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A NORWAY GONE BERSERK

In the last two short months tens of thousands of Romanians around the world have taken to the streets to protest the seizure, on November 16, 2015, by Norway's Barnevernet, the equivalent of the Child Protective Services in the United States, of five (5) children, between 3 months and 9 years old, belonging to a Pentecostal Romanian-Norwegian family living in Norway. The parents are Marius and Ruth Bodnariu. The protests were held not only in Romania but also in Scandinavia, North America, and Australia. More are planned in the United States and Australia, as well as in India, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and elsewhere. The initial rallies gathered around 1,000 participants, mostly Evangelicals, but the numbers quickly swelled to 5,000 in Suceava, in northern Romania, and 10,000 in Oradea, western Romania, by the end of January. This time, the crowds did not emerge only from Romania's Evangelical community but also from all of the country's faiths and denominations. Seldom, if ever, has Romania experienced such a strong display of Christian unity stretching across all denominational and ethnic lines on any single issue.

A savvy and well sustained social media campaign kept Romanians informed of what the parents and their relatives in Romania and the United States perceived as a grave injustice done to them by the Norwegian authorities. Eventually, Romania's mainstream mass media picked up the story and soon the Bodnariu family became the front and center of many news articles, commentaries, editorials, shows, and interviews. The coverage was fairly balanced, but the editorials and commentaries lacked understanding of the facts, the issues, and the legal and political dimensions of the case. They typically praised the "civilized" nature of the Norwegian child welfare system and contrasted it to Romania's "backward" child welfare system. As always, they shamed their own country, calling it backward and blasting it for not being aligned with international standards for the protection of children.

Numerous online petitions were also initiated which, in a matter of weeks, gathered over 100,000 signatures. The signatures are still pouring in. Concerned parents from all over the world, including Brazil, Peru, Chile, Australia, Poland, Russia, Turkey, the Czech Republic, and many other countries signed the petition and posted commentaries critical of Norway and its child welfare system. Many of them reported similarly unfortunate and cruel experiences with the Norwegian authorities.

By the end of last year Romania's politicians also joined the fray, seeking to take advantage of the wave of social discontent and the global fury directed at Barnevernet. Over a hundred of

them addressed a petition to the Norwegian Ambassador in Bucharest, Norway's Ambassador was summoned for meetings at Romania's Foreign Ministry, and the matter escalated in January 2016 when a high-powered Romanian delegation, headed by Romania's ex-Foreign Minister, visited Norway in hopes of having the children released to their parents. Though there are some encouraging, yet feeble, signs, thus far all endeavors have failed to bring about a mutually satisfying resolution. The only notable exception to the politicians' involvement in the crisis remains Klaus Iohannis, the inept and largely irrelevant President of Romania, who throughout this ordeal chose silence.

The incident created a major rift between Norway and Romania. Internationally, the matter had been taken up, albeit marginally, by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. Discussions, however, continue.

Following an address I registered with the Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest in December, I received scores of phone calls and inquiries seeking updates and a more current commentary on the overall situation. Maybe it is time I write again, hopefully a more comprehensive commentary, especially after having been fortunate to access some of the official documents related to the case filed with or by the Norwegian authorities. What I read disturbed me deeply and caused me to believe that Norway's Barnevernet has acted arbitrarily, has grossly violated the parental rights and parental autonomy of the Bodnariu family, and has not acted in the best interests of the children. All seven (7) members of the Bodnariu family have become tragic victims of Barnevernet's irrational actions and prideful self-righteousness. Barnevernet falsely accused the Bodnariu parents of abusing their children. The children never were abused. The parents are responsible and practice a responsible parenting style. Unfortunately, Barnevernet has used strong-arm tactics to abduct the children. This commentary, then, is written in the defense of the victims, first and foremost the children and then their parents.

Let me also add, however, that this essay is not written to denigrate Norway. But the Norway of today is not the homogenous Norway of a hundred years ago with the unspoiled landscape and fjords which have long enchanted American imagination. Today's Norway is a multicultural state where more than 10 percent of its population are immigrants. Xenophobia is strong in Norway. Norway experiences that pain of multiculturalism where diverse cultures often clash. Norway has difficulties navigating multiculturalism and, unfortunately, it has occasionally taken a rogue approach to deal with cultural differences and diverse traditions. Unfortunately, the Bodnariu family were caught up in the travails of Norwegian multiculturalism, the Norwegian state's inability to deal with it, and in the process became victims of it.

