
KRCT
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MONITORING PROCESS OF THE PROTEST OF VETËVENDOSJA IN BORDER POINTS MERDARE AND DHEU I BARDHË, 14 JANUARY 2012

KRCT monitoring teams have monitored protests of VETËVENDOSJE Movement held on 14th of January 2012 near the borders in Merdare and Dheu i Bardhë, in order to implement the measures of reciprocity. Both KRCT teams have stayed near these borders from the beginning until the end of the protest, and later they have visited the arrested activists among who were also members of VETËVENDOSJE in the Assembly of Kosovo.

KRCT during its monitoring in two borders estimates the police intervention for the disperse of the protesters in order to have complete freedom of movement is made without provoking of the masses, where were arrested about 100 protesters at the two border points. During the protests there were numerous persons injured.

Intervention of Kosovo Police was not provoked by the mass of protesters, protesters were peaceful and organizers have continually called for peaceful protest, being able to keep order and peace among the protesters.

Disperse of the protest at the border crossing at Merdare began in the early hours of the protest, where the police intervened; protesters have begun to respond by throwing various items at the police where started the escalation of the situation where some of the police have been injured. During the police intervention for the protesters in Merdare for the distribution of the protesters was used tear gas, water cannons, spray and rubber batons.

While at the border at Dheu i Bardhë course of the protest from the beginning until 17:45 am was normal and without any mutual reaction. But in the evening after many requests of the police to end the protest, protesters were all sitting and standing in a peaceful, but police have intervened in the distribution of the protesters and started to arrest them. During the arrest were some of the Kosovo Assembly deputies, which among them was Glauk Konjufca who got injured during arrest in frontal parts of the face and were kicked in stomach. After the arrest of protesters, the KRCT monitoring team visited deputies and the others arrested persons who were sent to the Police Station in Gjilan, who were later released on their home. After interviews with them, they stated that the behaviour of the police officers after the arrest has been corrected.

KRCT expressed concern the use of force against protesters at the border crossing at Merdare and Dheu i Bardhë, especially the use of tools such as tear gas, water cannons, spray and rubber batons, while left many protesters injured.

I – The course of the protest of the Vetëvendosje Movement in Merdare (Podujevë), 14 January 2012

Around 1:30 pm hundreds of protesters of the Vetëvendosje Movement were gathered in the street Podujevë- Merdare nearly 4 to 5 kilometers near the border crossing, because PK had put a lot of roadblocks before the crossing point and did not allow the protesters to approach near the border crossing point.

Numerous police units and special units were placed in front of the VV protesters' crowd. The leader of VV Abin Kurti with a megaphone was claiming continuously for a peaceful protest and used to notify about the purpose of the protest. He stated that the protest was organized against the Serbia and the free movement of Serbian goods, and has nothing to do with the Serbian population. Therefore, he required from the police forces to be peaceful and to not provoke. Then a member of the Special Unit of Police of Kosova (PK) spoke to the protesters with a megaphone and asked them to release the road in 5 minutes. The protesters did not react to the appeal, meanwhile, the Special Unit of PK have approached nearly 15 minutes later and have created a cordon in front of the protesters. The Special Unit then immediately have started to push them by forces with their plastic protective tools and beat them. Then the protesters have started to protect themselves and did not accept to recede. While the PK was pushing back the protester, there were some stones coming out of the left side of crowd in the direction of PK. Somebody in the crowd have required from the protesters to sit down the on the ground and this was applied by some of them. However, this did not help the Police to soften their conduct. On the contrary, the Police Unit has roughened its behavior and has started to beat the protesters. Immediately has begun the use of tear gas by the members of PK, who were standing behind the Special Unit. Furthermore, there were threw water canisters in the direction of protesters.

The protesters of VV, meantime, have started to throw stones more frequently and also some of the wood sticks of their banners toward PK.

In those moments everything was covered by the smoke of the tear gas and the PK have used this situation to catch/arrest some of the protesters. Groups of 3, 4 or more policemen have continuously taken protesters from the crowd and have sent them to their vehicles. The protesters weren't yet dispersed and they were continuously shouting Vetëvendosje, Vetëvendosje and Serbia Nuk Kalon! (Serbia will not pass!)

Nearly 10 minutes after the beginning of the incident, Special Unit of PK was also accompanied by the PK truck, which used to throw water in order to disperse the crowd.

We noticed PK dragging a protester (two policeman have catch him through his hands), while the protester did not make any resistance. Furthermore, another used to lie down on the ground and resisted to give up, but he did not act violently. He was just protecting his hands and head, while four policemen were standing near of him and one of them was seen to beat him with legs while the protester was still down on the ground. After these scenes, the Police have achieved to catch him and send him to their vehicle.

The protesters' crowd was separated into 3 to 4 small part and with each part there were a group of policemen that were dealing with, mainly Special Unit forces. There were noticed some attempts of

protesters to reorganize, but this was impossible because there was a huge number of policemen, and the protesters were separated in side roads and had no possibilities to unify.

It is very interesting to mention that till late there were not seen any ambulance, though, there were protesters who asked for help as the result of troubles they experienced from the tear gas, but also injuries as consequence of the chaos and police behavior. There were also police members who were asking for help.

After nearly half an hour there appeared an ambulance that has started to offer help to injured people.

We have seen members of PK chasing protesters even outside of the main road Prishtinë – Podujevë (i.e. fields) to prevent them from using side roads in order to reorganize.

The protesters were now in a small number and dispersed, while the police was continuing to push them back by using tear gas and water that was thrown continuously by the police vehicles. The arrests were continuing, although there were not any resistance from the protesters side, not even shouting or any reacting from their side (i.e. they arrested tens of people).

