

Hungary closes its border with Serbia

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On Tuesday Hungary closed the last remaining opening on its border with Serbia. The location had been used in recent weeks by refugees as an entry point in to Hungary. It was located on a railway platform between Horgos in Serbia and Röszke in Hungary. Before Tuesday, refugees could still reach Hungary through Röszke.

Hungary detained over 150 migrants Tuesday after closing the border crossing, leaving hundreds of migrants to wait on the Serbian side of the razor wire fence.

Since mid-August, no trains have been allowed to travel through the area. The fence is to be equipped with a ten-metre-wide gate through which trains will be able to drive at a later date. Construction work is being carried out by convicts under the supervision of correctional officers.

Hungary has been working for months on the completion of the 175 kilometre-long fence on the border with Serbia. To accelerate its construction, the government deployed the military. According to defence minister Istvan Smimicsko, 4,300 soldiers were made available for this purpose.

Hungarian government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs said the completion of the fence marked the “beginning of a new era. We will stop the flood of illegal immigrants over our green border.” Several hundred police officers have been assembled close to the border, horse-mounted officers patrol the border and helicopters fly overhead.

On the Serbian side, many refugees broke down in tears when they saw that the border was no longer open.

Since most refugees travel through Hungary on to Austria and Germany, the Austrian government is preparing for new refugee routes to be used. “The possibility certainly exists that Hungary will be avoided,” said a spokesman for the interior ministry in Vienna, Karl-Heinz Grundböck on Saturday to Austrian news agency APA. Migrants could increasingly travel through Slovenia to Austria.

According to the Hungarian government, over 180,000 refugees reached Hungary through Serbia in recent days and weeks. Most of them come from Syria and Libya, as well as the Middle East and North Africa. On their

gruelling journey through the Balkans, which many made on foot, they faced inhumane conditions in many countries, and bullying and intimidation by border guards and soldiers.

Refugees’ travails continue with their arrival in the European Union (EU). A recent video provoked anger and disgust, showing how police officers threw water bottles and bread at refugees in a camp in Röszke. There was no organised distribution of food; instead, the refugees were fed like animals in a zoo.

Michaela Spritzendorfer-Ehrenhauser, a volunteer from Vienna, told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “They are people, after all, who have been fleeing for months and are now herded together with others they don’t know.”

On Monday, it was announced that the Hungarian government had cleared the camp at Röszke and transported the refugees to the Austrian border, which has since been sealed by the Austrian government with the help of soldiers.

Conditions in the camps on the Hungarian-Serbian border are catastrophic, and were described by the aid organisation Doctors Without Borders as completely unacceptable. On the M5 highway towards Austria, a fatal accident took place a few days ago, when refugees were struck by a vehicle as a result of the government’s failure to properly close lanes.

The Hungarian government’s brutal closure of the EU’s external border has been accompanied by further anti-refugee measures. Illegal entry is being treated as a criminal offence beginning Monday. According to *Pester Lloyd*, emergency proceedings are taking place in Szeged. The courts are manned in shifts by 130 judges, and 240 assessors, bailiffs and public defenders.

Illegally crossing the border is punishable by between one and four years in prison. Damaging the border fence results in a more severe punishment. If there are witnesses, the trial can be completed in three days; otherwise it takes eight. If the accused has filed an asylum application, it will be automatically rejected. They remain detained in a barracks until they are deported.

Because there is no possibility for legal entry, refugees are placed in a Kafkaesque situation that reduces the right to asylum to a farce. A refugee has the option of refraining from making an asylum application and voluntarily turning around, or illegally crossing the border and thereby losing the right to asylum.

The policies Hungary is now imposing with particular brutality are paralleled throughout Europe. With the sharp increase in refugees, the Dublin regulations, under which the first state entered by the refugees on European territory is obligated to register and receive them, have in practice collapsed. Germany has closed its southern border and introduced border controls.

The influx of refugees has led to deepening conflicts within the EU. The foreign ministers of the Visegrad states—Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary—have firmly reject adopting quotas that are being called for by Germany, Austria and the EU commission.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Victor Orban of the right-wing Citizens League (Fidesz) is seeking to use the migrant crisis to consolidate his domestic political position, while preparing further attacks on his own population. The interior ministry recently announced that it would store the biometric data of 10 million citizens in its own database.

The attacks on democratic rights and social welfare by Fidesz have been accompanied by several corruption scandals, producing a considerable drop in support for the government. In recent months, there were major strikes and protests in the healthcare system and social services. Despite the government's efforts to whip up the most backward elements in society behind its right-wing policies, there is considerable support for the refugees among the Hungarian population.



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