

# The Hope Is in the Resistance

*Not everything is dark. Even in the midst of our trajectory towards pure nothingness, there is a crack through which light comes in. Even with the post-apocalyptic melancholy spreading faster than a virus, even with the perpetual 'normalization' and introduction of the 'new normal', there is a choice.*

*After the Apocalypse, Srećko Horvat*

*A no border politics is a politics of refusal, a politics of revolution, and a politics of repair.*

*Border and Rule, Harsha Walia*

Almost 10 years ago, on a late-spring day, I stood under the giant sign with the handwritten word 'HOPE'. It was in Idomeni, the border area between Greece and North Macedonia. The sign was written by people on the move who were stranded at this place during winter/spring 2015/16. Perhaps even by some of the people who came as part of solidarity groups, who arrived at this place expecting only misery. Only to learn how HOPE lives in strange places.

It is also possible that it was a joint action by people on the move for different reasons. While walking around what was left of the makeshift camp, in the gravel near the sign, I found a handful of golden butterflies. I perceived them as a sign of hope.

A makeshift camp in Idomeni was established in response to the closure of the Balkan Route, as instructed by the EU and individual member states. The sudden halt in movement created a bottleneck in Idomeni, which the governments hoped would deter people planning to start their journey from anywhere in the world from taking this route. The same messages have been sent from other routes, including the Mediterranean, where people were left to die every day, with no help provided.

To send the message, governments employed intergovernmental organisations with their 'migration management', and police forces, allowing them to use force of any kind. The message was: 'You are not welcome here.' Rather than questioning those in power, which should be their primary role, the mainstream media decided to interview people arriving and those showing solidarity. They reported on the 'migrant crisis' and made a distinction between refugees, migrants, and economic migrants. They often forgot that they were reporting on people.

However, none of that was particularly effective in stopping migrations. History teaches us that migrations cannot be prevented, nor can solidarity among people that has kept the Balkan Route open until today, as it has been for centuries.

At the same time, Idomeni is reminding us that hope lives within us, the people, and we carry it with us, sharing it with others, beyond (or despite) borders.

I am writing this article a decade after I began following migratory routes through the Balkans. I was once a refugee, but only for a very short period. I could not bear the humiliation that the status brings. For me, living under siege for almost four years in Sarajevo, the city where I am from, was easier than being a refugee. Even back then, it meant humiliation and exposure to various forms of violence, both physical and administrative. People were forced to move from one place to another in search of peace. Given my experience as a war survivor and my connection with the movement of people through the Balkans, it was almost as if I were continuing a journey that began in the early '90s.

The past decade has been a time of learning about myself, as well as about other people, the world, politics, love, solidarity, patience and humanity. It was all about life. The person who stood under the 'HOPE' sign in Idomeni and the person writing this today are very different individuals. However, the world we live in is also different. It is more militarised and, as such, more dangerous. It is ruled by technocrats and has become dehumanised to the point where killing and genocide have become normalised.

Rather than dwelling on the darker aspects of the past decade, as I have done extensively, I have decided to recall the hope from Idomeni and share it with those who will read this article. I am writing this article while sitting under framed butterflies, which I found in Idomeni and kept as a reminder that, even in darker times, hope often lies deep inside each one of us. We need each other to keep fighting and reminding ourselves of this fact.

To reconstruct the destruction of our society, as well as the birth and survival of solidarity and hope despite it and the daily struggles, I made use of the extensive archive of the Are You Syrious Info Team. This is a self-organised group of individuals who came together in awe of the fact that what is happening



Idomeni, 2016. Photo: Nidžara Ahmetašević

around us is even possible (*Syrious* is a word game since most of the people who were on the move back then, in 2015, when we came together, were running away from the war in Syria). People from all around the world, with diverse backgrounds, came together, many of us having never met before. We formed strong human connections by spending endless hours online collecting and preserving information and stories, believing that making all that we were seeing visible to everyone would be helpful in some way. Together, we kept asking the world and those in positions of power to make decisions that define the lives of all of us: Are you seriously doing this? Going back to Daily Digests, thousands of articles written together and published between 2015 and 2023 (I left in 2018, but others continued) can reconstruct the growth of the movement of hope, as well as its birth, which is now visible on the streets of every European city, and much more. Now, we no longer ask the question, but we demand the change.

