

Roma woman dies following deportation to Kosovo

Elisabeth Zimmermann**19 January 2011**

The village of Mayen, near the city of Koblenz in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate, is governed by a Social Democratic Party (SPD) administration. A Roma family originating from Kosovo had lived in Mayen since 1999. Despite the serious illness of one of the members of the family, Mrs. Borka T., the whole family was deported under inhumane conditions in early December to Kosovo. Just a month later, Mrs. T. died of a brain hemorrhage.

In the early hours of December 7, police picked up Mrs. Borka T. with her husband and her 14-year-old son Avdil from their home in Mayen. They were given just 30 minutes to pack a few personal belongings. They were then taken by police to Dusseldorf Airport and together with other refugees deported to Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.

Mrs. Borka T. was examined at Dusseldorf Airport by a doctor whose job was to give the okay for her deportation. Mrs. T.'s own specialist doctors had diagnosed her as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and neuralgia. Due to these symptoms, she received regular medication and therapy with the support of the Caritas organisation. These facts were known but ignored by officials at the airport.

The ailing woman's condition was also swept aside by the local administration in Mayen-Koblenz, which ordered the deportation of the family. The Trier Administrative Court then upheld the deportation, knowing full well that no possibilities of treatment for the woman existed in Kosovo.

The Mayen-Koblenz administration denied any responsibility on its part even after the death of Borka T. was announced earlier this year. A spokesman merely declared that the authority had relied on the judgement of the Trier Administrative Court, which had stated that there were options for her treatment in Kosovo. The spokesman refuted any correlation between a lack of drugs and the woman's death as absurd, declaring with cynicism: "Intracranial bleeding is always a possibility".

The lawyer for the family, Jens Dieckmann, issued a press release on January 7 describing the family's traumatic experience in Kosovo and the subsequent brutal deportation of Borka T. and her family:

"In October 1999 Mrs. T. came to Germany with her family. Previously they had lived in Mitrovica, the city in Kosovo was

at the center of fighting (in the Yugoslav war) and was divided (and remains divided) between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. She witnessed the destruction of her house during the war and the death of many of her neighbors, friends and relatives. Mrs. T. and her family are members of the Roma ethnic group and were trapped in the war between the crossfire of warring Serbs and Albanians. The Albanians expelled the family of Mrs. T., together with other Roma from Mitrovica, accusing them of collaboration with the Serbs. The family subsequently fled from the ruins of Mitrovica.

"Since fleeing from Mitrovica, where Mrs. T. experienced burning houses and countless dead and wounded, she has suffered post-traumatic stress disorder. In Germany, she was therefore in constant specialist care and with the support of Caritas underwent a specific trauma therapy."

The lawyer then went on to describe how the court in Trier upheld her deportation, although the court was fully aware of her condition. Ignoring humanitarian grounds for denying the deportation, the court preferred instead to rely on thoroughly erroneous information from the German Foreign Office that the woman would be referred to specialists in Kosovo and given immediate treatment.

In fact, the conditions on the ground in Pristina were very different. Any claim by German authorities that they could not have anticipated such a lack of medical facilities in Kosovo is completely untenable.

A number of reports and studies by refugee aid organisations such as ProAsyl or the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, have documented the desperate social and political situation in Kosovo.

There are only about 300,000 jobs for Kosovo's 1.8 million inhabitants, and the official unemployment rate is 45 percent. For the Roma and Ashkali communities, the rate is 95 to 100 percent. There is virtually no form of support for the unemployed, and medical care is only available to those who can pay for it. Education is also bound up with paying fees. The province's agricultural system is not competitive, and there is no significant productive sector. Kosovo's main export is scrap metal.

In a report by the Council of Europe, Kosovo is described today as a land dominated by "mafias and organised crime".

