable moment to cross the border and go on the **game**, and those who have been forcibly and illegally returned to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Croatian authorities (see **pushback**).

Some of the people moving through Velika Kladuša could previously access the Miral camp (cf. **camp**), which was run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). In this camp, as well as in others in Bosnia and Herzegovina, people on the move were exposed to inadequate living conditions, lack of sanitation and health care. Many people were denied access to the camp (either because it was too crowded or due to various arbitrary criteria, often including ethnicity) or did not want to stay there for various reasons, and often lived in abandoned buildings in Velika Kladuša – **squats** that they set up as emergency shelter.

The presence of a large number of illegalised persons represents a new milestone in the unusual history of Velika Kladuša (Lipovec Čebtron et al.: 2019). The area was the site of the “centuries-old border” between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire, also constructed as the border between East and West. After WWII, in 1950, the town of Velika Kladuša was part of the “Cazinska buna” (the Cazin Rebellion), the only organized peasant revolt against the communist authorities in Yugoslavia, which had introduced unpopular measures in this area (Križišnik Bukić 1993). The uprising was met with harsh countermeasures by the authorities, which caused the gradual deterioration of this area in the following decades, including several episodes of discrimination against its inhabitants (Križišnik Bukić 2017: 234–235). During the most recent Balkan war, Velika Kladuša also played an unusual role, as the city became the scene of an armed struggle among Muslims. Fikret Abdić, the central figure in the Agrokomerc banking scandal that traumatised Yugoslavia in 1987, declared the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia in 1993 and set up camps in Velika Kladuša to imprison those who opposed the establishment of the Autonomous Province (Brstovšek: 2020). The fact that he held this position until his death in 2020 represents a tangible continuity with the wartime period in this region.

Today, the historically burdened and economically deprived town faces a multitude of people on the move and has seen multi-faceted tensions arise between the spontaneous hospitality of the local population on one side and the increasingly repressive policies of the European Union and restrictive local measures that **criminalize** not only people on the move, but also all forms of **solidarity** with them on the other (Lipovec Čebtron et al.: 2019).

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