Disclaimer

This commentary is based almost exclusively on the official documents related to the case which I have perused, although most of the facts are already in the public domain having been leaked sporadically. Hence, my narrative focuses primarily on Norway and Barnevernet violating the *parental rights and parental autonomy* of the Bodnariu family. I am aware that there is another, maybe wider, angle to explore, namely gross violations of the family's *religious rights*. It is my

understanding that individuals much closer to the case than I have obtained troubling evidence that Barnevernet may have also been motivated, in seizing the children, by an anti-religious animus toward the family. That may likely be the case. The family's religion, however, is not discussed in the official documents, except briefly, but the violation of parental rights is obvious. I encourage those with personal knowledge of the religious aspects of this international incident to publish their impressions as well and share them with me.

A note on privacy. The names of the children have been withheld to protect their innocence and privacy, although they may be found online.

What are the factual allegations?

Here are the main facts, taken straight from the occasionally wanting English translation of official Norwegian documents, mainly the complaint filed with Barnevernet in October 2015 and Barnevernet's decision of November 30, 2015.

Marian a/k/a Marius Bodnariu is a Romanian IT specialist married to a Norwegian woman, Ruth Bodnariu, a nurse. They are both Pentecostal. Marius is a Romanian citizen and Ruth Norwegian. They have five (5) children, the oldest, a girl, born in 2006; another girl born in 2008; a boy born in 2011; another boy born in 2013; and another boy born in August 2015. At the time of their seizure, the oldest girl was in fourth grade and the younger one in second. The oldest of the boys is in kindergarten and the younger boy stays home with the parents. The family lives on a farm in a hamlet which belongs to the Naustdal Municipality. Prior to their seizure, the girls attended school in Naustdal where they went by bus. The father works as an IT specialist for the municipality and the mother works in the pediatrics unit of a nearby hospital. The father hunts and fishes and occasionally took the girls with him on his trips.

The story that defines this narrative begins in October 2015 when the school principal quizzed the oldest girl about a brawl on the bus between her and her younger sister and another boy. Among others, the principal asked the sisters about their home life, including how the parents treated them. The girls disclosed the parents, the father in particular, spanked them occasionally when they were disobedient, dirtied their clothes, spilled food at the dinner table, or had food or physical fights with each other. It was also alleged that the father slapped one of the children for calling a sibling a "fool". Their mother usually intervened to stop the spanking, but she, too, is alleged to have occasionally spanked the girls. The spanking, the girls said, consisted of being pulled by the ear or being slapped on the buttocks. They also talked about their life on the farm, and that they were asked to do chores around the house, like set the table, feed the animals, fetch the eggs, or care for their younger brothers. One of the girls incurred a bruise on the head once when she and her sister jumped off the night stand and bumped into each other. They also talked about the parents disciplining them by grounding them or not allowing them to go out and play. When they fight, the girls said, the father breaks up the fight and "gently" spanks them to "learn" not to fight again. They complained, however, that, unlike their school peers, their parents did not give them a weekly allowance. They were also unhappy with being spanked because their friends told them their parents did not spank them when they misbehaved.

The school principal, however, had opinions of her own about the girls and the Bodnariu family which she conveyed to Barnevernet in no timid terms. She knows the family because they live in the same neighborhood. The girls were a handful. Vivacious, bright, full of life and extremely extrovert for their age, they were also very expressive, maybe too much at times. Teachers complained that the girls were rowdy, strong willed, talked a lot in class without raising their hands or asking for permission to speak, or talked over other kids. Occasionally, they became so boisterous that the teachers were exasperated and complained to the school master to have reached their wits' end. At times, the teachers doubted the girls' credibility, believing they told, like all children do, white lies from time to time to avoid being punished. One of the girls told the school master that the family "is a very Christian family, especially the maternal grandmother is very Christian, and has a very strong faith and view that God punishes sin. The entire family shares these views, including all of their uncles and aunts." It is unclear from the record whether this conversation was invited by the school master or the girl volunteered this detail. I am inclined to believe that, given the girl's age, it was invited or obtained by leading questions.

