

## Today in the Roma village of Pribislavec

December 8, 2015

Today I re-visited the Roma settlement of Pribislavec with Kristijan Balog, his father and the Nova TV crew, after two years since my last visit. I returned with a puppy which I just couldn't leave there, and a severely wounded dog with infected neck wounds, which has already been taken care of in our infirmary.

I don't know how to describe my feelings and thoughts now. It took me 2 hours to stop shaking after I returned, even though everyone who knows me knows I am not an overly emotional person. As head of an animal shelter, I have been dealing with the consequences of this kind of treatment of animals for years, so I always try to imagine the circumstances that put them in the condition in which they arrive.

However, what I saw and felt today was beyond my every expectation. There are three to ten dogs in front of almost every house, if what we see in these photos can even be called houses.

In front of many of them, there are female dogs with puppies lying on the bare ground, the puppies with bloated bellies squeezing up against their mothers to keep warm. All dogs have only one emotion in their eyes—immense despair and sadness. There aren't as many ill dogs (like those with mange and so on) as I expected, maybe about 10% total. Almost every house has a Pit Bull Terrier or Staffordshire Terrier on a chain or in a crate. The breasts of female dogs sag because of whelping, many dogs have scars on their bodies, some parts of their bodies are hairless...

Except the ground on which they sleep in front of the shanties, they have no protection against weather conditions. I saw only one dog in a doghouse, but he was also chained.

In one yard, there was a dog which, as I immediately noticed, had pus leaking from infected wounds. The wounds were about 1.5 months old, and were, according to the locals, a result of abuse, i.e. an attempt to cut his throat with wire. I picked him up and took him to our animal infirmary, where he has been taken care of and will be well.

This puppy on my lap I just couldn't leave there. He was the only puppy which approached me without fear, looking at me with his big eyes like he was begging me: take me out of here, save me. I took him with me...

But all these things I have written here weren't what shocked me, because I expected them. Something else shocked me... Children shocked me... Children aged 3, 4, 5, 10, who almost all know how to set the dogs on each other, how to set them on people, how to hit a dog, how to make a dog lie down in front of them, how to kick him. "Shoo" is like "good day" to them. I know one thing—they weren't born this way, they've learned to be this way.

On departure, an older boy went into the bushes and brought us a puppy which had been "killed yesterday." He carried it by the back legs, swinging it through the air and throwing it in front of our feet. The puppy was discarded just a few meters away from his house to decompose and decay. While all of us stood in shock, the boy watched us with a smile on his face, probably wondering why we were appalled.

Soon, those children will become adults, and if someone doesn't teach them differently, the problems we are dealing with now won't be big, but gigantic.

This is a problem which needs to set in motion all the structures of society, this is a problem which isn't solvable by only a few people, this is a problem which even I hesitate to grapple with

because I don't have enough time, energy, emotional strength and resources. This requires people, lots of people.

I will leave you to your thoughts, but then we need a plan to solve this problem—for people, for animals, for those children...

As the last note, they want to give the dogs away and I took this puppy and the wounded dog without any problem. Let me know if there are people who could take in at least the youngest—let's move to safety at least those two female dogs with their couple-week-old puppies. One of the mommies came to me and when she realized I would not hit her, she cuddled with me looking for help. If we find them a home, we can rescue at least them. Our shelter is overcrowded.