



# Weekly Briefing

**Bulgaria political briefing:**  
**A new large-scale Scheme for Corruption and Influence Peddling in**  
**the Bulgarian Judicial System**  
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# **A new large-scale Scheme for Corruption and Influence Peddling in the Bulgarian Judicial System**

## **Summary**

*On January 31, the media in Bulgaria reported a shocking murder of a man whose name is Martin Bojanov, who is known by the nickname "The Notary". According to the initial information of the police, it is apparently a planned, contract killing. Bojanov was shot in front of his home, in a luxury residential complex. The murdered man is relatively unknown to the general public, but the investigation soon revealed that his name is well known in the judicial system. It turned out that for years this man has been suspected of committing property fraud, extortion, racketeering and influence peddling. At the same time he remained untouchable for justice. Moreover, he allowed himself to threaten and blackmail judges. Finally, it was understood that he is involved in a large-scale scheme for extortion and racketeering and, above all, illegal influence in the justice system. Martin Bojanov had many contacts with prosecutors and judges at all levels and influenced their actions and decisions. The scandal became so large that the Bulgarian parliament decided to establish a temporary commission which, within three months, would verify all the facts and circumstances of the alleged illegal ties between Bojanov and representatives of the prosecution and the judiciary.*

In June 2023, Bulgarian society was shocked by a scandal related to corruption and influence peddling in the judicial system. Then the scandal was connected with the name of the former director of the Metropolitan Investigation Service Petar Petrov, known by the nickname Petyo "the Euro". He was charged by the prosecutor for the fact that from 2018 to May 29, 2023, in Sofia, various people were forced, through threats, to act against their will. That time the prosecutor's office was also investigating illegal recordings made by Petrov of various persons with the aim of using the recordings as a means of racketeering. The case became known as the "Eight Dwarfs". This was the name of a restaurant owned by Petar Petrov where extortion and influence peddling took place, the purpose of which was to use the judicial system to influence lawsuits, to influence investigations, to detain people, to steal businesses etc.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The whole story was reviled in a China-CEE Institute briefing in June 2023: *Evgeniy Kandilarov Evidence of a Scheme for Corruption, Extortion and Influence Peddling in the Bulgarian Judicial System* - [https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023s06\\_Bulgaria.pdf](https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023s06_Bulgaria.pdf)

The story of the small capital restaurant “Eight Dwarfs” became an emblematic example of a scheme to carry out influence peddling in the judicial system in Bulgaria. Bulgarian society was shocked by testimonies that extortions were organized there, investigations were arranged against innocent people in order to intimidate them, arrests of people were arranged, and businesses were even stolen with influence on judges of the Commercial Courts and Courts of Appeal.<sup>2</sup>

Only eight months later, the Bulgarian society was shocked again by another huge scandal, which in all respects resembles the one with the "Eight Dwarfs" affair. Again, it's about corruption and influence peddling at the highest levels of the judicial system. Again, it's about how people committing various crimes can avoid prosecution and convictions thanks to corrupt prosecutors and judges as long as they pay what they need to. At the same time, it turns out that there are so-called brokers in the judiciary, who play the role of a link between the criminals on the one hand and the judicial system on the other.

On January 31, the media in Bulgaria reported a shocking murder of a man whose name was Martin Bojanov. He was known by the nickname "The Notary". According to the initial information of the police, it is apparently a planned, contract killing. Bojanov was shot in front of his home, in a luxury residential complex in Sofia. He is relatively unknown to the general public, but soon the investigation revealed that his name is well known in the judicial system.<sup>3</sup>

It soon became clear that this is no ordinary murder. Behind it stays something huge. It is related to racketeering network involving entire institutions that are part of the judicial system, such as the prosecutor's office and the court in Bulgaria.

### **Who is Martin Bojanov - "The Notary"**

He was a 50-year-old man who, during his lifetime, claimed to be engaged in commercial and consulting activities. He has been married four times, had three divorces. His widow was an employee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Main Directorate "Combating Organized Crime".