The school master described the family as being very thrifty and careful in managing its finances. The children had, she opined, all they needed, including clothes and shoes, and always brought lunch with them to school from home. The principal concluded that the girls were not afraid to go home and did not believe the parents were abusing their children physically. On the contrary, she believed the family was united, a "true family," and observed the parents and the children doing many activities together. The parents periodically took their children to medical clinics for medical checkups and all the children had been vaccinated. The principal described the girls as being very intelligent and developing well. Under legal compulsion, she relayed her findings to Barnevernet on October 12, 2015.

Still in October, and then in November, Barnevernet made inquiries about the children from their doctors and the clinics where the mother took them. The doctors confirmed that the mother regularly came in for prenatal care, brought the children in periodically for medical checkups, and that they "do not have anything unusual" to report about the mother.

The local police was also brought into the fray but it focused mainly on the spanking allegations hoping to indict the father. Their inquiries alluded to a prior incident in September 2014 when the oldest of the girls allegedly showed up at school with a bruise. School staff were questioned about the incident but no one seemed to be able to confirm the story or the cause of the bruise. This allegation became somewhat murky because the girls disclosed that on some occasions the father "rescued" them, once when one of them fell off of a shelf and the other into a pond. Their bodies hurt afterwards but no one was able to conclude whether the bruise on the oldest girl could be attributed to an intentional strike to the body or to the father's "rescuing" attempts.

Following the police investigation, on Monday, November 16, 2015 Barnevernet staff conducted discussions with the two girls at school. The girls were asked if the parents spanked them and the girls confirm they were being spanked occasionally. They were asked if they were afraid to go home and they said they were not. They told the social workers their father spanked them "lightly." Toward the end of the conversation, however, the family's faith came to the fore once

again. The older girl told that her mother had previously miscarried, "prayed to God for another child and God answered her prayer and blessed her with another child." Once again, it is impossible to determine from the script whether the comment was volunteered or invited. I have an inkling it was invited and part of a broader and maybe inappropriate conversation about the family's religion.

On November 16, 2015 Barnevernet seized the girls from school and placed them in state custody claiming that the seizure was "in the best interest" of the girls. At 3:00 pm. Barnevernet officials arrived at the Bodnariu farm and told the mother the girls had been taken into custody. The mother was asked to take her three (3) boys and follow the social workers to the police station. She complied, hoping to meet the girls there. At the police station police officers interrogated Ruth for three (3) hours. Ruth admitted to spanking the children, and the official record explained how and when it occurred: "The mother gave as an example that she could have the baby in her arms, the food in the oven with the two oldest beginning to quarrel. This was a typical situation where she could slap them on the buttocks or in another place." November 16, 2015 was also the last time Ruth saw her children with the exception of the smallest.

At 3:00 p.m. on the same day, the police arrested Marius at work charging him with physical assault of the children and interrogated him. He was shocked, and the atmosphere turned Kafkaesque. He was told of the allegations the girls had made against him. The father admitted some of the allegations and denied others, insisting that some of the facts, especially those related to physical abuse, were fabricated or exaggerated. He insisted he did not hit the children in anger and never hit them so hard as to leave any marks or bruises on their bodies. He admitted he played sports with the girls and that occasionally the encounters may have been rough as they usually are. On those occasions the girls may have been bruised, but he never harmed them or caused them any bruises. He opined that what the girls told the authorities related to what may have happened when he and the girls played sports. After hours of interrogation the police asked Marius to sign a statement admitting to physically abusing his children. He refused. He was then informed of the charge against him: physical abuse of his children which carried a criminal penalty of up to six (6) months in jail. Eventually, however, the charge was dropped for lack of evidence.

At around 8:00 p.m. or so, Marius was taken to a different office where he met his wife and two social workers. One of them, not Ruth, held the three (3) month old baby. The parents embraced and started crying. The social workers told Marius they understood that cultural differences and his upbringing may have caused him to spank his children. Marius responded he was willing to undergo counseling in how Norwegians bring up their children. The social workers assured Marius and Ruth that a counseling plan would be devised soon to assist them in handling their children. They were then allowed to go home, along with the baby. The other children stayed behind and eventually were placed in foster homes. And all this without a court order.

On Tuesday, November 17, 2015 four police officers and two social workers arrived at the Bodnariu farm under cover of darkness at 8:00 p.m. and seized the baby, also without court order. Now, all five (5) Bodnariu children were in Barnevernet's custody. During the raid, social

workers suggested to Ruth to give an affidavit claiming that Marius is abusing her physically, in which case, she was told, she would be separated from him, and would be allowed to stay with all of her children in a shelter for battered women. Ruth refused. Essentially, Barnevernet asked the wife to incriminate her husband. She chose to stand by the truth, instead, which speaks volumes for her character, integrity, and credibility. She was pinned to choose between the integrity of her family and indicting her husband. She chose the truth, and the price she paid for this was the seizure of her children.