The commander of the KLA and current prime minister, Thaci Hacim, is accused of heading a criminal cartel involved in murders, prostitution and drug trafficking. (See “Washington’s “humanitarian” war and the crimes of the KLA”)

When the T. family arrived in Pristina there were no doctors, German-speaking employees of the German Embassy or aid workers to meet them. After completing their immigration formalities, the family was completely abandoned. “You can go wherever they want,” they were told. The only money in their possession was the sum of €220.

On arrival, Mrs T. underwent a panic attack and declared she would not return to Mitrovica. The family then drove for about two hours by taxi to a brother of Mrs. T. in southern Serbia. There, around 40 family members live in a number of poorly equipped barracks. Each hut has a kitchenette and living room, where everyone eats together and at night sleep on the floor. There were no adequate facilities for a bath or shower.

The 14-year-old son Avdil, who has lived and attended school in Germany since the age of three, was totally shocked by the poverty surrounding him. Lacking any knowledge of the language, he has no chance of going to school there.

Denied essential medical treatment and drugs, Mrs. Borka T. collapsed shortly after New Year. She was taken to a clinic in Kragujevac where she fell into a coma and then died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

The tragic death of Mrs. Borka T. is yet another damning indictment of the German asylum and deportation system. Every year, thousands of people suffering from severe illnesses are deported to their countries of origin. In many cases, they have lived for years or even decades in Germany. There, they were denied a right to permanent residence and lived in a permanent state of insecurity.

Many of those deported are children who were born in Germany and grew up in the country. These children are brutally torn from their schools, their familiar surroundings and friends and deprived of any future prospects.

Even given such circumstances it was entirely within the remit of the administration in Mayen-Koblenz to grant a residence permit to the T. family on humanitarian grounds. Just two weeks before the deportation of a family, the Conference of Interior Ministers had issued a decree making such decisions possible. The state of Rhineland-Palatinate, however, decided to implement this regulation only on December 23, over a month after the decree was issued.

In his letter to the press on January 7, the family’s lawyer raised number of vital questions:

1. Why was there no medical examination of Mrs. T. immediately prior to her deportation?

2. Why were no specialists and relief organisations present in Pristina at the airport when the German authorities knew that a mentally ill woman was being deported on that day?

3. Why did the state of Rhineland-Palatinate not join the ban on the deportation of Roma from Kosovo, which had been

agreed by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia? The state government in Düsseldorf had made its decision based primarily on advice from the Foreign Office and information describing the catastrophic situation facing Roma in Kosovo.

4. Why was there no stop to the deportation practice following the decision of the Conference of Interior Ministers on November 19, 2010? At the conference, it was agreed that a residency permit could be awarded to refugees who had integrated properly and protected against deportation at least until children in the family reached the age of 18. Avdil attended a school in Germany for years and would undoubtedly have fulfilled the criteria laid down.

According to his class teacher, Avdil was a good, hard-working and inquisitive student who was popular with his classmates. Nevertheless, he and his family were brutally deported.

This bureaucratic cruelty, however, is intentional. Deportations to Kosovo are the avowed aim of the agreement signed by German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere (CDU) and his Kosovar counterpart, Bajram Rexhepi, on April 14, 2010. It commits Kosovo to accept 14,000 refugees from Germany. In addition to more than 10,000 Roma, this figure also includes Ashkali, Kosovo-Egyptians and members of the Kosovo Serb minority in Kosovo.

Most of the Roma fled from Kosovo in 1999 during the NATO war against Yugoslavia. While the official doctrine of NATO was to protect the Kosovo Albanians from Serbian attacks and “ethnic cleansing”, the NATO- and EU-led war fueled ethnic nationalism and assisted in the campaign to drive out the Serb, Roma and Ashkali minorities from Kosovo. Some fled to Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, but most sought asylum in western Europe or hoped for recognition as refugees from civil wars. Most of those who applied for asylum in Germany were turned down.

Now, many of those who did get into the country are being deported, despite the cold winter in war-torn and shattered Kosovo. Those returning will encounter poverty, social exclusion, and housing shortages. Many lacking proper medical care will suffer illness, and for some, like Mrs. Borka T., deportation means death.



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