

TRADE WITH ORGANS

MACEDONIAN PATIENTS - TRANSPLANT TOURISTS

Traveling through out half a world for a kidney

More than one decade patients from Macedonia are traveling in India, Pakistan and other countries where the kidney transplantations are executed legally, half-legally or completely illegally. Macedonian citizens on internet markets and in local newspapers are offering kidneys for sale. America's Doctors Association in it's official reports provides that Macedonia is part of the chain of illegal sale of kidneys. Non-governmental organizations are warning that they "have indications" that people living in poverty, especially from the Roma community, are selling kidneys. In several affairs unnamed macedonian doctors were pointed that were participating in illegal transplantations..... However, officially in Macedonia trade with organs - does not exist. The daily newspaper "Dnevnik" has executed research. Here are the results.

"No, this could not be happening to me. The doctors are wrong. They don't know anything." Young 22 years old girl from Skopje couldn't believe that her health condition is worsening very fast and seriously after one of her kidneys has stopped to perform the function. She was obligated to go to dialyses. "Why is this happening to me?" This question was ringing every day in her head. She could not stand the idea that until the end of her life she will have to go on dialyses. None of her closest friends was not applicable kidney donor. So, she has decided to go to Pakistan to find a kidney. There she was transplanted a kidney. She doesn't want to talk in which hospital she was, neither who has performed surgery, nor how much she has paid for the kidney. However, her troubles haven't stop. She has lost the donated kidney and also was very close to lose one of her legs.

- The girl couldn't bear the fact that she had to go on dialyses. Suddenly she could not be found anywhere. We have heard that she has left to Pakistan through certain secret channels in the hospital in the City Lahore, whereas the kidney was transplanted to her. But after a short period when she came back from Pakistan, she has returned to our Clinic with a lot of problems. She had problems with the functioning of her kidney and also has appeared early thrombosis on her blood-vessel. We have hardly succeeded to save her leg, but the kidney - has gone. Large amount of money have been paid for the transplantation in Pakistan and the girl has been put to

great risk. Unfortunately, she was obligated to continue with dialyses- D-r. Ninoslav Ivanovski, Head of the Transplantation Department of the Clinic for Nephrology recalls.

Ministry of interior is waiting for reports

The trade with organs in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as in the most countries in the world is prohibited and is a criminal act. Also is prohibited buying and selling of organs. However the macedonian police has never been interested through which channels macedonian patients at least one decade, are traveling to India, Pakistan or other countries where the kidney transplantation is legal of half-legal, whereas are informed and are finding "fresh" kidney. The police is waiting to be submitted official report to her for the latter.

- The fact is that there are people who are traveling abroad in order to have kidney transplantation. But so far we have not received any official reports for such activities in order to act ex officio –Zoran Pavlovski, Chief Inspector says. He is the Head of the Team in the Unit for Fight Against Violent and Serious Crime in the Department for Organized Crime in the Ministry for Internal Affairs.

- The patients, normally could not be punished if they buy kidney in order to save their own health. But those who organize transplant tours for illegal sale of organs must and should be punished as should be those "businessman" who are buying kidneys and other organs from poor people and afterwards are selling them to rich people for enormous amounts.

- There were patients from Macedonia who were going for kidney transplantation in some of the countries where the transplantation centers exist and where those are executed legally of half-legally. Those are mainly patients from albanian nationality. Lately, we have patients coming who had kidney transplantation in Egypt. But, we definitely don't send them in these transplantation centers -D-r. Ivanovski explains.

He added:

- Of course they are going illegally. But not through me. I am not aware if there are others involved. I could not accuse anyone. I have received offers from centers in Pakistan to send patients, in exchange for the part of the profit, but I have refused. I am not in a position to tell to the patients that it is dangerous, what they must be careful about and how to act in different

situations, due to the fact that they don't tell us that are intending to travel and have transplantation.

Seven death cases

In our country the transplant tourism is permanent. This, 2009 there were three patients who had kidney transplantation in Egypt. Average number is 4-5 patients per year who are having kidney transplantation abroad.

- In those centers usually are going patients from Kosovo. Thirty such patients are under control here in Skopje Clinic. They had received kidney in two centers - in Ravalpindi and Lahore. Those centers are now closed but others were opened. Those two hospitals have generated many complications to the patients. Such hospitals have many organ donors, but don't have standards. The surgeons are skilled, but the conditions in the hospital are scary. This has been told by the patients themselves. In those two centers in period 2006 - 2008 there has been explosion of patients. The patients from Kosovo who have returned after the executed kidney transplantation in those hospitals, had many complications, D-r. Ivanovski claims.