Ever since, the children and the parents remained separated. In a rather bizarre move, Barnevernet subjected the 3-month old baby to an X-ray examination which revealed he was fine: no bruises, no broken bones or limbs. Barnevernet justified this twist in the plot on the eerie allegation that the parents shook the baby's head. The examination proved this allegation false. The other children were also subjected to medical examinations, which concluded that "no marks or injuries on children were revealed that could give reason for concerns in kindergarten or at school."

Barnevernet's Puny Ruling

On November 30, 2015 the local Barnevernet council of the Naustdal Municipality, called County Commission for Child Protection and Social Affairs, issued its decision on the matter which was at some point reduced to writing. It merits closer examination. It did not present a rationale for Barnevernet's decision to seize the children, but for rejecting the parents' petition to return them. In so framing the issues, Barnevernet stacked the cards against the parents from the outset.

The decision recited many of the facts already outlined above. The only source for the findings of fact upon which the opinion was based was the girls. No sworn affidavits from neighbors, teachers, church or community members, extended family members, or medical personnel were obtained. All evidence to the contrary was either ignored, watered down, or turned around and used against the parents. For instance, Barnevernet chastised the parents for claiming that the physical spanking of the children was light and turned this characterization against them, stating that the "mother's disposition to trivialize the violence and the reasons she presented such as having too many children can be very stressful worries us." Ruth was further maligned, Barnevernet pointing out that though she is Norwegian and knows that the corporal punishment of children is forbidden in Norway, she failed to protect the children. The Council derided the "parenting style" of the parents. It based its concern, in part, on a medical examination which concluded that "the youngest boy is flattened emotionally," which meant that the three-month old baby could not remain in the parents' custody either. The Council added: "we consider that it is not safe for baby to be with *this* mother and father. (emphasis added) Faced with this extreme irrationality, the parents pleaded, in vain, for the return of their children. In a desperate move to rescue the integrity of the family, they pledged not to physically discipline their children in the future. In their own words: "it will not happen again." Their pleas fell on deaf ears.

Strong dissents

The written ruling, however, also noted strong dissents. First was the school master. She refused to cooperate with Barnevernet to indict the parents. The ruling noted that "the headmaster ... doesn't think the parents are doing something to physically harm children ..." The headmaster was also "opposed to taking the children away when she felt this was not in their best interest. The headmaster was also [one of the girls'] teacher for four years and she lives in the family's neighborhood. She also knows the family in private."

To the Bodnariu family's defense also came the local government, identified in court records as the County Committee. It recommended the children not be separated from their parents, but, instead, counseling be provided, stressing that the parents are sufficiently "resourceful" to care for the children. The County Committee proposed that "the best interests of children are to go back to their home." Norway's Child Welfare Act, the Committee pointed out, imposed a high threshold for the children to be taken away from their parents. The proof required a showing that the children had been "significantly harmed" by the actions of the parents. Such evidence was absent, the Committee urged, concluding that "the parents are fully capable to properly exercise their care for the children," and that "the situation can be correct[ed] by adopting measures at home."

More backing for the Bodnarius came from the Naustdal Municipality. Its attorney portrayed the family as one where "family values have a central role in their lives," adding that "this is a great thing to see by whom the children have been cared for."

Nevertheless, Barnevernet remained unpersuaded, concluding that this is "a serious case of violence against 4 defenceless (sic!) children," a case about "systematic violence." Hence, Barnevernet reasoned, placing the children back with their parents "will be a new violation." It also expressed concern about the massive adverse online publicity the case had already received by November 30, and in a rather bizarre uttering, it stated on the record a fear "that the children may be kidnapped."

The ruling came down like a heavy hammer. The mother would be allowed to see the baby twice a week for two hours. The mother, but not the father, would be allowed to see the boys once a week for two hours. The parents would be allowed no face to face contact whatsoever with the two girls, except by phone, and the ten-minute phone conversations would be monitored by Barnevernet personnel. The children's locations would not be disclosed to the parents.

What happened after November 30?

