

Friendly, unfriendly and dangerous Serbians

The first thousand kilometres on our way we had no trouble at all with the people we met. But on the route from the Hungarian border to the capital of Serbia Belgrad our impressions are mixed for the first time.

The rural landscape hasn't changed. Long streets straight ahead, huge fields, small properties in the villages on both sides. But suddenly there are no nests with storks any more on the roofs. No footpaths like we are used and no cyclepaths at all. You have to drive on the streets or on dirt tracks.

Completely rotten houses and renovated ones side by side and in between showy new buildings. Different from Hungaria the churches are not neat and renovated but often rotten.

Everywhere we get attention with our tandem and people take pictures and speak with us, here in Serbia the interest is enormous. There is a constant friendly honking some cars pass slowly to take pictures. Some of them turn to drive behind us. At first this is not bad for us but soon it gets on our nerves and sometimes it gets dangerous.

The atmosphere changes as soon we come close to big cities like Novi Sad or Belgrad.

In the traffic you can see more and more occidental big cars. We could see them seldom in Hungaria. Between the cars are old models you wouldn't get a license in our country. They all pass us noisily and stinking. The driving style gets more and more aggressive and there is a unpacient honking now. It's not great fun to ride. Sometimes we are frightened because drivers come toward us very close or they insult us while overtaking us.

In addition waste is laying endlessly at the side of the street ,also many dead animals. Memorial stones remind of victims of the traffic in the streets.

We were used to barking dogs from Hungaria, there they all were put behind fences. But in Serbia the dogs run without control in the streets and often they run behind our bicycle. Honking and shouting we get them to go away from us .

Behind Novi Sad we have to climb our first high mountain, on the top two bicyclists signal us. After the steep incline they make a break. Their loaded bikes make clear they are on a long trip, too. We join them. Michael and Sybille together with their two dogs want to drive to Asia and name their tour "cycle for a better world". With this tour they will campaign for the use of bicycles. Sybilles slogan is: your bicycle brings you wherever you want from the supermarket to people you like and even to the end of the world. For Michael a bike is the best alternative for all distances below 5 kilometers. Everybody knows we have to act against the emission of carbon dioxide, he explains. With this message they make a trip around the world for the next two years.

We make a pause together with them and recount about frustrating experiences with cardrivers. Michael has installed a pile on his trailer to get aggressive drivers on distance. A french- netherland couple join us. They will drive to the Black Sea.

An eleven km long country lane leads to Belgrad. We hear an increasing noise on Brigitte's pedals. In a little garage for bicycles near the Danube cycleway in Belgrad we get it repaired for four Euros. There we get a good tip for a hostel. We ask in the city for the way. A bearded man explains us the way. By arriving at the place he is already there and shows us the last few meters.

It is not easy to leave Belgrad. We decide as our cycle guide recommends to take the train to avoid the terrible traffic. Brigitte buys tickets and asks if it's possible to take a tandem into the train. Everybody gives an affirmative answer. In the afternoon the conductor prohibits to load our tandem in the train because this is a lokal train and so the transport of a tandem isn't allowed. Pleading doesn't help us. We could take a later train in the evening in a different station but now we decide to push our bike through the traffic to leave the city. In a suburb we recover from the stress in a great hotel. Our next destination is the iron gate. We will ride there on a street high over the Danube.