

amnesty international

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 15/10/97

Action Ref.: AF 192/97

Date: 9 September 1997

Bulgaria

Reported ill-treatment of Zlatko Radev Gulekov by police officers

Amnesty International is concerned about reports that Zlatko Radev Gulekov, a theatre director from Sliven, was ill-treated by police officers. The organization is urging that these reports are investigated in a thorough and impartial way, that the results are made public and that any police officers thought to have violated human rights are brought to justice. Amnesty International believes that incidents like this one are illustrative of a widespread pattern of police brutality in Bulgaria, and once more urges the authorities to take this problem very seriously and to take appropriate measures to combat it, including by ensuring that investigations are conducted into all allegations of ill-treatment and that those thought to be responsible are brought to justice. Amnesty International furthermore believes it to be the duty of the Bulgarian authorities to prevent further cases of police ill-treatment by devising and implementing effective training for police officers with special attention given to issues like human rights, racial tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution.

Amnesty International's information on this case is based on reports published in the Bulgarian newspapers *Trud*, *Kontinent*, *Novinar*, *Duma*, *Demokratstya* and *Standart*, on an interview with Zlatko Radev Gulekov by Amnesty International, on his written complaint to the local military prosecutor and on a medical certificate describing his injuries.

29 June 1997 was the final day of the international Balkan Festival of Youth Theatres "Neighbours' voices" which was held in the town of Sliven in eastern Bulgaria. In the evening of that day all participants to the festival were invited to a farewell dinner at the "Stariyat brayst" restaurant in the town centre, and more than 50 people gathered there at about 10pm. Zlatko Radev Gulekov, the director of the local "Stefan Kirov" theatre and organizer of the festival, was apparently not aware of an order imposed by the Sliven municipality that all restaurants should close at 11pm, and therefore had not asked the Regional Police Directorate to make an exception for the farewell dinner. He also stated later that he assumed that everyone in the small town was aware of the international theatre event going on.

That night, at around 1.30am, a police patrol consisting of two sergeants came to the restaurant insisting that the party should stop at once as they had received complaints from people

in the neighbourhood about noise. Zlatko Radev Gulekov introduced himself as the organizer of the festival and started explaining the situation but the police officers refused to listen to him. They also turned down his offer to go to the local police station in order to settle the matter. The restaurant owner told the police officers that she wanted the party to continue. Nevertheless, Zlatko Radev Gulekov ordered that the volume of the music be put down. He also called the police office and asked to speak to the officer-in-charge but was told that this was not possible.

Zlatko Radev Gulekov in a performance during the festival. At around 2.30am the same police patrol returned with a written order for the restaurant owner, and Zlatko Radev Gulekov then tried to end the party. A group of young actors reacted to the police order by getting up and singing the Bulgarian national anthem, followed by traditional folk songs, and some of them started to dance. One of the police officers entered the restaurant as if going towards the toilets, pushing everyone in his way, including one of the dancing actors, Tsvetomir Lazarov Tsvetanov, who was arrested on the spot. As the officers were taking him to the police car, Zlatko Radev Gulekov approached them and said he wanted to accompany them to the station as he felt responsible for his guests. He then voluntarily got into the police car.

When they arrived at the police station, Zlatko Radev Gulekov was reportedly pushed to the ground and the two police officers and the driver of the car started to hit and kick him all over his body. They then took him inside the office to the area in front of the officer-on-duty. As in many Bulgarian police stations, this area contained a cage-like structure, used for detaining persons who are being held under 24-hour police arrest. Tsvetomir Lazarov Tsvetanov and another detainee had been locked up in this cage. Zlatko Radev Gulekov was placed in a chair and the two police officers, in the presence of two other police officers (a lieutenant and a sergeant) started to punch him in the face. They then hit him in the chest with a sack that according to Zlatko Radev Gulekov felt like it was filled with heavy, hard, blunt objects, while shouting abuse at him. After the beating, which lasted for about 10 minutes, he was also placed in the cage. Although he was bleeding from injuries to his head and nose, which had been broken, the officers refused to call a doctor.

Zlatko Radev Gulekov was then given a police statement saying that he had been arrested (although he had come to the police station voluntarily). They also attempted to make him take a breathalyser test but he had no energy left to blow. He asked for a blood test to be taken but this was refused.

Meanwhile the actors gathered at the farewell dinner had organized a vigil in front of the police station and the press officer of the festival had called local journalists, asking them to come to the spot. A local member of parliament, Eva Dimitrova Zhecheva, also came to the police station and only at this point, several hours after he had been detained, Zlatko Radev Gulekov was allowed to go to the toilet and a doctor was called in to treat him. When Zlatko Radev Gulekov asked her to register his injuries she replied that she could only note that they were caused by a fall.

Zlatko Radev Gulekov was released at 10.30am on 30 June and taken to the local hospital where he underwent an operation for the repositioning of his nose the following day. He had to remain in hospital for eight days. A medical certificate issued by the hospital upon his release dated 8 July 1997 states that he suffered contusions to the back of his head and face, bruising around both

eyes, a concussion and a fractured nose. The certificate also prescribed an additional medical treatment period of 28 days.

On 7 July 1997 Zlatko Radev Gulekov filed a written complaint with the Sliven Military Prosecutor and on 21 July he was informed that preliminary inquiries into his complaint had been started.