The girls wrote letters to their parents but Barnevernet only gave them to the parents two months later. They and the boys have continuously expressed a desire to be reunited with their biological parents, but to no avail. They cry and are depressed. The boys and the girls have been separated by long distances. The girls have been placed in a foster home some two hours and a half from

the family farm, and the boys four hours away. The girls have asked to be allowed to see their brothers and their request was denied. As is self-evident, there is a pattern of denial after denial of the innocent children's reasonable, natural, and affectional wishes.

The fate of the parents is no less painful and uncertain. In the upcoming months the matter is scheduled to escalate before a different Barnevernet panel to determine whether the parents' parental rights should be severed. Should they be, all five (5) children will be put up for adoption.

What could be a more egregious violation of parental or children's rights than this? What more extreme a nightmare can a family face? Or Orwellian? Keep on reading for it gets even more bizarre.

Grave Breaches of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Though Norway savvily projects internationally the image of a rational, peaceful, and polished system, it is far from it. Its ugly side, as here, never makes the news. Barnevernet has gravely violated the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child which Norway has signed and ratified. Here's how.

Article 5 of the Convention imposes an obligation on Norway and on all signatories to uphold parental rights. ("State Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents...") This obligation is restated in **Article 14**. **Article 7** grants children "the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents," and **Article 8** the right to "preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference."

Article 9, however, is less straight forward and allows for subjective interpretation. It states, in relevant part, that "State Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, *except* when *competent* authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving *abuse* or *neglect* of the child by the parents ..." Even where the child is separated, however, the child still has the right "to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests."

One of the most flagrant violations of the Convention is the very set up of Barnevernet. It is a governmental agency or, more properly stated, an administrative body run amuck. It is not subject to meaningful judicial review or accountability. It can take children from their parents without court order. Its decisions are final as in an arbitration. It lacks a supervisory board. Due process is not followed. Even the most elementary aspects of due process are lacking. Testimony is not allowed. Sworn affidavits or declarations are not taken. The rules of evidence do not apply. The accused is not allowed to cross-examine her accusers, for instance the case workers or the

persons who investigated the alleged wrong-doing or proposed the abduction of the children. Immunity prevents prosecution of the agents who abduct the children. No judge is involved and no judge presides over the proceedings. No impartiality is guaranteed or pursued. Many times decisions are taken by a local council which consists of individuals not even trained in the law. The deliberations consist of debates among the council members and the attorneys. There is no set procedure to follow. If parents have complaints, they can be lodged with the County Governor, but no meaningful judicial review is available.

This flies in the face of the Convention's Article 9 which requires that decisions be made by "competent authorities subject to judicial review." In Norway, the seizure of children from their parents is not supervised by the courts and it operates outside of the court system. Probably the most egregious aspect here is that suspension of parental rights is also within the powers of Barnevernet and is not subject to judicial review. Imagine that, being deprived of parental rights without a court order. Unimaginable in the United States and in most countries around the world, this is a frequent reality in Norway.

Parental rights are fundamental human rights. Human rights are the province of the courts, yet in Norway parents are barred from accessing the courts to vindicate abuses of parental rights. This means that, should the Bodnariu parents lose their rights to the children before a non-judicial, Barnevernet panel, they will not be able to appeal the deprivation of the most important rights a parent can have. In the rest of the world only courts or legislative bodies, not administrative bodies, can deprive people of the exercise of their human rights.

The complaints filed with the Governor go nowhere. The main reason is the system's rigid structure which is not subject to judicial review, as well as the culture entrenched in the practices of Barnevernet and the parenting ideology Norway follows. The Norwegian government finances Barnevernet and each foster family where Barnevernet places children receives tens of thousands of Euros annually for each child. There are vested interests at work which preclude the system's reformation. The inevitable consequence is that the children and their parents are the victims. Everyone seems to benefit from this scheme, except them.

Another violation is that of the children's right to be cared for and raised by their biological parents. Norway seems to abide by a parenting ideology which disregards biological ties and emphasizes social and psychological parenting. Likely, the now five (5) month old baby is irreversibly estranged from his biological mother. No rational argument can be made in support of this atrocious act. It evidences the viciousness and arbitrariness of Barnevernet's action, backed up by Norway's radical ideology which experiments with ethnic children. The mother's right to nurse her infant has been trampled on. What, one legitimately asks, can be more cruel than that? More heart wrenching? More barbaric? More despicable?