There were also seven death cases. Numerous infections have occurred to the patients after the kidney transplantation in the hospitals in these countries. Afterwards in the Clinic in Macedonia those kidneys had to be removed in order their lives to be saved. The infections in most of the cases happened as a result from the surgery. But, in some countries, in which this practice is allowed, there are better hospitals. For instance, on Philippines transplantation with bought kidneys is allowed, but costs around USD 80,000.

However, the donors, commonly, poor people are deciding to sell a part of their body (trying to find a way to feed their family or to pay some of their enormous debts) are receiving very little funds. In the countries "exporters" of organs, the poverty is enormous and misused. The modern society is fighting against forcing the poor people to sell organs in order to survive. They receive EUR 1,500 - 2,000 per kidney. Sometimes even less. Sometimes nothing. On the other hand, the buyers are paying huge amounts of money. In Pakistan, one kidney costs around USD 30,000 and in other countries up until USD 100,000. The price of the liver on the market is USD 150,000.

Unfortunately, only in 2007 and 2008 in the world were sold around 15,000 organs. This business, which in the past was reserved for the third world - India, Pakistan, China, Philippines and Egypt - is expanding. Those are legal destinations but there are also illegal.

Turkey is considered as a pillar and moderator on these activities. It is also logistic support and main center to the third countries. There, the patients are also receiving dialyses on their way to the final destination for the transplantation. The channels through which this trade is executed aren't familiar. We don't know who is organizer and how this trade is executed.

The trade with organs also exists in South America - Brazil, Ecuador. In China as source of organs are used individuals sentenced with death penalty. Last year there were around 16,000 executions whereas organs were removed. It was performed brutally - when they are in a cerebral death - D-r Ivanovski says.

(team of Dnevnik, Kanal 77 i Fakti)

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INDECENT PROPOSAL

Macedonia refused Israel's transplant tours

The authorities for discovering and fighting this kind of criminal are saying that such criminal does not exist in this country beside the fact that more than ten years macedonian citizens are traveling abroad, in countries like India, Pakistan and lately Egypt, in order to have half legal kidney transplantation. Or, even that, unofficially, business with organs, mainly with kidneys, is in expansion in Macedonia and in the countries in the region. But, beside this, America's Doctors Association is pointing our country as the part of the trade chain.

Approximately, ten years ago macedonian doctors have refused an offer from the Israel's Doctor Zaki Shapira, (whose name is connected with illegal transplantation and trade with kidneys), Macedonia to become destination where the transplantation will be executed.

- It is correct that this business is "in expansion". We are reporting the cases when we are visited by the macedonian patients as well as patients from Kosovo who, by virtue of transplant tourism, have been transplanted the kidney. They are coming to the Clinic for Nephrology because after the performed kidney transplantation they have complications which we must correct and treat. There are also many cases when we must remove kidneys which they have paid very expensively for in order to save their lives. We report such cases to the police. The investigators are coming in order to find the mediators, due to the fact that the patients are going through channels that are unfamiliar to us. There are also suspicions that many patients from Kosovo were going to Pakistan through the Islamic fundamentals from Albania. It has been performed extremely professional.

This kind of crime may be disclosed latter, as in the other types of the organized crime, however, countries, especially those in the region must undertake appropriate measures. Without commonly organized action of the police in the entire region, there aren't chances for success. Large amount of money is involved in this business and the chain could hardly be disclosed, whereas many people are having profit, but at least the kidney donor -D-r. Ninoslav Ivanovski, Head of the Transplantation Department of the Clinic for Nephrology points out.

In the Ministry for Internal Affairs are claiming that nobody hasn't reported anything to them. Neither the doctors from the Clinic, nor the patients.

- Until now we have not received any official report from any state or private institution or from the citizens. It is fact that the there are individuals who are traveling abroad in order to have kidney transplantation. This could be also acknowledged from the media. Nevertheless, I repeat that there are no reports regarding the latter from the Clinic or from the individuals that have been in India or in any other country, neither we have discussed for these issues with any of our doctors -Zoran Pavlovski, Chief Inspector claims. Pavlovski is Head of the Team in the Unit for Fight Against Violent and Serious Crime in the Department for Organized Crime in the Ministry for Internal Affairs.

