**That Weird Name of Haroyan**

Once upon a time there lived two brothers. Some twenty years old they were, naughty bunnies like all boys of a similar age. But any other similarity to bunnies was non-existent.

The Haroyan brothers were Armenians, Christians – part of the Armenian Orthodox congregation and lived in Iraq´s capital, Baghdad. In their own words, they played big beat in upmarket clubs greatly favoured by the army officer elite. They weren´t, of course, the only Haroyans living in Baghdad, there were quite a few. An entire extended family! The wee problem here was that a certain uncle got tangled up with one Saddam Hussein (the manner of his entanglement being known to me but remains most inappropriate for publication) who at that time was sitting atop his Ba´ath throne and looked most unlikely to be evicted from it. (By the way, I am taking you back to 1999.) Well, one day the uncle concluded that things had gone too far and ordered his clan to disperse and join the diaspora abroad. Wherever there was no Saddam Hussein, where there is no Ba´ath Party and, if at all possible, where there are no Moslems. And so it came to pass that by the most tortuous of ways his two nephews found themselves in Bělá under Bezděz in the Czech Republic in a camp for asylum seekers.

Their asylum claim was turned down first time round, they appealed, and the glorious Advisory Appeals Committee of the Czech Ministry of the Interior (in relation to asylum claims) had a sitting in order to advise the Minister concerned as to what to do with them. The Committee met regularly each Friday at a place called „the Valley of Hollow Heads“, in other words Prague´s Police Academy in Prague – Modřany. (Please do not confuse with the grounds of Ministry of Interior´s Police University Academy and Police College based in Prague – Hodkovičky which was often called by the same name.) Within the Police Academy one could also find the Interior Ministry´s Asylum and Migration Policy Department, most probably in order to allow the police academicians to have practice on the job really at hand. And I became a member of this Advisory Committee. It was all God´s oversight as there was complete disinterest within the Czech Lawyer´s Association in being despatched to this most praiseworthy of bodies and having to mull over the fates of asylum seekers week in week out for a meagre fee that equals half-an-hour´s renumeration for a trainee lawyer. But then, logically, that most altruistic of lawyers, Samková, put her hand up and the crisis within the Lawyer´s Association having reached such a crescendo that even the then Secretary, Mr. Klouza, took a sigh of relief and appointed me without any protests. The person who of course realised from the word go that I´d be trouble was Tomáš Haišman, (then and now) Director of the Asylum and Migration Policy Department. I got to know him way back when he worked at the Department of Ethnic Studies and focused on Roma folklore. So, we both knew very well what the other was about.

Tomáš´s worse fears came to pass in the case mentioned above regarding the Haroyan brothers. The Committee delved into it and delved into it some more… and concluded that the letter of the law dealing with asylum seekers says the Haroyan brothers should be granted asylum. Six members of the Committee, a grand total of six lawyers, unanimously agreed that there wasn´t just one set of grounds but several running hand-in-hands attesting that the Haroyan brothers should enrich our multicultural melting cauldron and start to play Armenian big beat mixed with Arab pop in Czech bars and alehouses.

The greater then was the surprise when a rejection was delivered by the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Václav Grulich: Simply, no way will the Haroyan brothers be given asylum in the Czech Republic. And that´s that!

What are we going to do about it? I asked my colleagues at the first planned meeting. Silence reigned, of course. I sat down and wrote a letter to the then Chairman of the Czech Lawyer´s Association, Karel Čermák, requesting instructions as to what I should do as:

*„...I am acquainted with the case in every detail and thus can say quite responsibly and with all information at my disposal that having made the above-mentioned decision the Minister has breached the Czech Republic´s internal as well as international obligations as well as our own legal code. As the Interior Minister´s decision quite understandably fails to mention the reasons given for the asylum to be granted as proposed by the Advisory Appeals Committee the end result of the stance taken by the Committee can be anticipated as being identical, i.e. negative. This course of action by the Minister of the Interior ensures the absolute devaluation of the work of the Advisory Appeals Committee, but, in actual fact, also to its abuse and the abuse of the Czech Lawyer´s Association as well. This situation is in direct conflict with my ethical principles and I believe also in direct conflict with the interests of the Czech Lawyer´s Association which has involuntarily lent itself to issuing illegal rulings...“*

I wrote the letter on 21 July, informed the Minister of the Interior of it, and, lo and behold, I was sent a letter just two days later, on 23 July, that I had been removed from the Committee. But as I only received the letter a week later I had the opportunity on the 23rd to inform my colleagues of my reaction. Unanimous collegial silence was golden, only the Committee´s Chairman sighed in a whisper: „You´re mad. Completely mad...“

This, of course, is quite true. I am a dismissed nutcase whom the Lawyer Association´s Secretary, Mr. Klouza, wrote to that I had no business worrying about the Lawyer Association´s reputation, that it is, he stressed, only my personal matter, referring to those ´ethical principles´. And my word, the Chairman of the Advisory Appeals Committee is of a different mettle. I am mad – and he is... right now, a Constitutional Court judge...

P.S. My work at the Ministry of Interior´s Advisory Appeals Committee had one other repercussion in 2014. On 30 January 2014 I was a guest of Czech Radio´s ´Radio journal’s Twenty Minutes´ fronted by Martin Veselovský. Mr. Veselovský was giving me a hard time and tried to turn me into a racist, xenophobe, Islamophobe as I stuck to the firm view that the European Union should not accept refugees from Northern Africa and should repatriate them all. I also referred to my experience with the Ministry of Interior´s Advisory Appeals Committee in granting asylum and the massive difference between asylum seekers on the one hand and mass incursions by young men who sail to countries of the EU in their hundreds and thousands. These days such an opinion has very much taken root, but then it seemed I wouldn´t get home in one piece. Apart from that, a group calling themselves ´Demagogue´ focused on my views, more naughty bunnies based at the Faculty of Social Studies at Brno´s Masaryk University, whose aim is to keep an eye on politicians and whether they are telling the truth or lying. In the above-mentioned programme lads and lassies came to the conclusion that I was lying and that I was never a member of the Appeals Advisory Committee dealing with refugees and granting of asylums. „How did you fathom this?“ I asked in an email. „We rang one of the Committee´s officials“, sounded the answer. Ah, and there an anonymous bureaucrat told them that he didn´t know me... My dear eager beaver students: you´re not only demagogues but also manipulators who do a disservice to our country. You are proud of how many politicians you caught out coming out with your so-called lies. Much more important than nit-picking over someone´s words is to critically mull over their comments. Sure, one finds it difficult to get grants for it and it results in very little applause in public. But the question arises as to what you wish to achieve. If you wish to see an improvement in the general political atmosphere you must, above all, accept that history began before you yourselves showed up on the stage of the political world-at-large... And moreover, one must point out that even Wikipedia doesn´t provide you with everything. So, if you wish to make amends for your sins find out where the Haroyan brothers disappeared to after their asylum plea in the Czech Republic was turned down. I have a feeling they owe me a beer. Perhaps they might even buy you one.