Years ago, a media investigation indicted him as a person involved in a criminal group that organized property fraud and also made threats against magistrates in the judicial system. Gradually, numerous media revelations claim that Martin Bojanov was actually playing the role of a link between the criminal world and the court, a broker of influence in the judiciary. At this

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> <https://bntnews.bg/news/koi-e-zastrelyaniyat-martin-bozhanov-notarius-a-1265310news.html>

stage, the prosecution is not saying whether there is evidence of this but at the same time, however, after his death, the prosecutor's office stated that it was just about ready to indict him.<sup>4</sup>

Martin Bojanov was not a real notary, neither a lawyer nor a judge. He engaged in real estate fraud, and real estate transactions go through a notary. That's where his nickname comes from. Bojanov worked with a real notary who was later investigated and convicted of property fraud. Along with their joint activity, the murdered man got his nickname.<sup>5</sup>

The name of Martin Bojanov was mentioned for the first time in 2004 in an investigation done by one of the major Bulgarian national televisions. Then three people spoke to the media about how they lost their homes through real estate fraud committed by Bojanov. Later it became clear that Martin Bojanov was a leader of a whole criminal group that was dealing with this type of property fraud and there have been hundreds of similar cases with defrauded people. Frauds were usually carried out by falsifying documents for the purpose of appropriating property. The scheme was as follows: a fake power of attorney has been prepared over an apartment - often owned by elderly or ill single people. In violation of the law, a notary has been certifying the fake power of attorney in the absence of the real owner. The supposed agent then was selling and reselling several times the property through a chain of people at the expense of the last buyer, who gave his money to the fraudsters.<sup>6</sup>

In the early years of Bulgaria's transition to a market economy, similar types of property fraud schemes were common. However, the activity of Martin Bojanov does not end there, but extends much further.

The name of Martin Bojanov made noise in the media again in 2021, this time because of an investigation by the non-governmental organization "Anti-Corruption Fund". The investigation included witness accounts and recordings of secret conversations with individuals with illegal influence in the judicial system, one of whom was Martin Bojanov. It was about the story of a large businessman in the restaurant business, who in 2020 was suddenly arrested and accused of participating in an organized criminal group. Subsequently, Martin Bojanov and his close lawyer offered their services as mediators for the businessman's release, but his wife had to pay a large sum of money, at least 100,000 euros.

The investigation of the "Anti-Corruption Fund" revealed a certain racketeering scheme in which, with the assistance of corrupt prosecutors, charges and the arrest of an innocent person

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/notariusa/32820973.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> <https://btvnovinite.bg/predavanja/120-minuti/ot-imotni-izmami-do-podkupi-i-iznudvane-koj-e-ubitijat-martin-bozhanov-notariusa-spered-dokumenti-i-svideteli.html>

can be fabricated, after which the same people, by means of so-called "brokers" or intermediaries, can influence the prosecutors to drop the charges, drop the investigation and finally release the person. All these could happen only in exchange for large sums of money. According to the investigation of the "Anti-Corruption Fund", the "Notary" was an influence broker in the judiciary, extorted families, took away businesses, etc.<sup>7</sup>

### **How far does influence trading go in the Bulgarian judicial system?**

After the murder of Martin Bojanov, more and more facts about his criminal activity, the people who were associated with him and worked together with him, the methods and mechanisms that were used to carry out racketeering, extortion, influence trading began to appear in the media. His all activities were related with corruption on a particularly large scale, money laundering and many others.

Obviously, there was an "umbrella" over Martin Bojanov's activities by the prosecutor's office, as there have been dozens of reports and complaints filed against him over the years for committed frauds and crimes, which did not lead to effective investigations.

Along with this, Bojanov has been accused of making threats against at least two judges who, as early as 2020, told the Supreme Judicial Council in Bulgaria that they had been threatened by him in connection with cases they were handling. The Council notified the then chief prosecutor Ivan Geshev about the case, but the prosecutor's office did not react.