Getaway, the police is coming!

The doctors from the Clinic of Nephrology share the opinion that the patients who are traveling

in other countries for kidney transplantation should not be accepted at the Clinic in Skopje and instead should be returned in the places where the transplantation was executed.

- Some of our colleagues are saying: "I am not obligated to treat and cure them, they should return to Pakistan and have the surgery there if they have complications". My opinion is that those patients should be accepted. They should not be returned neither due to their health condition, and also because that medical treatment of the complications is not included in the price of the medical intervention that was executed in those countries. It is brutal that the doctors in those countries are looking to release these patients as quickly as possible, even very often with the excuse - getaway the police is coming! It is fact that the treatment of the complications which have occurred upon the executed transplantation cost us very expensively - D-r Ivanovski emphasizes.

Who is buying and who is giving kidney?

There are individuals who want to cash their donation of organs due to various reasons or to solve some life problem related to their existence (to buy house or a car or to start some business). Some of them want to pay their debts. However, there are also individuals who want to give their kidney without any particular reason whatsoever. Between potential donors there are from the Roma community but also other individuals, as Samarian donors - D-r Ivanovski explains.

USA accepts donors who do not request any compensation or remuneration for that purpose. The only condition is not to disclose the donor's identity.

-Citizens come to us saying that they want to donate a kidney. Those aren't many. They claim that will donate without any compensation or remuneration. I don't accept them because there isn't any way that I could disclose what is the real reason behind their offer. Somewhere these offers are accepted. In Iran for example, such donors are accepted. Their country declares: "All the Islamic people in front of Allah have order to donate kidney, because it could help somebody." In Iran exists enormous giving away of organs, whereas the state gives money to the donors. However, the process is badly controllable due to the fact that it is basic rule the patient who is donating organ to be in a good health condition after the donation. It will be a

disaster if something happens to the donator, if some complications to his health occurs - D-r Ivanovski reveals.

He adds that until now they had no patient with complications who has admitted that is organ donor.

- It is fact that several patients have come to us who do not have a kidney. But when we ask them, their answer is that their kidney has been removed because of the "stones in the kidney" that they have. We are aware that in Turkey are executed this types of interventions, and our colleagues from Turkey are claiming that such interventions are well organized and secret - D-r Ivanovski says.

D-r Shapira in mission in Macedonia

Ivanovski remembers the attempt of the Israeli's surgeon Zaki Shapira, whose name is constantly related with trade of organs, Macedonia to become destination in the transplant tourism. He has offered to the macedonian doctors to bring Israeli's patients and organs for them and in return he asked from his macedonian colleagues to provide him facilities and other necessary conditions for the transplantations.

-Ten years ago Shapira has offered something to us, that he has now received in Kosovo. The minister of health in that time, mr. Petar Ilievski, has come to me with the proposal for me to supervise the interventions on the Israeli's citizens. Shapira should execute the surgeries. As the organ donors should be used Israeli's citizens, who should have surgeries here. My first question was - Why this is not executed in Israel, instead of here? We have refused the proposal. We have sent a letter to the minister saying that the respective offer is attempt for sale (trade) of organs. However, what hasn't succeeded here, he has done in Estonia. D-r Shapira is working through out the world more than ten years. The colleagues from Israel have given up on him - D-r Ivanovski explains.

According to him there are indications that illegal trade with organs is deeply involved in Kosovo, Romania, Moldavia, Albania, Ukraine.....

- Everywhere in the world there are people living in poverty and not well formed legal system. This type of trade is performed only on 80 kilometers from Macedonia - he says.

In Macedonia is allowed to be performed kidney transplantation from the members of the same family - from mother, father, husband, wife.....

- Our system is based on voluntary basis and excludes any type of material benefit from donating kidney. We also accept blood non related donors, but if those are from the same family - father or mother in law..... The key role is played by us the doctors. The donors are signing statement at the Notary that the donation of the organ is on voluntary basis. They must also visit psychologist, who should examine them and also check the relationship between the donor and the receiver, respectively whether between them exists any emotional bond. If donors are accountable, they also visit psychiatrist. At the end, if some doubt exist, the entire case and the donors go to the Ethical Committee of the Ministry for Health. However, the donation doesn't have any financial background. We turn special attention whether there is any pressure to the donor to give away the kidney. According to our Law on Transplantation, if there are proposed donors who aren't close relatives to the family, they must obtain additional permits from the Ministry for Health -D-r Ivanovski says.