Nearly 3:30 pm the road was unblocked and the vehicles have started to move in the direction of Prishtina.

It wasn't noticed or claimed from nobody that during this time has passed any vehicle with Serbian goods, except a truck with vanity plates of Novi Pazar, which was going in the direction of the Podujeva city.

II – The course of the protest of the Vetëvendosje Movement in Dheu i Bardhë (Podujevë), 14 January 2012

Starting at 11 am, the protesters have begun to gather near the border crossing point in Dheu i Bardhë, who mainly were coming in an organized manner from region of Gjilan, but also from distant municipalities such as: Ferizaj, Suhareka, Prizreni, Malisheva etc. According to the police officers and Vetëvendosje Movement, the number of protesters was over 1000.

In the road that takes you from Gjilan to Dheu i Bardhë (nearly 25 kilometers) there were seen increased police forces, where in every linked road were standing police groups.

As it was announced, at 1 pm all the protesters were 1 kilometer near the border point Dheu i Bardhë, respectively in the triangle that links this border point. There were a considerable number of police officers, while in the triangle of road that leads to the border point was the police cordon from special unit, who had blocked the road that leads to the border point.

The protesters at the beginning were standing near of the parking lot of a gas station and on one part of the highway, but they were calm and did not interfere the vehicle movement.

The road triangle, where the protest took place, is surrounded by Serbian settlements and around 2:00 pm there were shoutings from these Serbian settlements (Ranillug and Korminjan). In those moments, the police was on standby and the protesters as well, who started to shout such as: "UÇK; Vetëvendosje; Albin Kurti"

etc. However, in a few moments the situation was calm and the peaceful and quiet protest has continued. According to the official information from the police, after the reaction of inhabitants of Serbian villages, the representatives of police have met with the leader of these Serbian locations in order to achieve the normalization of the situation, and therefore the reactions of Serbian inhabitants were stopped.

During this time, the calm protest has continued and there were not any concrete reaction from protesters or police. The police officers were continuously in contact with the organizers of the protest, who asked them to end this protest. However, the organizers did not give a deadline about the ending of the protest. After 4 pm the temperatures went too low (under minus/-), but the protesters were still standing and they also lit the fires to get warmed, although their number was reduced, because the protesters who live in near settlements, including Gjilan, have started to leave individually.

At 5 pm, when the night came, the police started a re-mobilization and the ongoing requirements to end the protest with the justification that the protesters are in the middle of Serbian settlements and they cannot offer anymore security for them in this location. Despite the ongoing requests to leave, which was directed verbally to the organizers (without megaphone), there were not any ultimatum. The protesters, though, tired and freezing, have continued the peaceful protest.

At 5:40 pm, except the patrol police, who were standing near the protesters and the cordon of special unit police, who were in the same position since the beginning of the protest, now have approached the other group of special unit of police, who until that moment were standing near the costumes terminal at the border point. This group of special unit, at 5:45 pm has done a fast military march around the protesters, but the protesters were sitting down on the ground and did not make any particular action. All policemen were activated afterwards: special unit, patrol police, and also there were seen a considerable number of civil police. Although, all protesters were sitting down and standing peaceful, the police have started the frantic action of arresting. Their arrest was done quickly by taking and dragging them on the ground. There were seen 3 or 4 policemen dragging a protester. Although, the process of arrest was continuing, the protesters did not use any tools to oppose the police and they did not move from their place. The protesters during arrest were dragged on the ground, which was covered by snow and ice. The arrest was applied also to some people with mental and physical disabilities. In the same way were arrested also the deputies of the Assembly of Republic of Kosova and also members of Presidency of Kosova. One of deputies (V.Y.), during arrest, was dragged through his scarf, which he then threw away in order for him to survive the choking. Furthermore, the member of Presidency of Kosova (G.K.) was arrested violently and has undergone to some injuries in the frontal part of his face. He also was kicked in his stomach, and this was the moment when it was very hard for him to breath. The KRCT team has interviewed him after this event in the police settings and he was looking very pale.

The arresting process has continued till around 8 pm and this was the time when all protesters were gone.

During all the protest, one lane was free for movement and there did not appear any problem that interfere the movement. Meantime, during this protest did not pass through any vehicle with goods from Serbia, but it is necessary to mention that there were vehicles with Serbian plates, who were carrying travelers. However, they weren't hindered by protesters.

The entire protest and the moments of arrest were followed by a considerable number of media members. Furthermore, the monitoring process was done also by KRCT and Police Inspectorate of Kosova.

The monitoring team of KRCT has visited the Police Station in Gjilan at around 8 pm, where the arrested protesters were held. During the meeting with leaders of this station, they stated that they were grateful for the proper behavior of protesters. The number of arrested protesters in this action that the police have sent in the Police Station in Gjilan was 36.

The KRCT team have also meet some arrested deputies, and also some of the arrested protesters. During our visit in this police station, there was present also the Chief Municipal Prosecutor of Gjilan. However, the release process of arrested people has started during our stay in Police Station.

Based on the confidential interviews realized with arrested people in the Police Station (without the presence of police officers), they claimed that the police officers conduct after the arrest was correct.

Here are some pictures taken during the protest and arrest moments:











Kosova Rehabilitation Centre of the Torture Victims (KRCT) is an independent, nongovernmental and non-profitable organization which has been established in 1999 with a mission to provide the rehabilitation treatment for the torture and traumatized victims.

As a part of its campaign for human rights protection and prevention of torture and other forms of ill-treatment or inhuman behaviours, from 2007 KRCT is implementing its monitoring activities of Correctional Centres, Detention Centres and Police Holding Cells.