Recently, former Minister of Internal Affairs Boyko Rashkov confirmed to the Bulgarian National Radio that the ministry has collected a lot of data on possible criminal activity of Martin Bojanov "The Notary" and handed it over to the prosecutor's office.<sup>8</sup>

After Bojanov's death, the prosecutor's office announced that it was just about to press charges on him in connection with a case of property fraud, money laundering and coercion of magistrates.

It was only later, after the scandal grew, that the state prosecution specified that it was actually investigating "The Notary" as the leader of an organized criminal group created not only for property fraud, but also for "illegal influence" on magistrates.<sup>9</sup>

The scandalous revelations connect the name of Martin Bojanov with a high-ranking judge named Georgi Ushev, who successively headed the Specialized Criminal Court<sup>10</sup> and the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://acf.bg/bg/spisak-za-barz-kontrol-istoriyata-na-ve/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://bnr.bg/horizont/post/101944364/boiko-rashkov-obvini-vatreshnia-ministar-vav-vrazki-s-dps>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/notariusa/32820973.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://spns.justice.bg/en>

Appellate Specialized Criminal Court.<sup>11</sup> According to the media, which cites unofficial information, Bojanov had some compromising materials against the high-ranking magistrate and thus he was dependent on him. This was stated in an investigation document of the Main Directorate for the Fight against Organized Crime and sent at the end of 2022 to the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office.<sup>12</sup>

It is this investigative document that forms the basis of the pre-trial proceedings initiated in April 2023, under which Bojanov's alleged group is being investigated for pressure on magistrates, property fraud, money laundering and influence peddling.

The investigation information that Ushev may have been dependent on the "Notary" is important because of the judge's position. It was he who authorized the use of special intelligence devices against other magistrates for years. This authority was given precisely to the chairman of the Appellate Specialized Criminal Court after the Bulgarian parliament transferred in 2017 to the specialized courts all corruption crimes, including those committed by magistrates. Ushev headed this court from the summer of 2017 until the closure of the specialized justice in the spring of 2022.<sup>13</sup>

A review of the Office of Special Intelligence Surveillance's public records shows that more than 150 warrants were issued for wiretapping and surveillance of magistrates during that period. This number was reported to the Supreme Judicial Council by the Judge Vladislava Tsarigradska, who was one of those threatened by Martin Bojanov "The Notary".

The high number of authorized Special Intelligence devices against magistrates provokes suspicions of abuses, because in this period the publicly known cases of investigated magistrates are just a few. This arises the question, what is the information obtained from so many wiretapping used for?

The group of the murdered Bojanov is currently being investigated precisely for illegal influence in order to solve cases in a certain direction.

It is highly possible that the special intelligence devices were used to collect information in order to be used as kompromat against magistrates so that they would be willing to cooperate with Bojanov and his group.

Shortly after Bojanov's murder, the Anti-Corruption Fund highlighted the fact that Martin Bojanov was the owner of a secret club for magistrates, which was located near the Specialized

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<sup>11</sup> <https://aspns.justice.bg/en>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/srs-kompromati-kak-georgi-ushev-se-okaza-v-razsledvaneto-za-notariusa/32813328.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/srs-kompromati-kak-georgi-ushev-se-okaza-v-razsledvaneto-za-notariusa/32813328.html>

Prosecutor's Office. The club was entered only with membership cards, and its members assisted Bojanov in specific court cases. According to Bulgarian National Television, the name of the "SS" club stands for "judicial associates" or "judicial assistance". The place was used for informal relations with magistrates, the place was guarded by cameras, the windows were darkened. The influence on the magistrates was with money or kompromats.

A week ago, the police searched and ransacked the club, seizing flash drives, computers and recordings from the security cameras. The club was active working until April 2022.