Recommendation from the Istanbul Declaration is to have optimal conditions for the transplantation and the state to guarantee these complex interventions – D-r Ivanovski emphasizes.

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Kidneys on internet

I am selling kidney for 300 euros, urgently. I am selling kidney for 1.000 euro, zero positive. Such advertisements with phone numbers for contact could be found on the pages on the macedonian printed newspapers. And also on internet markets.

- Hallo, good afternoon. You have advertisement that you are selling kidney. Is the advertisement still valid?

- Sold. It is not valid - answers mail's voice from the other side of the phone. He is ready to turn off the phone. We are trying to continue with the conversation. To find out at least something.

- Do you perhaps know somebody else who is selling? I must find, it is very urgent for me.

- No, no...

- Maybe the people that you are contacting know where I could find...?

Ti-i-t, ti-i-t (closed)...

Other telephone numbers which could be found in the advertisements, for contact with the interested individuals do not exist anymore.

If you type "sell or buy kidney" on any domestic or foreign internet search engine, you will find large number of advertisements where that organ is offered or requested. Does the macedonian police checks these advertisements?

- The advertisements aren't subject of criminal examination and pressing charges. The Ministry for Internal Affairs is tracking the advertisements, however, the act of advertising is in accordance with the law. If the elements of the criminal act could not be proved, the Ministry for Internal Affairs does not have any grounds for initiation of the procedure. It should be proved that the organ has been offered or sold unwillingly under threat, but not if it is offered voluntary - Zoran Pavlovski, Chief Inspector in the Ministry for Internal Affairs.says.

We have not received answer from him whether the police has spoken with the people who have published the advertisements and how could be known whether those people who have published those advertisements have offered for sale their organs voluntary or unwillingly under threat, whether and who is buying, where those organs end up... Or the advertisements are just somebody's unserious joke? However, the explanation of the police is very strange, when it is clear that the sale of organs in Macedonia is forbidden, regardless if it is voluntary or unwillingly under threat. There also exists voluntary prostitution, which the state is sanctioning.

Due to the fact that this is serious crime, where the poverty of the people is exploited, the owners of the media in which the advertisements are published should be careful regarding their content.

- The actual publishing of the advertisement isn't criminal act. The role of the media must be proved, respectively the advertiser, in the network of the sale of organs – Pavlovski stated.

Have, afterwards not have

When in January last year "Dnevnik" has published information that there is trade with organs in Macedonia and that the victims are usually the members of the Roma community, all the authorities have put efforts to deny these news. The denial also came from the respective nongovernmental organization who has given this information. And the information was that this organization, whose primary activity is protection of the victims in the trade with women, had serious indications that the members of the Roma community in Skopje, due to their poorness and living conditions, for certain monetary compensation, were willing their organs to be removed. In most cases, kidney. The organs were sold mainly through mediators and in abroad.

Almost two years later, in the report of the America's Doctor's Association, Macedonia is mentioned as a country where citizens are selling their organs and as a part of the tour in so called transplant tourism. What is actually happening in Macedonia? Do the macedonians sell their organs? Or some of them are from the other side of the chain of trade as patients who are receiving illegally gained organs? Maybe they are part of the network for trade? Macedonian police is firm - in Macedonia has not been discovered any case of trade with organs.

Prilep is one of the cities where for a long time there has been a rumor that members of the Roma community have been selling organs, usually kidneys. Officially, nobody confirms this. Nesime Salioska from "Roma SOS", nongovernmental organization dealing with health issues, has only confirmed that they have heard about those rumors for trade with organs in which are involved the members of the Roma community. Members of this community from Prilep are refusing to discuss on this subject. Shenaj Osmanov from the Association on the rights of the members of the Roma community, which covers the territory of eastern Macedonia says:

- I have heard rumors, as everybody, for the involvement of the members of the Roma community in this types of trade. However, I could not claim if this is true. Nobody has come to us. He believes that actually the journalist's reports have started to spread those rumors.