## We keep moving

When we arrived at Idomeni in May 2016, the last groups of people who had lived in the makeshift camp for at least three months were being forcibly relocated to new and existing camps throughout Greece. The makeshift camp in Idomeni remains a symbol of the EU's shortcomings. For a year or so, the EU, led by Germany, played a game called "Wir schaffen das" ("We can do this"), pronounced publicly by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in August 2015. In practice, this led to a policy that allowed entrance through slightly open doors (borders) but only to certain people, and up to a certain number, into the EU. It did not last long. On 9 March 2016, the AYS Daily Digest title was "Balkan Route Closing as of Midnight March 8th":

*As of midnight tonight (Tuesday-Wednesday), the #BalkanRoute has effectively closed. Earlier today, the Slovenian Interior Ministry announced that refugees without valid EU visas and passports will be denied entry into the Schengen zone (Slovenia is the first country on the route that is part of the Schengen zone). The Croatian Interior Minister confirmed that the exact EU visa requirement will also be implemented in Croatia starting at midnight. As a result, the Serbian Interior Ministry said Serbia decided to impose reciprocal measures (close its borders with Macedonia and Bulgaria to those who lack valid visas) to avoid becoming a refugee and migrant collection centre. There are no official statements from the Macedonian Government, but the route is expected to close at the Greece-Macedonia border, in Idomeni.*

*This means that the Balkan route, as we know it, has effectively come to a close. This decision follows Monday's EU declaration, which commits EU members to reintroduce Schengen border controls. European Union leaders and Turkey reached an outline agreement, the finalisation of which is expected at a summit on March 17. According to the deal and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, all those who come to Europe illegally will get sent back to Turkey and have to join the end of the line to enter Europe, the New York Times reports. Turkey has offered to take back some migrants if an equal number is allowed into the EU legally. If the deal is accepted, the EU would accept one Syrian refugee from Turkey in need of asylum for each irregular migrant (who entered the EU illegally or was not given refugee status) that Turkey takes back from Greece.*

*The 15,000 people stuck on the Greece-Macedonia border will be relocated to camps in the region and across Greece. There are 34,183 refugees in Greece, including 6,835 on its islands, and 8,341 in the Attica region around the capital.*

*There are many speculations about new routes opening through Bulgaria, Albania, or Italy. So far, countries on the potential new routes have taken measures to prepare for or prevent such an outcome.*

After the deal with Turkey, the EU continued to make deals with various countries, in exchange for further fortification of borders and the criminalisation of migration, discussed in the concept of 'migration management', which suddenly entered our vocabulary as 'migration crisis', 'border management', 'sea deaths', and others created as a part of what Harsha Walia calls 'discursive control'.

At the same time, construction work was underway on kilometres of walls, including concrete walls equipped with surveillance systems. Meanwhile, police violence at the borders was becoming normalised, even resulting in deaths such as that of Maddina Husseyni, a six-year-old girl from Afghanistan who lost her life at the Croatian/Serbian border.

In 2015, approximately 315 km of European border areas in five countries were marked by walls and fences. Today, just 10 years later, this figure has increased to between 1,900 and 2,250 km across 15 countries. These walls cannot be jumped over, the wires cannot be cut, and the surveillance cannot be tricked. People keep moving.

Idomeni as it was in the winter/spring 2015/16, remains a place from which the whole world can learn many lessons about resilience, migration, freedom, struggle, and love. However, it also shows us that, despite all their talk of democracy, human rights, and justice, the EU and the West are not places of hope. If it ever existed, this image disappeared forever in Idomeni.

