

Petr Silaev - russian journalist, writer, social activist. Coordinated a media campaign around the notorious Khimki Forest case in 2010 and was accused for cooperating with foreign secrets services, treason, extremism and organization of insurgence by Russian authorities. Had to flee from the country and applied for political asylum in Belgium - in march 2012 it was Finland, that provided him a status of political refugee. Writes for Openspace (Russia), Colta (Russia), Voima (Finland). His book "Exodus", published in 2010, was later nominated for numerous literary prizes and translated into English, German, Finnish, Italian and Greek.

2 years ago I happened to experience all the luxury of Polish Straz Graniczny system and can't say that I'm well recovered even now. It's a huge system of concentration camps, with conditions obviously worse than in prisons and a person, who was that unlucky to fall in instantly loses most his legal rights and becomes a rightless puppet in hands of corrupted administration. It's not a secret that certain European countries are funding Polish SG to maintain that system of camps and make Poland a "sponge-country" for EU to fight legal and illegal immigration (the same processes could be seen in Malta and Greece). Therefore, even in the face of crisis, SG is year to year expanding the net of camps, occupies new properties, employs more people - their incomes are directly correlating to the rate of people detained and hold. More people kept - more money, and to add that the administration of camps is corrupted and feels absolutely free to steal and make profit on behalf of the detained - we see a very common picture in history: masses of rightless people being stuffed in very poor conditions for the matter of rates. I'm very inspired, that, even despite of the oppression of the administration, now people have raised their voice and listed a number of claims, which is absolutely correct and precise, and I would have signed under each article.

I've been detained by a random border patrol in Stetin in 2010 and after an hour of investigation that was absolutely clear, that the only thing they can do to me was just let me go. By that time I had applied for political asylum in Belgium and my case still was on the first stage of consideration. When a week before I had my documents checked in Germany, the police officer looked for me in the international database and after approving my status, let me go. I asked officers in Stetin to do the same, but it appeared they don't have an access to that database at all. They had to call their colleagues in Frankfurt-on-Oder so they check me. Germans approved, that I just should go back to Brussels - and I had my tickets with me. But it never stopped SG from starting a procedure of my forced deportation to Belgium, which took THREE months - and all that time I spent in Krosno-Ordzhanski camp.

I was not the one, who was spending a considerable time in the camp for a ridiculous, outstanding reasons. Lot's of Chechen people with families have been returning back home from living in Netherlands or Germany - and they've been detained on the border in Terespol on their way to Russia - just for the mater they've been asking for asylum in Poland many years ago and illegally moved from the country. So, the people, who've been returning to Russia were spending months and months in the camp for the money of taxpayers to be deported to Russia - sounds absurd to me.

Another example - a textile trader from India has been detained in the airport, checking in for a flight to India - his visa has been expired for 2 weeks. So he had been put in the camp and spent there 2 months to be deported to India even though he had his tickets in hands. A student from Taiwan has been put in the camp only because he boarded in a bus heading to Germany - his on-going Polish national visa never helped him. All those are minor violations, but only in Poland you are kept in prison for months just to proceed your way. That's obviously because every day one spends in a camp means more donations from EU for "preventing illegal immigration", more funding from budget for maintaining camps - if there are less people held, a camp could be even closed - a remarkable loss of profit.

In Krosno-Ordzhanski camp there were two options of obtaining food, clothes and other production - by receiving postages or by ordering them from a "store". The administration kept punishing people by banning the postages and one day we got their decision to cut all the post due to the "menace of drug smuggling". Therefore, you could buy goods only in the "store" - and what we noticed was that there were the traces of price stickers thorn off on all the packages. It wasn't a wholesale or a big chain supermarket they were buying in (which could be logical) - we were all just financing a small groceries, belonged to someone in the administration. Hundreds of us, every day, 7 days a week - such a loss having less of us in the camp.

And again - it's just a cowardice to call the place "a camp" or "detention center" - it was just plain prison, a bit worse, because we were not observed as objects of civil law. A five cells for eight people each, a

corridor of 20 meters, one hour in a dirty yard during a day, bars everywhere - that's all. We've been all pacing in that corridor from one end to another all day - that was the main thing we were allowed to do. If it's not a prison - than what? And to repeat that most of those people never committed any crimes.