Story of the doctor in Tetovo

We have entered a dead-end. No investigations. Only indications. Mainly rumors. For example, the rumor of the involvement of one doctor, gynecologist, from Tetovo in the trade with organs. In certain circles there are informations that he has worked in Albania, but due to the problems with the local police there, he will transfer the entire "project" in Macedonia. Also the rumor is that he has "specialized" with the Israeli doctor Zaki Shapira, who has come to Macedonia ten years ago and has offered to the macedonian doctors to be part of the well paid "business" with transplant tourism. Shapira has been refused, but his "students" and he personally are operating in the region.

According to the story, during to the conflict in 2001, period when, according to the rumors, the business of the trade with human organs in Macedonia "has expanded", the doctor from Tetovo has operated on the territory of Albania - Kosovo - Macedonia. His assignment, as the rumors are, was to find potential organ donors, as well as to help in the process of the execution of the transplantations and in postsurgery treatment. There are informations that after the pressure from the international public, the Albanian Prosecutor has initiated investigation against the macedonian doctor, who possesses legal license for working in Tirana. However, according to unofficial informations, the investigation has been stopped and the working license to the Doctor has been seized.

Is this the same doctor or not, is unknown, but during the February 2006 the albanian media have announced that macedonian doctor with albanian ethnical origin, who owned private clinic in Skopje, was one of the closest associates of Fotis Andrapoulos, greek doctor accused for traffic with human organs for transplantation from Albania to Italia. Macedonian media that have published the speculations of the Tirana's newspaper "Gazetta Siptare" that doctor internist with initials N.Z. who, allegedly has specialized in Germany, through his private clinic in Skopje , has directly transfered the patients - donors to the clinic of the Andropoulos in the Albanian city of Fiera.

Honorarium worker from Macedonia

Four years later, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is denying that there has been investigation regarding the trade with organs. Inspector Pavlovski claims that doctor with abovementioned initials was not subject of the investigation. In order to respond to our questions, the Ministry for Internal Affairs has performed checks in all the police stations on central and local level in the Ministry.

It is supposed that around 30 macedonian citizens who have offered to sale their kidney to the Clinic of Nephrology in Skopje, and were refused, have offered their organs on the black market.

In November 2008, scandalous discovery of the police in Kosovo has again alarmed the Balkans' area. The brother doctors Ljutvi and Arben Dervish and their colleague Tun Pervorfaj were arrested for trade with human organs. One turkish doctor has also worked with them.

In the shadow of this case has remained the information that in the private clinic in Pristine, "Medikus", known as "the clinic of horror", has also worked certain unnamed macedonian doctor on honorarium basis. The spokesmen of the police in Kosovo Mr. Veton Eljshani shared this information with the journalists.

- It is a fact that the trade with human organs is expanding. The media are permanently informing about this issue. This problem is more and more present in the world and in the neighborhood. We are monitoring the status because it could not be left to chance. However, there are no official reports – Pavlovski assures.

At that time, Israeli's citizen Moshe Harel has been arrested as a chief operative in the finding donors of kidneys that were bought for price up to EUR 120.000. The brain of the "business" was the well known Israeli doctor Zaki Shapira, who, more than a decade is connected with trade of organs, illegal transplantations and transplant tourism. This Israeli surgeon is mentioned as "the brain" in the illegal trade with human organs in Kosovo and in Macedonia, but also in certain countries from the former eastern bloc. Doctor Shapira, after has been turned down in Macedonia, has offered and executed collaboration in his business for kidney transplantation in Estonia, Moldova and Turkey.

When in 2007 Macedonia was pointed in the Report of the America's Health Organization in relation with the illegal transplantations, macedonian Government has ordered all those issues to be investigated. The results from the investigations are not disclosed to the public.

Macedonia, Kosovo and Metohia, Albania i Bulgaria are also pointed in the Report of the America's Health Organization from December 2007 as countries of "surgery tourism for collecting organs".

According to the research of the "American Chronic", the surgeries for collecting organs are executed in the Eastern Europe, and especially in Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Those organs, afterwards, as written in the "American Chronic", are distributed in Germany, Scandinavian countries, USA, Israel, Great Britain etc. It is also pointed out that in this criminal chain were involved doctors from Israel, Turkey, Brazil and Philippines. Only during 2001 in the University Clinic in Jerusalem were rehabilitated 60 patients after the kidney transplantation received from unfamiliar donors. Many Israelis are traveling to Eastern Europe together with Israelis doctors, where, in agreement with local businessmen are finding certain clinics, as in 1999 wanted to do D-r Shapira in Macedonia.

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