## Despite campisation, we move

At the same time as the process of wallisation, the EU and its intergovernmental organisations gained more power and donations. They engaged in campisation, concentrating people inside camps where they could observe every move, take data, and restrict freedom. This put people's destiny into the hands of international bureaucrats, who were empowered to decide who is eligible for a chance to start living in the EU. Today, people across Europe are crammed into old schools, disused factories, deserted military barracks, derelict sports stadiums, airports, and even rubbish dumps. In 2017, Franco Bifo Berardi wrote an article about this titled *Auschwitz on the Beach*, referring to camps on islands of the Mediterranean. He wrote:

*The Archipelago of Infamy is spreading all around the Mediterranean Sea. Europeans are building concentration camps on their own territory, and they pay their Gauleiter of Turkey, Libya, Egypt, and Israel to do the dirty job on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where salted water has replaced Zyklon B. To stop the migratory, Euro-Nazism it is going to build enormous extermination camps.*

| Country/<br>Region   | Border                          | Length (approx.)      | Notes                            |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Poland               | Belarus                         | ~187 km               | Built after 2021                 |
| Lithuania            | Belarus                         | ~502 km               | Completed in 2022                |
| Latvia               | Belarus & Russia                | ~130 km               | Partially completed<br>by 2024   |
| Estonia              | Russia                          | ~115 km               | In progress, ~2026<br>completion |
| Finland              | Russia                          | ~200 km<br>(planned)  | Started in 2023                  |
| Hungary              | Serbia/Croatia                  | ~300 km               | Built 2015–17                    |
| Bulgaria             | Turkey                          | ~235 km               | Expanded after 2015              |
| Greece               | Turkey (Evros)                  | ~192 km<br>(planned)  | Expanded from<br>12.5 km in 2012 |
| France               | Calais wall<br>(UK border zone) | ~65 km                | Built 2015–2016                  |
| Spain                | Ceuta                           | ~10 km                | Reinforced and extended          |
| Austria,<br>Slovenia | Short fences                    | ~10–50 km<br>combined | Built and removed<br>cyclically  |

Table 1: Location and length of border fences in the EU

The first camp I visited was Cherso, near Thessaloniki, Greece.

Several thousand people were forced to live in the unbearable heat, under plastic tents, with no shade. They were constantly monitored by the military and denied autonomy over their own lives, including what they ate and how much water they consumed each day. Most of the people were Syrian or Afghan, and several hundred were Yazidis from the Sinjar area—all genocide survivors. Upon entering any of these places, whether in Greece, on the islands, or on the mainland, or anywhere else in the Balkans or the EU, it is immediately clear that they are not intended to provide sanctuary, but rather to extinguish any hope.

Yet people gathered in boiling tents or freezing ones in the winter, in cramped rooms or metal containers, sharing time, meals, tea, fears, hopes, and laughter, and learning from one another. Immediately upon entering any of these places, whether in Greece, the islands, the mainland, or anywhere else in the Balkans or any EU country, one understands that these places are not created to be a sanctuary but rather to extinguish any hope. Yet, in boiling tents or freezing ones in the winter, in cramped rooms or metal containers, people gathered, sharing time, meals, tea, fears, hopes, and laughs, and learning from one another.

In 2025, there were 38 camps in the Balkans. Despite all of them being built, as the IOM likes to say, to European standards, none of them provided decent living conditions.

Outside the camps, the EU and the big companies profiting from them were building a world ruled by far-right technocrats, where democracy was slowly dying. It is one political crisis after another, one phobia after another—all for profit. By criminalising migration and solidarity, the West aimed to prevent people from coming together, talking to each other, and learning from each other. They believed that if they kept us apart and made us afraid of each other, we would abandon all hope and accept their reality of wars, walls, wires, drones, cameras, and concentration camps.

I could go on reminding you about all the horrors of the past decade. But I will stop there. Instead, I will give way to something more important.

