

CROSSING BORDERS

movements and struggles of migration



One year ago Crossing Borders appeared for the first time as an attempt to foster transnational communication: in reference to the migration-related networking process in general, but connected to practical struggles and initiatives in particular. The previous issues mainly covered conflicts in western Europe, in Africa and the USA. This new issue includes many impressions from the Ukraine, with a main reference to the Noborder Camp in Transcarpatia last August, but as exemplary for the whole of eastern European realities. And we repeat our call to support this multilingual newsletter project by contributing and distributing! Contact: frassainfo@kein.org Website: www.noborder.org

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Go West? Coming East! - Ukraine, "the Morocco of the East"

After the incidents of Ceuta and Melilla, at least in the western European media, a certain public attention has been given to the southern outer border of the EU, to Morocco and the fate of the (mainly sub-Saharan) boatpeople. Probably nowhere in the world more people die (primarily by drowning) as a consequence of a cruel system of migration control. This same border regime operates at the eastern outer border of the EU, with a great deal of inhuman and sometimes deathly effects too. Statistically, the East is even more important: many more refugees and migrants (try to) enter the EU by the eastern routes. From the point of view of EU authorities and the border agency Frontex, the Ukraine is - similar to Morocco - mainly a „problem zone of illegal migration“. It's not by accident that the Ukraine and Morocco are the main target countries in the so-called European Neighbourhood Policy, with programmes costing millions of Euros to deploy them as buffer states (see page 3).

Transcarpatia is one of the poorest regions in the Ukraine. It was chosen for the No Border Camp because of its exemplary situation. It is a hotspot in a double sense: for transit migrants from the global south as well as for Ukrainian labour migrants and "migrant capital", e.g. in car factories (see page 2). Over 40% of the working population of Transcarpatia is employed on a temporary basis or works abroad permanently. In earlier years it was particularly men who left. Today equal or even more numbers of women make this move. Remittances have become a crucial source of income. The region is right beside the borders to Slovakia and Hungary and at present occupies a position at the bottom of the European wage hierarchy, with incredibly low-waged workers exploited in the border industries and extended workbenches (see the article about car-factories on page 2). All this explains why Eastern Europe must be considered a crucial focus for migrants' struggles with a transnational dimension. The movements of migration are a concrete threat to the growing European attempt to capture those movements, enforced by a political communication that crisscrosses the

borders and affects people who live outside Europe, whose projects of migration are intercepted by these European policies. At the same time, the intense migration of capital towards the East shows that these frontiers are more and more instrumental to the precarisation of labour. Thus, our perspective should be the confrontation with this transnational organisation of labour. We cannot look at the South without looking to the East and vice versa. Migrants' struggles are already pointing out the routes of migrations. Will we be able to connect East and South with the European movement?

brief report about the noborder Camp in Transcarpatia

Planned as a communication-camp between East and West, and with about 300 people from many mainly eastern and western European countries, this expectation was fulfilled in a large number of workshops and through common actions. At the end of a one week camp in a rural area near the city of Ushgorod a smaller group of people went to the detention camp near the village Pawshino in order to express direct solidarity to the 500 detainees detained there in incredible inhuman conditions (financed by the EU!). Simultaneously about 200 persons demonstrated in the city of Ushgorod in front of the office for "Migration Service", which is mainly responsible for the situation in Pawshino. Afterwards people marched through the city with a closing rally taking place in the central square, where in the days before a No Border festival with music and films had taken place. During this festival a lot of the local population was put in touch with No Border politics and many people agreed with the critics based upon their own experience with the rigid visa system or even deportations carried out by EU authorities. More information about the No Border Camp, the leaflet from the demo, but mainly about the detention camp in Pavshino can be found at: <http://www.pawshino.antira.info/>

Is the auto industry moving to Ukraine?

In the last decade the European automobile industry has been expanding eastward. Corporations like Volkswagen, General Motors, Peugeot and Toyota, as well as dozens of suppliers have invested billions of Euros in the "new Detroit" - the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. Capital has advertised the relocation of manufacturing work, in particular the auto industry, like a political death threat to the Western European working class. In reality, Germany and France now produce more cars than they did ten years ago while the Czech Republic still produces less than Belgium. Still the threat has worked: working conditions and wages in the West have severely deteriorated.

