

The Brutal Violations of Human Rights in Bulgaria (and why the European Union should be concerned)

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[Antoaneta Vassileva's blogpost dedicated to the brutal violations of human rights in an EU member state published on medium.com on 19 April 2017:](#)

The judicial system in Bulgaria is often described as 'Stalinist.'

Indeed, the Bulgarian Prosecution Service often organizes 'witch-hunts' against the political and economic rivals of those in power using Soviet-style tactics. Moreover, it uses all available repressive instruments of the State to destroy them by targeting their closest friends and relatives, too.

My own case is enough evidence. 'Stalinist' may sound harsh or dramatic. But it is perfectly accurate.

After my husband, prominent entrepreneur and banker Tzvetan Vassilev, did a television interview last November, criticizing Bulgaria's "mafia model" of governance and calling for economic and legal reforms, the Bulgarian Prosecution Service targeted me to get to him.

Tzvetan was—and remains—a serious threat to a Bulgarian power structure that relies on corruption for its subsistence. He didn't speculate, but rather supported his claims with documents and hard, incontrovertible evidence of public graft. They outlined how, with support of leaders at the highest level of the Bulgarian government, organized criminals had tried unsuccessfully—to blackmail him.

The Prosecution Service fabricated charges against me—as they had against Tzvetan months earlier. They wouldn't make them public until they could carefully stage a most dramatic moment—a special, nationally-televised press conference at which the spokesperson of Bulgaria's Chief Prosecutor announced I was a dangerous money launderer who needed to be detained—for 72 hours—and immediately.

The Prosecution Service wouldn't present any actual evidence of my alleged crimes—but they would be issuing an European Arrest Warrant (EAW) and a Interpol "Red Notice" for me.

No, they weren't exactly following Bulgarian law. And no—I wasn't allowed to appeal any of this. Allowing a counter-argument would defeat their purpose, which was to silence my husband by threatening to throw his wife in jail.

In Bulgaria, government leaders not only practice this kind of thuggish behavior. They do so in plain view. And because European Union leaders haven't yet held them to account—for making a mockery of property rights and rule of law—they have only grown bolder.

To the average Western executive, the story of the 2014 government-provoked bank run, seizure and mafia looting of Corpbank, built by my husband, is something out of a movie.

For our family, it's been a horror film, as Tzvetan and now I have been falsely accused of crimes and publicly humiliated by state-controlled Bulgarian media. We'd make clear our innocence—and the craven motives behind this scheme to besmirch us—if only we were merely allowed to defend ourselves.

Bulgaria does not observe its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. Its justice system presumes guilt—not innocence—and does not offer defendants the right to a fair trial. When detained, it doesn't protect them against inhumane treatment. These are our fears.

We have submitted a claim against Bulgaria before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in 2014 for breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights in the case of my husband, and we will certainly submit one for my case. Yet, this would not solve our country's bigger issue: government leaders who use Bulgaria's judicial system to wage political vendettas.

Case in point—the charges leveled against me are absurd. I have been accused of money laundering as I purchased a house in Switzerland in 2012 with allegedly 'misappropriated' money.

To buy the house, I used a loan from a bank in Switzerland as well as money given to me by my husband—money he transferred to my bank account from his bank account. My husband had declared this money and paid his taxes to the Bulgarian Tax Authorities, which had recently completed an extensive 10-year audit of our family income and found nothing out of order.

Moreover, I reported the purchase on my own tax return.

Why did the Bulgarian authorities suddenly, now decide that, come to think of it, they missed something in their audit?

In hindsight, the answers are too obvious.

My husband Tzvetan Vassilev was ranked as the most influential person in Bulgaria in 2013 by Forbes. He was among the biggest taxpayers too. Clearly, he was a threat to the status quo as he could not be controlled: he had to be destroyed using all means.

Bulgaria's economic crisis—enhanced by a lack of Foreign Direct Investment—has encouraged Bulgaria's political mafia to raid successful businessmen with the help of state institutions with one purpose—loot their assets. One can hardly see a difference between these methods and communist expropriation.

This brutal violence can happen to anyone in the country. Does an EU member state deserve such a perspective?

Most certainly, Bulgaria's crisis is also a crisis for the EU. Anger about corruption is palpable everywhere on the continent. European citizens are hard-working people and that is why they are outraged that wealthy people, politicians, and powerful corporations routinely evade taxes and offer/accept bribes. If EU institutions want to be respected, they need to show they are not mere bystanders who close their eyes to the inconvenient truth.

EU institutions, which take a stand against corruption of all kinds, can change public perception and give people hope about the future of the EU. Bulgaria, being the most corrupt country in the EU, is the right place to start reform and now is the right time.