## We meet, and we are together

While observing how governments, intergovernmental organisations, and other bureaucrats and technocrats were creating a paranoid world in the name of security, I followed people and their encounters. Instead of camps, spaces based on solidarity and mutual support proliferated throughout Europe. Not only activists, but ordinary people too, opened their houses to those who arrived tired, hungry, and often beaten by the border police. People who appreciated the difficulty of leaving behind their life, home, family, and friends to start walking into an uncertain future. In 2024, I met a woman in a small village in Bosnia. When I asked her why she opened her house to hundreds of people passing by, cooking for them and giving them her own clothes and those of her family members, she answered that her neighbours had joined her in doing the same: *“We are all just people. And that is it.”*

Simple as that. We are all just people. The migration movement of the last 10 years has served as a reminder of that.



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

## INFORMATION TO REFUGEES - MIGRANTS

### **Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction**

You are in Greece and you are guests in this country. It is your obligation to follow the rules and instructions of the Greek state.

The borders, and this is not a responsibility of the Greek government, are and will remain closed. This settlement does not cover any of your basic everyday needs. It will end its operation. You should move to the camps run by the Greek state, in a fast and coordinated way, under the responsibility of the Greek authorities.

The Greek State gives you the opportunity to stay in the temporary reception facilities (camps, hotels, settlements and other facilities) in various areas in the country

These facilities are open but are guarded and controlled so that you and your families are safe. There you will find food, medical care, clothes and personal hygiene items.

While in these reception facilities, you can move freely, going out and coming in, but you must return back at a specified time and you must observe the Operation Regulations. If you do not observe these rules, you will lose your right to stay there.

You must also register. Soon after your enter the reception facility, the Greek Authorities will give you information on your right to apply for asylum in Greece, and the option of relocation in another EU member state for those fulfilling the terms and conditions of the relocation programme. You will also receive information on the family reunification procedure so as to reunite with members of your family in EU member states.

You will also receive legal and financial aid so as to return to your country of origin in case your asylum application is rejected or in case you wish to return.

You are requested to follow the orders and instructions of the competent members of staff who will tell you how to leave this settlement in an orderly manner and how to be transported safely to the reception facilities.

This text was given to everyone remaining in the camps in Greece in 2015.

Photo: Moving Europe, 2016



IOM map of active camps created under their supervision. Photo: IOM, 2025

These islands of solidarity and struggle, created by people on the move, which we all are at some point in our lives, continued to emerge. We resist together. Look at any protest against the genocide in Palestine anywhere in the world today. You will see people from different backgrounds and parts of the world coming together and asking those in power, 'Are you serious?' Many of them arrived in the West in the last decade, while others had arrived earlier and often crossed borders. They came carrying hope.

On their way, we meet. They taught us about bravery, equality, solidarity, and dignity. Sometimes we had something to offer in return, but at other times, we did not. However, we have finally realised that significant change is needed, and that we can only achieve it together. It will take time to end wars, demilitarise the world, and close all concentration camps, but we demand it and we will get there. It will take time. And we know it. Now we know what we want, and we are on the move!

We demand an end to borders and militarism. We call for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against those we see as enemies of the people. We want an end to patriarchy and colonialism, including settler colonialism and injustice.

Sometimes it is not easy to see hope from where we stand today, but it is here. I see it in the faces of people participating in protests for Palestinian freedom across the globe; in those taking part in encampments; in those going to concerts and chanting for freedom; in those boarding ships to try to break the siege; and in those starting to march towards Gaza. I see it in the faces of those fighting for climate justice, those fighting against deportations, and those marching for women's rights. I see it everywhere.

It may be overly optimistic for the present moment, but we all have the right to dream and hold on to hope. That is something I have learned from the people I've met while travelling over the last decade.

In these ten years, we have moved the borders, perhaps not the physical ones, but the borders between people have been moved, sometimes even shattered. We got in touch and exchanged information outside of the mainstream corporate media. Instead, we met on the streets and in places that those in power created to kill any hope. Instead, those golden butterflies from Idomeni are today everywhere in the world. As long as they fly, as long as we move, migrate, and meet each other, organise, we hope and we resist.