However, it's also clear that in the East, workers hate working in car factories just as much as in they do in the West. Skoda and Toyota in the Czech Republic already employ Slovaks, Poles and Ukrainians because they cannot find enough local workers. In Slovakia and Poland where official unemployment has just dropped from 20 to 14 %, capitalists are already talking about a labour shortage which must be decoded as "not enough cheap and docile workers" (see articles in Wildcat #76 and #78). Now capital is playing the same game of intimidation by talking of moving further east eg. to the Ukraine where labour is even cheaper.

In reality, any development of the auto industry in the Ukraine will be a long and expensive process. It will also depend on an increasing economic integration into the EU which means opening the borders while the only way to keep workers cheap in the long term is to keep them socially isolated, i.e. keeping the borders closed. How will capital handle this contradiction?

In the short term some Western auto manufacturers have actually set up shop in the Ukraine, but mainly to get a foot into the local retail market. On the other hand some global auto suppliers set up maquila factories right behind the border in order to exploit a cheap, young, female labour force. But it turns out those workers can only be found in the villages, they are not so young, and they change their jobs as soon as they can. About 40% of working age Transcarpatians are working abroad either permanently or temporarily in spite of the lack of opportunities for doing so legally. How realistic is capital's dream of turning these people into the cheap and docile labour force it cannot find in the West?

Some facts

In 1999, the Ukraine produced merely 19 000 cars, compared to 5.3 million in Germany, down from 150 000 in 1992. Lately, internal demand has been rising and in 2006 production was up to over 275 000 again – mostly Ladas have been built during the Soviet era AvtoZAZ factory in East Ukrainian Zaporozhiya. However, these are losing market share to imported cars and foreign models assembled in the Ukraine. Foreign producers can avoid the 25% import tax on cars by do-

ing "semi knocked-down" (SKD) assembly: Cars are built in a "real" car factory, taken apart, put in a container, shipped to the Ukraine, and reassembled. This is not very productive but requires little investments. It is the standard way for the global car industry to "get a foot in the door" of potential new production sites.

When Volkswagen opened its Eurocar factory in the Ukrainian Solomonovo/Uzhgorod in December 2001 after a 200 000 dollar investment, 37 workers assembled seven different Skoda, VW and Audi models. In the current second stage, VW has invested over 100 million dollars. Now 1,000 workers assemble two Skoda models. However, practically all components – which make up two thirds of a car's value – still have to be imported. Ukraine does not have an integrated productive structure like Germany or now the Czech Republic where hundreds of supplier factories are linked with the assembly plants in Just-in-time production by thousands of trucks on motorways. In the third phase, Volkswagen plans to invest another 100 million dollars, employ another 2,300 workers and use "domestic components". Local politicians even promise up to 6,500 jobs at Eurocar and another 30,000 in component manufacture.

So far, few component manufacturers have come to Ukraine. In Transcarpatia, Groclin in Uzhgorod produces seat covers for export (Volvo), Leoni in Mukacheve, 35 km from Uzhgorod, produces electronic board networks for export (General Motors und Porsche), and Yazaki, 5 km outside of Uzhgorod, a few hundred metres from the EU border, produces wiring harnesses for export (Opel).

Yazaki's 31.7 million Euro factory is the largest Japanese investment in the Ukraine and started production in October 2003. We had the opportunity to speak to some workers during the recent No Border Camp. Most of the 1,000 workers are women in their thirties who work on the assembly lines in three shifts. They are directly employed by Yazaki with unlimited contracts. The average monthly net wage of about 175 Euros consists of a basic wage of 880 Grivnas (129 Euros) "for everyone" plus a productivity bonus of an average of 500 Grivnas (73 Euros) minus 13 per cent income tax. There are no unions in the factory. When it became known that mobile phone producer Jabil paid higher wages about a year ago, a lot of women quit Yazaki for Jabil. Two years ago the company raised the maximum age from 30 to 45 years because they could not find enough younger workers. They also have difficulties finding workers in the city. Most workers are being brought to work in company minibusses from villages as far as 50 km away from Uzhgorod.

A tale among the borders - a story of women's ordinary migration, during one of the many journeys back to the Ukraine.

I am on one of the many coaches that connect Italy with the Ukraine on a weekly basis. It is a long trip, so that I have lost, like my travel companions, the perception of time passing, which is beaten by the stops at the service areas and the borders, that always produce adrenalin surges. Stress and anxiety grow while the border is drawing near, and they change into euphoria after crossing it.