Below I'll just illustrate the articles of the petition one by one with examples from my own experience.

Right for information and translation

There wasn't a single English or any other than Polish language speaker in the administration of the camp. And they were the ones, who were obliged to communicate between the court and the ministry of immigration and people kept. They filled the files, brought the decisions to be signed, passed all the documents. And those people from all over the world had to use body language to explain the sophisticated details of their cases to the officers and the officers just very sincerely kept answering them, that they just didn't understand. From the moment I arrived that was me who started to function as a staff translator – translating from English to my very broken Polish – and these were the official, crucially important papers we had been routinely filling every day! Appellations, notifications, clarifications, protests – all have been translated in that way. Once I saved guys life maybe – I seen him frantically telling something to an officer. I asked what was the matter. “I'm trying to make him write down the password of my e-mail, were I store the copies of all my documents” - cries the black ex-preacher from Burundi. The officer interrupts him: “No need for a translator, I understand everything. He refuses to show me any copies of his documents”.

Right to contact outside world

There was only one telephone in our block and the administration made all possible efforts to restrict using it. They were setting ridiculous rules and schedules, making people stand in lines and strive for a minute to call their relatives and lawyers – that led to inevitable quarrels which was giving the administration the rights to make even more restrictions.

There was no library in the camp too.

Right to proper healthcare

Every week we had a right to sign for a visit to doctor, and people have been regularly waiting for that actual visit for a month. For some reasons the doctor could only accept a couple of people every during his weekly visits - and there were 45 people in the block. There was a lot of senior people kept, being suddenly put in prison without doing a thing, their condition went gradually downscale, heart on the first place - that never worried the administration, I never seen anybody hospitalized from a cell, as the administration supposed the others would simulate heart attacks to get to a hospital.

Respect to children's rights

They have “family cells” in Krosno-Ordzanski camp - just like regular criminals, children of all ages has been put in the prison equally. Of course none of them goes to any school - they just have a cell a bit bigger than normal one. The conditions of imprisonment for them didn't differ from our's in no way.

Improvement of social conditions

The administration of Krosno Ordzanski camp made some economy by not hiring any cleaning personal and were obliging everybody to do that work for free. If one would have refused to clean he was not allowed to smoke. If he didn't smoke - the whole cell had been restricted from smoking. Once I got in a chamber where we all didn't smoke - that put the guards to a short confusion - finally they prohibited us to use a kettle. And we had a big part of our diet in instant noodles - so it was mean. That's a funny example - but they just never respected anyone's wills and preferences. Due to our beyond-the-law position they had their right to perceive us as sub-humans - and they acted accordingly.

End of Abuse

People had been regularly beaten up, put in solitaires, put in solitaires and beaten up all together. Normally they were choosing a person, who couldn't speak any foreign language at all - a Chinese or from Afganistan - very smart of them. There were no firm regulations of the restrictive measures and penalties - so they were just doing what they wanted. And if you write a complaint - it goes only to the chief of the camp anyways.

The forces of SG used the camp as a practicing module: there were frequently practicing "riot suppression" attack. That meant that in 6 in the morning a crowd of masked troops were suddenly rushing in your cell, bashing you out in the corridor to stay along the wall hands behind the head while they were trashing all our property on the floor. There were unnecessary searches of cells and humiliating body-searches every time people had been raising their voice against violations of the Administration. Every time they announced that they are searching for drugs - and to remind that most of the people kept were some unlucky fathers of families and seniors, trying to join their families in EU or going back home. Never seen the guards finding anything too.

End of criminalization

All men in my chamber were just normal family people trying to emigrate from their dangerous and miserable countries. The very majority of people kept in all the system of detention camps are just construction workers, electricians, cooks, traders, who once saved some money and set off for a better life with their families. Even though, most of them succeeded somehow, many were so unlucky to get in a Polish camp - where they've been treated worse than any criminals, because criminals have their rights. Everywhere, where an ambivalent juridical status gets involved together with profits and rates - we see a very familiar picture for the human history. A huge camp, filled with rightless and abused people in unhygienic conditions, ruled by almighty corrupted administration. The picture I seen my own eyes in Krosno-Ordzanski camp.