The Sofia City Prosecutor's Office, meanwhile, announced that it had known about the Bojanov's club existence since the end of 2022. The information was given to it by the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with the opinion that Bojanov was part of an organized criminal group for influence peddling.<sup>14</sup>

The news about the existence of this private club leads to the fact that on February 7, 2024, a temporary commission of inquiry has been established in the National Assembly, which will verify the facts surrounding the possible illegal activity and the influence in the judicial system of the group around Martin Bojanov - "The Notary". The idea for such a commission initially came from the Anti-Corruption Fund and was subsequently supported by all parliamentary forces. The new temporary commission will investigate the facts surrounding "the possible presence of individuals and organized groups to influence the judicial system."<sup>15</sup>

Its other task will be to reveal whether there was inaction on the part of the Supreme Judicial Council and its Inspectorate, the prosecutor's office and other competent authorities regarding Bojanov and his possible "unregulated ties" with representatives of the judiciary.

It will be necessary to find out who the members of Bojanov's magistracy's private club were and whether they were patronized by politicians over the years. The commission will also aim to give a forum to magistrates who were pressured or threatened by Bojanov. The commission will meet on these issues for 3 months.<sup>16</sup>

A week later, the entire management of the Sofia District Prosecutor's Office resigned because of the continuing testimony about the connections of the murdered Martin Bojanov – “the Notary” with people in key positions in the judiciary. After the murder of the so-called “Notary”, temporary chief prosecutor Borislav Sarafov has ordered a review of all cases related

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/prokuraturata-znae-za-kluba-na-martin-notariusa-ot-2022-toy-e-razsledvan-kato-chast-ot-prestapna-grupa/32808135.html>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.parliament.bg/bills/49/49-454-02-16\\_PR\\_sazdavane\\_Vremenna\\_komisiya.pdf](https://www.parliament.bg/bills/49/49-454-02-16_PR_sazdavane_Vremenna_komisiya.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

to Bojanov. It turned out that his name was involved in a total of 25 cases and prosecutor's files, most of which were in the Sofia District Prosecutor's Office. None have gone to trial.<sup>17</sup>

On February 13, 2024, the Supreme Judicial Council also established a special commission to verify the degree of influence that the murdered Martin Bojanov had in the judicial system. This commission will investigate all the facts and circumstances of the participation of judges in the activities of the group around Martin Bojanov. The mandate of the commission is three months, within which court cases will be investigated for which there is data of connection with Bojanov's activities, information will be required from the bodies of the judicial power, the Supreme Prosecutor's Office, as well as from services in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Agency "National Security". It is also possible to hear people in connection with some known circumstances.<sup>18</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A murder provoked an upheaval in the Bulgarian judicial system. Suspicions are growing that magistrates have provided an umbrella over a criminal group that has for years exerted pressure on how specific cases are decided. The group was suspected of corrupting and blackmailing people in the judicial system with the use of slanders and threats to smear them in the tabloid media.

*"This case – with "the Notary", is only the tip of the iceberg, but this iceberg is not the only one."* This was stated to the Bulgarian National Radio by Olga Kerelska, a member of the judicial collegium of the Supreme Judicial Council.<sup>19</sup>

After the murder of Martin Bojanov – “the Notary”, the tension in the prosecutor's office escalated. No one can give a clear answer what was the influence of this man in the Bulgarian judicial system. But it is a fact that his death even provoked the establishment of a parliamentary commission to investigate what exactly he was doing.

According to the investigation of the “Anti-Corruption Fund”, “the Notary” was an “influence broker” in the judiciary so he extorted families and took away businesses.

According to Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, Martin Bojanov also had political “umbrella”. On February 20, President Radev stated: *"The creation of a criminal network to*

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/notariusa/32820973.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bta.bg/bg/news/621493-vss-sazdade-komisiya-po-sluchaya-s-martin-bozhanov>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mediapool.bg/aferrata-notariusa-shefovete-na-stolichna-prokuratura-podadoha-ostavki-news356185.html>



*influence the judicial system cannot be done without political protection."* That is why it is important to come to the disclosure of political dependencies.<sup>20</sup>

The same point of view had one of the judges threatened by Martin Bojanov - judge Vladislava Tsarigradska.