Once the Bodnariu children were severed from their parents, more violations cascaded. They were separated from one another. The boys and the girls have been placed with different families and are also geographically separated by long distances, not only among themselves, but also from their parents. The boys and the girls are not allowed to communicate with one another.

Contacts between the girls and any of the parents have been cut off entirely, and contacts with the boys are only allowed to the mother.

Three (3) of the Bodnariu children were born in January. Barnevernet deprived the family of three (3) birthday celebrations in January of this year. Three family celebrations have been replaced by a nightmare, by unending and unimaginable pain and anguish for the parents and the children alike. How can this happen in a country which claims to be civilized? Did Barnevernet's zealots think that the world would never hear about this? That people of good faith would be too timid to speak or write about these atrocities? That the rest of the world would stand idly by and not say anything? Fortunately for the children and the parents, the truth is out and is being told from the rooftops.

The harshness of the rulings applied to the Bodnarius conveys a systemic problem and how dysfunctional Barnevernet is. This harshness did not mushroom overnight but likely evolved over time with everyone turning a blind eye to the problem. Probably in the beginning citizens put up with it, felt helpless or isolated living in a foreign land, and this likely encouraged Barnevernet to become more aggressive, evolving into the monster organization that it is today.

What about the father's parental rights? After all, the Convention's Article 9 states that "both parents," not the mother or the father alone or separately, have the right to maintain "personal relations" and "direct contact ... on a regular basis" with the five (5) children. With all children, not some of them only. Unlike the mother, the father is not allowed any contact whatsoever with the boys. Moreover, the contact is not direct, but by phone in the case of the girls, not "regular" and not "personal." The harshness of Barnevernet's rulings evidences that the decision was intended to be punitive not curative. The mother is forced to drive no less than four (4) hours, one way, once a week to see her two boys. She likewise must travel four (4) hours, one way, to see the five (5) month old baby to spend two hours with him, nurse him, and attempt to resuscitate the maternal bonds. The cruelty of this decision can only lead one to conclude that Barnevernet commits crimes against humanity and should be banned. International law has long labeled pirates *hostis humani generis*, or enemies of mankind. Barnevernet certainly fits this description. It is an organization which operates outside the bounds of the law, and a danger to the ethnic children and families living in Norway.

The children's seizure further is a violation of the **Convention's Article 8** which gives children the right to preserve their identity. This is a straightforward, objective standard. It is a sure bet that Barnevernet is violating this right. Identity is defined, among others, by religion and language. Propaganda material posted on Barnevernet's website boasts that it does all it can to "safeguard a child's religion and cultural background." Perhaps, it would be useful to know whether Barnevernet is taking the Bodnariu children to a Pentecostal Church every Sunday. Do the children attend Sunday School? Have the children been placed with foster families which share the family's religious and ethnic heritage? Are the children taught or allowed to sing "Jesus loves the little children of the world?"

Furthermore, the girls speak Romanian at home. Do they speak Romanian daily with their foster

parents? Faith is a major defining trait for the entire family. Not only the parents are strong believers, but so is the grandmother. It is doubtful Barnevernet is doing anything to preserve the children's identity, especially considering the girl's conversation with the schoolmaster that the family believes that "God punishes sin." One would be naive to believe that secular Norway would expend public funds to enroll the girls in Bible classes which teach, consistent with the parent's view and theology, that "God punishes sin."

Let's now tackle the **Convention's Article 9** head on. First of all, was there neglect? No. All witnesses concurred the parents are "resourceful" and have the resources to provide for the children.

Were the children subjected to abuse? Definitely not, though here opinions might differ, depending on one's understanding of what constitutes abuse. "Abuse," however, is the start, not the end of the conversation, because, according to Norway's Child Welfare Act, children can be separated from their parents only if there is "danger that children would be *significantly* harmed if remaining at home." The operative words here are "significantly harmed." This is a very high threshold to overcome. Barnevernet arbitrarily labeled the circumstances "significantly harmful" conveniently selecting evidence it found useful to its decision, and discarding the evidence to the contrary. The evidence which Barnevernet used to indict the parents came exclusively from the girls whose credibility even the teachers questioned at times. The grownups, namely the parents, the schoolmaster and the doctors, provided different impressions and opinions which, however, Barnevernet conveniently chose to ignore. One can then conclude that the opinion was deliberately written to yield the impression that the children were abused by being spanked. The opinion was outcome oriented. An intellectually honest opinion is one where the decisionmaker takes the facts as they are and allows them to take him or her where they may. The opinion reads like a script from Stalin's show trials in the 1930s, or a narrative full of accusations pulled from the dusty archives of Romania's Securitate after 65 years. It is surreal and sinister. No wonder the verdicts were so off mark.

