



Press release

Breakthrough court ruling in Bratislava: Killing of refugee was a crime, family has a right to compensation!

Bratislava / Prague, 13 March 2017. In a breakthrough decision, the district court Bratislava I. decided today to fully rehabilitate Hartmut Tautz, the 18-year-old refugee who was killed by border guard dogs on the Czechoslovak border with Austria in 1986. Hartmut's family is entitled to a compensation by the Slovak Republic. The Platform of European Memory and Conscience welcomes the court ruling as a first acknowledgement of a criminal offence committed by killing the refugee. Criminal prosecution of the perpetrators must follow.

For 28 years since the fall of Communism, practically no justice has been attained for the killings of refugees trying to escape across the Iron Curtain in former Czechoslovakia. In its "JUSTICE 2.0" project, the Platform has identified the killing of civilians fleeing to the West during Communism as a crime against humanity. The Platform has filed criminal complaints in Germany and Poland in the cases of killings of German and Polish citizens on the borders of former Czechoslovakia.

Today, the district court in Bratislava I. issued a breakthrough decision. Hartmut Tautz, the 18-year-old refugee from East Germany who was gravely wounded by border guard dogs and let to die, has been fully rehabilitated based on Act No. 119/1990, on judicial rehabilitation. As a follow-up, the family will receive a financial compensation from the Slovak Republic for his death. This success is due to the dedication of Dr. Lubomír Müller, attorney-at-law representing the family, who has been relentlessly working toward rehabilitations of people unjustly persecuted under Communism and who has already won several hundred such court decisions.

"This is a first and precedent decision of a Slovak court, expressing a moral satisfaction to a victim of the Iron Curtain," says Dr. Lubomír Müller.

"The Nation's Memory Institute sees the court decision as a breakthrough. After decades, the bereaved families have finally received moral satisfaction. And that is a great success in the Slovak judicial practice so far," says Ondrej Krajňák, Chairman of the Board of the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute.

"Now the door is open for all families of victims of the Iron Curtain to set out on the same road," says Dr. Neela Winkelmann, Managing Director of the Platform.

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The Platform of European Memory and Conscience brings together 55 public and private institutions and organisations from 13 EU Member States, Ukraine, Moldova, Iceland, Albania, Canada and the USA working in the field of coming to terms with the legacy of totalitarianism on European soil. We represent about 200,000 Europeans and over 1,100,000 North American citizens with European roots.

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