At a hearing by the temporary parliamentary committee she stated that the judiciary serves political orders.

*"The judiciary has been carrying out political orders and there is no way, especially in this composition of the leadership of the prosecutor's office, that this will find an answer and that you will be able to wash away the shame of this institution, because it is becoming an avalanche and it is clear that all the authorities have cooperated."*<sup>21</sup>

Due to the death of Martin Bojanov, there was talk again about another figure with influence in the judicial system – the one headed by Petyo Petrov – “the Euro” and the "Eight Dwarfs" affair.

“The Euro and ”the Notary” circles are connected with senior magistrates, among whom are the current and former chief prosecutor - Borislav Sarafov and Ivan Geshev.<sup>22</sup>

It turns out that the story of Petyo “the Euro” and the influence-peddling scheme he created in the prosecutor's office and the court, which was exposed in a series of investigations by the “Anti-Corruption Fund” in the summer of 2023, is far from unique. In the last month, the Bulgarian society realized that there is at least one more organized group that has the ability to influence court cases and pre-trial proceedings. The facts known so far show that both groups enjoyed a prosecutorial "umbrella" that provided them with a comfortable "business" and also gave them the confidence to exert pressure on magistrates - either by corrupting with large amounts of money or by outright threats and fabricating kompromat. The problem is that the system knows about the so-called lobbyists in the judiciary for years, but for the institutions this problem does not seem to stand. Namely, this is one of the reasons for the collapse of the authority of the judicial system.

Now, among the most important tasks of the investigators is to reveal all the existing connections between the criminal groups of the "the Notary" and “the Euro”. Petrov disappeared before he was arrested, and to this moment there is no information about what

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<sup>20</sup> <https://bntnews.bg/news/rumen-radev-s-komentar-za-notariusa-rotaciyata-i-sastoyanieto-na-balgarskata-armiya-1267704news.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://bntnews.bg/amp/news/ako-ne-mlakne-mazhat-%D1%9D-i-decata-%D1%9D-shte-sa-betonirani-na-danoto-na-yazovira-sadiya-carigradska-e-poluchila-oshte-zaplahi-1268022news.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://bntnews.bg/news/rumen-radev-s-komentar-za-notariusa-rotaciyata-i-sastoyanieto-na-balgarskata-armiya-1267704news.html>

happened to him. The investigation of the murder is working on the assumption that the order for the assassination of the "Notary" may also come from "the Euro", since the groups of the two had declared war on each other due to the conquest of positions in the various prosecutor's offices. The story becomes even more complicated due to the allegations that Martin Bojanov "The Notary" was in an extremely close relationship with the ex-wife of Petyo Petrov, Lyubena Pavlova, who recently exposed the schemes of her former partner "the Euro". The acquaintance between Bojanov and Lyubena Pavlova is evidenced by the fact that the ex-wife of Petar Petrov lives in an apartment purchased by "the Notary". There is another circumstance that connects Martin Bojanov and Petar Petrov. From the documents in the case against Petar Petrov, which are known to the media, it is clear that there are three witnesses in the case, two of whom are his ex-wife Lyubena Pavlova and the lawyer Velimir Atanasov, who is a close friend and partner of Martin Bojanov ", and also close to the former head of the Sofia District Prosecutor's Office, Nevena Zartova.

How and when the investigation of the murder of Martin Bojanov will end, as well as the investigation into the large-scale network of corruption schemes in the judicial system, remains to be seen. In any case, however, the "Eight Dwarfs" and the "Notary" are obviously the two most important and influential schemes that have been allowed to develop for years in the Bulgarian judicial system, and it seems that they are only the tip of the iceberg.