On the way, moments of rest take turns with moments of waking, when we chatter and tell each other about ourselves. I meet Olga, who is going back to the Ukraine because she is afraid of losing her husband, but she is not convinced of her decision: in Italy, she left all her friends, her autonomy, granted by economic self-sufficiency, while in the Ukraine she has her family. Before the fall of Soviet Union Olga was a shop assistant. In 1991, the year of Ukrainian independence, she had a child and decided to supplement her maternity benefits with trans-border trade: she bought clothes in Poland to sell them at the market. But between 1995 and 1996, her husband's wage was paid with big delays, and the family conditions rapidly worsened: this trans-border trading was no longer enough to supplement the family's income.

So she decided to try the way of going abroad. Her first experience, by the irony of fate, was in an Italian textile factory in the Czech Republic, where she worked for a short time with other Ukrainian and Polish women. But the wage was too low compared with the long working days. She therefore went back to the Ukraine, and after a few months bought a visa for Italy from a travel agency, for 500 €. Naples was the recommended destination. Upon arrival, the coach driver put her in contact with a "caporale", a gang master who offered her

employment as a domestic worker in exchange for 200 €. Olga started a lengthy process of freeing herself from the isolation of domestic work and obtaining a residence permit. But it was a route with many hurdles: she was forced to pay many bribes, and this lowered her wage level.

Now, Olga is going back again, perhaps for good. Her hesitations are shared by other women, because in the Ukraine the common place is that the family crisis is owed to women's migration. Migrant women are used to answer by appealing to the rhetoric that they are the pillar of the family itself. They say that migration is necessary in order to make up for their husbands' unemployment and incapacity to provide for family necessities.

We arrive at the Ukrainian border of Chop. Policemen are arrogant, they perform the common degrading practices against my travel companions, who are merely guilty of having attempted to improve their economic and social condition. The instruments used by migrant women for their own social promotion are considered as illegitimate, in as far as they have been acquired outside the social rules recognised in the country of origin.

After the border, the attitude of the women towards their fellow-countrymen becomes wary. Soon, a forced redistribution of hard currency takes place: at every check point, it is necessary to pay a bribe, *habar* in the local language. The custom is so commonplace that the drivers are always ready with 5 or 10 euros notes. The woman beside me explains to me that we might run into as many as ten check points. But this is a fortunate journey: we encounter only one more.

Europe needs its outside

The non-member countries are increasingly necessary, in order to expand European migration control. Nowadays, the accession process is a lever to oblige the candidate countries to comply with EU regulations to become members, while the non-candidate countries should be considered as a "sanitary cordon", a safety belt around European borders to keep out and filter migrants' movements.

The Ukraine is a quite good example: with the enactment of the EU Action Plan of Justice and Home Affairs (2001), the country is held as responsible for migration to the European Union, and this was confirmed by the integration of the Ukraine in the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004) – whose attempt is to set up a "ring of friends" along the new borders. A process of "externalisation" of migration control which includes, of course, the crucial role played by detention centres, readmission agreements and asylum application procedures outside the EU. From many points of view, Kiev is Europe: 23 member states have an embassy there, which implement visa policies and have officers responsible for migration control issues. Most embassies host police officers, border guard officers or immigration control officers, so-called EU Justice, Freedom and Security Contact Points. It is not by chance that also IOM has its site in Kiev. The Soderkoping process – initiated in 2003 by the Swedish migration authority, IOM, UNHCR and EU – is also crucial for coordinating cooperation of EU and non-EU migration control agencies in the region, with the BOMMOLUK (Border Management at the Moldova-Ukraine Border), a 9 million Euro project, and the ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development), which should be considered as an intelligence agency that cooperates with Europol and Frontex in order to detect paths, techniques and strategies of undocumented migrants. Nothing surprising, if we consider that eastern non-member countries (and the Ukraine in particular) are a focal point, in as far as thousands of workers move from there to go west, and more and more migrants and refugees coming from Asia and Africa follow that eastern route to reach EU.

News and Chronology...

Migrants in Russia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia has become the most important destination for migration in the region. About 80% of the migrants are from the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Azerbaijan or Tajikistan. They work on building sites, as care takers, at the markets and everywhere where cheap labour is needed. Following estimates, about 10 million migrants live there without any legal status. On the one hand, the registration laws that were implemented this year have made the legalisation of illegal workers a lot easier, on the other, new barriers are being put up through the issuing of work permits subject to regionally determined quotas. Migrants are exposed to constant harassments in the places where they live, at work and as a result of numerous passport controls. In the metropolis Moscow, youth organizations with affiliations to the Kremlin act as police helpers in finding illegal workers. In the region around Moscow and the south of Russia new detention centers are being planned. Deportations of politically undesirable persons, overwhelmingly from China and Uzbekistan, are carried out in collaboration with the secret service FSB. According to the Russian migration office, in 2006 following the largest campaign against a particular national group, around 5000 Georgians were deported.