Is reasonably spanking one's children the equivalent of abuse? It depends on who asks the question, for what purpose, and who answers it. Richard Dawkins, for instance, is reputed for claiming that even teaching the Bible to children is a form of child abuse. However, an impartial, fair minded person would have to conclude, especially in light of the universal experience of humankind, that reasonably spanking a child is not abuse. It must have not been viewed as such in 1989 when the Convention was adopted because the Convention did not abolish spanking, nor did it allude to the corporal punishment of children. For millennia parents had the "right" or "privilege" to reasonably and even physically discipline their children. It was only in 1979 or so that Sweden broke ranks, abolish this standard, and became the first country in the world to entirely ban the physical discipline of children. Norway followed suit soon thereafter, along with more than twenty or so other countries. New Zealand, too, abolished spanking, but parents initiated a referendum which abrogated the anti-spanking legislation. It cannot be said, therefore, that international customary law does not still recognize a right or privilege to parents to reasonably discipline their children, as part of their right to parental autonomy.

Nevertheless, Norway has chosen to march to a different drum beat than the rest of the world. That is its prerogative as a sovereign state, of course, as is the prerogative to apply its laws equally to all of its inhabitants, Norwegians or not. After all, the proverbial "when in Rome do as the Romans do," still applies. Or does it?

It applies when it is convenient to Norway. Norway has long prided itself on being a tolerant country. But tolerant of what? Westerners, like Norwegians, generally like to boast their creed in multiculturalism. Except when it comes to foreign residents. Norway expects nonNorwegians entering the Nordic state to leave their religion, ethnicity, culture, customs, and values at the border. It is intolerant of those who do not, and Norway's stated policy of multiculturalism has its limits, severe one might add, as reflected in its treatment of the Bodnariu family.

If what the Bodnariu parents did to their children is "abuse," then no less than between 17% and 55% of all American parents abuse their children, and, according to Norway's standards, their kids should be hauled far away to different states and separated from their parents. According to a December 17, 2015 study of the Pew Research Center, 17% of all American parents "spank their children at least some of the time as a way to discipline them," and another 28% "rarely" spank them, while 53% say they never do.

More Barnevernet violations of the Convention come to the fore when considering that the children's express wish to be reunited with their parents is ignored; when the letters they write to their parents only reach the parents two months later; when the children ask to see their parents and their wish is denied; or when the children state they want to stay together or see one another and they are told no. This hard-headedness is hardly in the best interest of the children.

No Spanking or Reasonable Spanking?

Matters differ in the United States, where, for centuries, at common law parents were granted the privilege to reasonably discipline their children, including corporal punishment.

Most recently, in June 2015 the Massachusetts Supreme Court rendered a decision in *Commonwealth v. Darvil*, recognizing *the parental privilege defense* in a case where the father was alleged to have kicked a three year old girl in the back, "kind of like a football kick," smacked the child on the buttocks, and yelled at her to "shut up." The case articulated that "the use of moderate corporal punishment to discipline one's child is viewed by many in [the United States] as an integral part of *parental autonomy* that furthers the welfare of the children." It also established that:

a parent or guardian may not be subjected to criminal liability for the use of force against a minor child ... provided that (1) the force used against the minor child is reasonable; (2) the force is reasonably related to the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the welfare of the minor, including the prevention or punishment of the minor's misconduct; and (3) the force used neither causes, nor creates a substantial risk of causing, physical harm (beyond fleeting pain or minor, transient marks), gross degradation, or severe mental distress. By

requiring that the force be reasonable and reasonably related to a legitimate purpose, this approach effectively balances respect for parental decisions regarding the care and upbringing of minor children with the Commonwealth's compelling interest in protecting children against abuse. By additionally specifying certain types of force that are invariably unreasonable, this approach clarifies the meaning of the reasonableness standard and provides guidance to courts and parents.

