

Deported refugee commits suicide in Romania

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On Saturday, March 17, 57-year-old Marin Mogos hanged himself in the transit area of the Bucharest airport at Otopeni. This act of desperation can only be understood as a protest against the inhumane refugee and rigid deportation policies of the German government and authorities.

In 1990, Marin Mogos fled with his wife and children to Germany from Romania during the upheavals that followed the toppling of the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Like hundreds of other Roma and their families, they had been persecuted and abused by the notorious secret police, Securitate. His wife suffered a miscarriage after being beaten by the secret police.

Like many other Roma who had fled Romania and became stateless, the Mogos renounced their Romanian citizenship, lodging an appeal for asylum in Germany in the hope of being granted citizenship at a later date.

The asylum proceedings dragged on until 2001, ending with the rejection of their application for asylum; the German foreign office in the meantime had deemed Romania to be a “safe third country.”

The Mogos family had been housed at a centre for refugees in Schwalbach, in the state of Hesse, immediately after their arrival. They later settled in Kastel near Wiesbaden, where the five children grew up and attended school and, like so many other asylum-seekers and “tolerated” immigrants living under constant threat of deportation, were fully integrated into German society.

After the rejection of their application for asylum, the family was allowed to remain for a few more months. The administrative court of Wiesbaden rejected their appeal and also refused their request to extend their permission to stay on. Shortly thereafter, in the early morning hours of March 7, 2002, the Mogos family—father Marin, mother Anisoara, as well as three of their children, Gabriela, Gheorghe and Dorina, aged 15, 17 and 18 at the time—were taken from the apartment where they had lived for the last 10 years. A total of 14 police were involved in the operation and the family were led away in handcuffs, to be deported to Bucharest. Two other children who had married German nationals were allowed to stay in Germany.

From that day on, Marin Mogos and his family lived in a

locked room in the transit area of the Bucharest airport. He had sworn never to set foot on Romanian soil again.

A complaint lodged against the family’s deportation and violation of rights by the German authorities was rejected by the European Court of Human Rights in May 2004.

While the decisions issued by the court were formally correct—that the complainant had not exhausted the appeals process in Germany, and that in the meantime an agreement had been reached between Germany and Romania allowing him to return to Romania and to live there—both decisions were extremely harsh because they completely ignored the actual situation of the complainant and his family.

It is virtually impossible for asylum-seekers living in Germany to achieve recognition through the appeals process. However it is even more difficult, if not impossible, when they find themselves in another country and in a legal no-man’s land, such as the locked transit area of an airport.

The reference to the treaty agreed between Germany and Romania in 1998 for the return of stateless, former Romanian citizens is particularly cynical. This agreement only came into force on February 1, 1999, and contained no provision to be applied retrospectively and therefore does not apply to stateless persons who entered Germany before that date.

The merciless attitude of the German authorities rests on a supplementary agreement, which was only signed into effect in the spring of 2001, after discussions between the interior ministers of Germany and Romania. In the lead-up to this agreement, Germany’s interior minister, Otto Schily (Social Democratic Party, SPD) of the then ruling SPD-Green Party coalition, had exerted enormous pressure on Romania, and had threatened that Germany would not agree to Romania’s acceptance into the EU if Romania was not prepared to accept stateless, former Romanian citizens who had arrived in Germany before the return treaty came into effect, even though Romania was under no obligation to do so.

Marin Maglos’ suicide can only be understood in the context of the hopeless situation in which he and his family found themselves after their more than five years’ enforced stay in a locked room in the airport transit area.

He did not want to return to Romania on account of the

persecution and oppression that he had experienced there, together with the total insecurity of the present situation. However, he was not permitted to return to Germany, where he had spent 12 years of his life before his deportation and where he had become accustomed to the social norms. In addition to his own intolerable situation—he was a diabetic and the medical care available was inadequate—he experienced the added torment of watching the grief of his family and the lack of perspective of his growing children, all of whom suffered from depression.

The case of Marin Mogos is particularly tragic, but it is not an isolated one.

This was highlighted by a number of detailed reports on a very similar case, that of the Codreanu family, published in the *Rhein-Zeitung* of Koblenz between July 2003 and December 2004. The Codreanus had lived in Koblenz for almost 13 years and were deported to Bucharest on March 10, 2003, where they had been living at the airport site ever since.

The main responsibility for the merciless treatment of stateless Roma and asylum-seekers rests with the SPD-Green Party coalition, which initiated and implemented numerous clauses to restrict asylum and immigration during its period in office from 1998 to 2005. This policy is now being continued and intensified by the current grand coalition of the SPD, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU). These attacks are part and parcel of far-reaching attacks on the democratic rights and social gains of the population as a whole.

The tragic case of Marin Mogos and the uncertain fate of his family highlights in a particularly stark manner revelations contained in the latest UNICEF report on the conditions of Roma children in Europe and children of Roma refugee families in Germany.

The UNICEF report, released at the beginning of March, examines in particular the situation facing Roma children in southern Europe, where most Roma live on the fringes of society in dire poverty. In Albania, Bulgaria and Romania only 60 to 80 percent of Roma children attend school. In Bosnia-Herzegovina only 20 percent of Roma children attend school.

The majority of the 8-10 million Roma live in southern Europe, with as many as 2 million living in Romania alone. Almost half of all Roma living in these countries are children under 18 years old. Most families languish in veritable ghettos and slums. Often the rate of unemployment and the poverty rate are close to 100 percent, with more than half existing on less than €100 per month. One quarter live in ramshackle buildings and sheds, often without running water or sanitation.

In the past, the conditions of the Roma people living in the

former Stalinist countries of southern Europe were already difficult. Since the reintroduction of unfettered capitalist relations in 1989/90, their situation has worsened. One indicator is the rise of illiteracy, which is increasing particularly among the younger groups examined, aged 15 to 24, living in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Serbia. Illiteracy is closely connected to the low attendance of Roma children at school and the difficult social conditions under which Roma generally live.

During the reign of Nazi Germany, Roma were ruthlessly pursued throughout Europe as “gypsies.” By 1945 approximately half a million had been murdered in the concentration camps.

In relation to present-day Germany, the UNICEF report is particularly critical of the difficult and uncertain situation facing Roma refugee families. There are currently 70,000 Sinti and Roma refugees with German passports in Germany and approximately 50,000 Roma refugees who fled former Yugoslavia, particularly after the onset of the civil war in 1990, including 20,000 children.

Above all, the UNICEF report highlights the uncertain residence status, which has a very detrimental impact on the Roma and their children. Around two thirds of the 50,000 Roma refugees from former Yugoslavia are simply “tolerated.” This means they live under the constant threat of deportation and have only limited rights. Refugees receive only 70 percent of the normal social security payment; they are not permitted to work and are not entitled to child endowment, educational allowance or full medical coverage. In the Saarland, these children have no right to attend school. In the states of Hesse and Baden-Wuerttemberg there is no obligation to attend. In other states and principalities, the efforts of social workers, teachers and parents often determine whether or not the children of “tolerated” immigrants can attend school.



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