

Nikolay Barovsky case so far

On the 22th of September 2004 Nikolay Barovsky, 29 years old, Bulgarian architect and musician with no criminal past, was arrested by the Greek police at the Bulgarian-Greek border. He was traveling to Athens as a member and co-establisher of a Bulgarian nongovernmental charity organization, "Dignity Bulgaria 2003". The aim of his trip was to represent the organization at a meeting with a potential partner organization at the Greek capital, organized by another founding member of the same NGO – Iskra Vidinska-Rigatou. Just before boarding the bus for Athens, Nikolay was given a small plastic bag by Iskra's daughter – Rose Elen Rigatou, also a member of the organization. Nikolay was to bring the luggage to her brother, residing in Greece. The bag, according to Rose Elen's explanation and to Nikolay's brief look at it contained a sports jacket and a walkman.

At the border Nikolay was to bring his luggage down for inspection and the package he was given to carry was found to contain a jacket with 20 000 fake euro banknotes stuffed in its sleeve. No fingerprints were taken from the luggage ever since, the jacket has not undergone any dactiloscopic expertise, and there is no proof that the validity of the money was examined. After the interrogation Nikolay was taken into protective custody. Iskra and Rose Elen Rigatou were called to testify but they did not report to the police. On the 15th of October they were both issued arrest warrants on their Greek names (they both have double Greek and Bulgarian citizenship) and the warrants were passed on to Interpol. The investigation in Greece was suspended. Yet the arrest of Nikolay Barovsky was not suspended. Six months later, on the 24th of March 2005, his arrest was prolonged for six more months. He was not let on bail because of his Bulgarian citizenship and his lack of address registration in Greece. On the 31st of March Iskra Rigatou was arrested and after being interrogated she was released on bail of 3000 euro and a ban to leave Greece. However, she still resides in her flat in Sofia and travels freely between Bulgaria and Greece.

In the mean time, in the beginning of 2005 a preliminary investigation of the case took place in Bulgaria. The police search in the home of Nikolay Barovsky did not show any evidence of his involvement in issuing or traffic of fake banknotes. As a part of this investigation Rose Elen Rigatou was also interrogated in Bulgaria; her testimony vastly contradicted the testimony given by her mother to the Greek police. The investigation in Bulgaria also proved that both Iskra Rigatou and her two sons had a record of criminal past in drug and weapon traffic as well as in kidnapping affairs. Yet despite the pleads of Nikolay's lawyer the results of the investigation in Bulgaria were not taken into consideration by the investigation in Greece.

In the mean time, since September 2004 Nikolay Barovsky has been kept in prison, the only people permitted to visit him being those with the same surname (this restriction also happens to exclude his mother and his

girlfriend). After a campaign carried out by his family, friends, and broader masses of the Bulgarian society (including a demonstration of more than 300 people before the Greek embassy in Sofia) the Bulgarian institutions with the help of the Greek embassy found a way to ensure an address for Nikolay in Athens: it was on the condition that he was not to leave the city, and had to return to his room every night and to remain there on bail until his case was taken to court. This statement together with the petition of 100 prominent Bulgarian citizens testifying for the clear criminal past of Nikolay and his contribution to his community are taken to the Sitting of Judges in Seres from the 1st of August. Yet, despite these efforts Nikolay was not released on bail. Neither the documents from the Bulgarian institutions providing the residence address of Nikolay, nor the documents from the Bulgarian investigation proving his clear criminal past were taken into consideration by the Greek legal officials – they were not even commented upon. Nikolay has been left in prison for six more months before the case goes to court. The treatment of Nikolay in this case is even more scandalous. On going to the Sitting of the Judges Nikolay was left without a bath for 5 days, and went to court without being allowed to shave or bathe before that. He was also not allowed to speak for more than 2 minutes. Upon his return back to the prison in Thessaloniki, where he had spent the last 10 months, his clothes and shoes were torn off by the policemen without explanation. His phone cards (cost ca.60 euro) were taken away and never given back to him.

The trial is now appointed for the 11th of January 2006. Under the described circumstances of the action of the representatives of the Greek legal system on the case so far, people campaigning for Nikolay question the chance and likelihood of an impartial trial preserving his dignity and personal integrity. We believe that Nikolay is innocent. Yet, our prime aim is to familiarize the Greek public with the case and to ensure external monitoring during the trial by media representatives and human right specialists.

The case of Nickolay Barovsky has risen awareness in Bulgaria; as we, the family and friends of Nikolay, and other concerned Bulgarian and foreign citizens, have initiated a web page <http://barovsky.ludost.net> where we exchange information on the last developments on the case.

Yet, since our possibilities to attract the public opinion and to control the functioning of the legal system in Greece are limited, we believe that with YOUR assistance and engagement we could help attain humane treatment and a just trial for Nikolay – a respected professional, an artist, a person with no criminal past. For this reason, we shall all be extremely grateful for any help, suggestions, or assistance!