France - Guinea – Germany – Benin - Iraq: transnational resistance against deportations

August 16th: six French policemen were beaten up at the airport in Conakry/Guinea, when they delivered two deportees. Not only the two Guineans, who had taken part in a hunger-strike of sans papiers in Lille, and some of the passengers, who protested against the mistreatment of the deportees, were involved, but also two Guinean policemen. This caused a lot of diplomatic trouble. Similar problems were created by a dubious delegation from Guinea who visited Germany for the fourth time, after visits in Switzerland, France and the Canary Islands, to "identify" African refugees in order to enable their deportation. Protests in Germany and Guinea resulted in a declaration of the new Guinean government on the 27th of August to suspend all measures of identification and deportation until a bilateral agreement was signed. Also, a chartered deportation on the 10th of September from Hamburg to Togo and Benin caused diplomatic problems, because the German authorities wanted to deport a Liberian to Benin without having valid papers from this country. Before, they had wanted to put him on an Air France flight, where trade unionists were campaigning against deportations, denouncing the collaboration with German authorities. The Liberian was released - thanks to all these transnational protests. Meanwhile in Frankfurt, Zagros-Air, a company destined for deportations to the Kurdish part of Iraq, could be successfully convinced to stop this dirty business – threatened with an image pollution campaign!

Tunisia/Italy:

Since August 22nd, seven Tunisian fishermen have been on trial before a court in Agrigento (Sicily), accused of "assisting illegal immigration". They risk up to 15 years imprisonment. Prosecuted as human traffickers, what they did was in fact just their basic duty of solidarity: on August 8, in the high sea near the island of Lampedusa, they picked up 44 passengers from a boat in distress at sea, bringing them to the harbor, where all of them were arrested. After international protests by many human

rights and antiracist organizations as well as 103 members of the European Parliament, the fishermen were released and could return home. The court case is still on-going - in front of the same judge as the crew of the German ship "Cap Anamur". More on: www.migreurop.org

Morocco:

Almost two years after the dramatic events at the fences of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005, two people died in the night of the 30th to the 31st of July 07 at the Atlantic coast of Laâyoune in the south of Morocco by shots of the coast guard, when they tried to enter a boat heading towards the Canary Islands. Two more people were heavily injured. Some days before, in the early morning of the 26th of July, another raid took place on the university campus of Oujda in the east of Morocco. More than 450 migrants were arrested, mistreated and brought to the Algerian border. Many organizations protested against this policy of the Moroccan government, which is supported by the EU (see declaration on www.migreurop.org). On the 6th and 7th of October, there will be days of commemoration of the events 2005 at the borders of the EU with transnational discussions and actions in Oujda.

Netherlands in April 07:

Days before the official opening of the new detention boats in Zaandam, north of Amsterdam, around 90 activists 'opened' the detention center by unexpectedly cutting down the fences surrounding the installation with bolt cutters. see: www.noborder.org/archive_item.php?id=381

Rostock/Germany in June 07:

Between the opening mass demonstration and the very successful blockades against the G8-summit an impressive demo for freedom of movement and equal rights with about 10.000 participants took place on the 4th of June. Activists invited from all over the world contributed also to interesting transnational meetings on migration-issues. www.nolager.de

Gatwick/UK September 2007:

The first UK transnational No Border Camp took place near Gatwick airport. Over 500 people from across the UK and other European and African countries convened to draw attention to the abhorrent global system of migration control and its particular expressions in the UK. There was a week long camp with workshops and transnational networking meetings. There were too large demos for Freedom of Movement and Equal Rights for All; one to the reporting centers Electric and Lunar House in Croydon, and one through the town of Crawley to Tinsley House, a detention centre at Gatwick Airport. There was also an occupation of the offices of Virgin Airlines, who carry out deportations, as well as a blockade of the offices of Group 4, a company that runs the Dungavel detention centre in Scotland. A weekend long event, 'Migrating University' took place at Goldsmiths University to tie together issues of borders, migration and education and other solidarity actions happened across the UK. The 2007 No Border Camp is part of an ongoing campaign against the building of a new detention centre, Brook House, at Gatwick airport. For more information and pictures, see www.indymedia.org.uk and www.noborders.org.uk.