Barnevernet harms children and parents

Barnevernet's seizure of the Bodnariu children has inflicted on them and their parents unimaginable harm. Ironically, the children whom Barnevernet allegedly wanted to help are its first and foremost victims. Barnevernet has not acted in their best interest. A major article published in December in [The Atlantic](#) summarized a longitudinal study by reputed psychologist Nicholas Zill, which concluded that adopted children experience major difficulties growing up with their adopting, non-biological parents. The study revealed that at the start of kindergarten about one in four adopted children has a diagnosed disability, twice the rate of children being raised by their biological parents. Adopted children were significantly likelier than birth children to have behavior and learning problems. And the problems experienced by adopted children only escalate with time. Zill found that by eighth grade half of adopted children have diagnosed disabilities. They also perform significantly less in school than children raised by their biological parents.

The question of course is why? Zill proposed the "attachment theory" which holds that a strong bond with at least one biological parent is essential to a child thriving. In contrast, children who are separated from their biological parents are more psychologically vulnerable over time. Among Zill's findings is that children separated from their biological parents have more problems managing their emotions and conflicts without resorting to hostility.

Barnevernet's actions have placed the Bodnariu children in harm's way. If Zill's study is any guide, unfortunately for them, the Bodnariu children are likely to develop psychological problems unless they soon reconnect with their biological parents.

A Norway gone berserk

Norway marches to a different beat than the rest of the world. Here, it clearly went overboard. It threw the baby out with the bath water. Its secular parenting module is a radical departure from traditional types of parenting. Barnevernet is a monster created by Norway's secular culture, a secularist experiment causing pain to countless families, an exemplar of the worst that secularism has to offer. It has only brought shame upon the country.

Consider this: a few years ago, Czech parliamentarians filed a complaint against Barnevernet in the European Parliament. It was signed by 38 parents from 13 European and Third World countries whose children had been seized by Barnevernet. The following paragraph from the

complaint suffices to convey their agony and despair: "Children are being, literally, ripped out of their parents' hands. Both social workers and the police are ruthless; crying and screaming children, begging for a chance to stay with their families, pose no obstacle to them whatsoever. They constantly prove that they are about to have it their way, no matter what."

This is the ugly side of Norway which Western media ignores and dares not report. Dirt poor only half a century ago, today's oil-rich Norway has been declared a Scandinavian Paradise and appears at the top of world charts in many categories, except in matters of the soul and the humane treatment of families. For the soul and families Norway is a vast prison, the wild, wild North on the edge of European civilization.

Clearly, something wrong is going on here, and the world should pay heed. The complaints that Barnevernet is targeting ethnic families are way too many to be ignored and have been lodged for far too long, without the Norwegian state doing anything about it. Concerned parents who escaped the Norwegian gulag of parental abuse, known as Barnevernet, have claimed, credibly, that Barnevernet is an arm of the Norwegian state entrusted with seizing ethnic children and placing them with Norwegian families to ensure the children grow up "Norwegian." Barnevernet enforces a silent policy of demographic redistribution. Children from poor immigrant families are taken away and are placed for adoption with wealthier Norwegian families and same-sex couples. Norway's demographic crisis is acute and worsening. Its natives have an appetite for sexual pleasure but have lost their will to procreate. At 5.2 million people, Norway's population is considerably smaller than that of Houston's metropolitan area. If ethnicity is an unwritten criteria for seizing children from their parents, and it appears to be, one can certainly say Norway is racist, has gone berserk and deserves to be stigmatized - worldwide.

There is some data to back this up. According to statistics posted on Barnevernet's website, at the end of 2012 Norway had about one million and a half of young persons, aged 0 to 22. Almost 200,000 of them were children of immigrants. Transforming these children into Norwegians is a tall order, and here is where Barnevernet's services come in handy. In 2013 it provided "help" to 53,000 children. For 17% of these children "help" came in the form of being taken away from their parents. Barnevernet refers to them as children "taken into care." In raw numbers, this means that in 2013 alone Barnevernet abducted 12,467 children from their parents. In 2013 it issued 1,259 seizure orders, called, euphemistically, "care orders," and in 2014, 1,504.

In the case of the Bodnariu family, Norway's secular state scored at the expense of parental rights, parental autonomy, and the welfare of the children. For now. Because, in the long run and for generations to come, millions of Romanians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Turks, Russians, Ukrainians, Brazilians, Philipinos, Iraqis, Indians and many others from other nationalities will recount their horrific encounters with Norway's Barnevernet. They all ask: does Norway deserve to be stigmatized for abusing us? From their perspective the inevitable answer is: absolutely!

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