



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 4, 2012

## Bulgarian Officials Persecute Pastor over Homeschooling

Authorities in the former communist nation of Bulgaria are reportedly persecuting a pastor and his family over their decision to homeschool, prompting an international outcry among home-education advocates who are calling on officials involved in the growing scandal to drop the case immediately. The matter is even more urgent now as the father has been threatened with criminal charges of “child abuse” for removing his son from government school, according to activist groups and news reports.



Pastor Yavor Kostov from the town of Vidin decided in February to withdraw his 13-year-old son from the state’s education system because of brutal bullying, the U.S.-based [local media reported](#). While researching various international distance-learning programs, the family decided to educate the boy at home by themselves.

“My son is educated at home and by the next school year he will be trained in a very good program for home education,” the father stated according to a translation of a [Bulgarian news article](#), adding that the boy was at risk while in government school and that his current social environment at home was far superior. “It feels wonderful.”

Local officials, however, had other plans.

According to HSLDA and others involved in the case, after the family ditched government school, Bulgarian authorities promptly initiated a campaign of retaliation and abuse against them. First, in violation of the nation’s Constitution, bureaucrats attempted to invade the Kostovs’ home. Then, last month, the father was summoned to the police station as part of the “investigation.” And authorities — without a subpoena for the child — forced him to bring his son along as well.

Once there, Kostov was reportedly threatened by police with a three-year prison sentence and other punitive measures. Meanwhile, his attorney cannot even access the documents needed to prepare a defense because officials refused to surrender the material — another violation of due process, according to legal experts.

“This is a clear-cut case of arbitrary use of power,” explained the family’s attorney, [Viktor Kostov](#), who is working with the international Alliance Defense Fund on the case. “The authorities are trying to scare the family into bowing down to the [Social Services Child Protection Unit]’s demand that the child go back to school ... they have absolutely no grounds for accusing the father and mother of a crime.”

Bulgarian law, according to lawyers working on the case, allows the social services only to initiate administrative proceedings against parents — not file criminal charges. The nation’s criminal code, meanwhile, provides that criminal proceedings stemming from alleged neglect must involve actions that cause “serious” damaging consequences to children.

In this case, Pastor Kostov and his supporters contend that he was actually *protecting* his son from the



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“serious consequences of violence” at government school, which authorities were either unable or unwilling to address. Plus, countless studies have [shown](#) that home-schooled children tend to perform far better than their public school-educated peers on every metric — standardized testing, learning abilities, critical thinking, and even socialization.

On top of that, homeschooling activists say, the criminal charges themselves will have negative consequences for the child, assuming the case does not get dropped before it spirals out of control. And the abuses of power will also have damaging repercussions for the nation as a whole, according to HSLDA founder [Michael Farris](#).

“As a former totalitarian and communist country now with democratic aspirations, Bulgaria’s treatment of its citizens in this manner over the choice to homeschool is alarming,” Farris said in a [statement](#).

“These officials are violating Pastor Kostov’s fundamental human right to choose the kind of education his son should receive.”

HSLDA International Affairs Director Michael Donnelly, an attorney with a global reputation as a fierce defender of persecuted homeschoolers, has already written to Bulgarian authorities seeking to resolve the matter. He is also asking friends of homeschooling and the organization’s more than 80,000 members to get involved, saying that officials must understand that the international community will not allow persecution and arbitrary abuses to go unchallenged.

“HSLDA calls on Bulgaria to conform its law to reflect these human rights norms and on Vidin officials to cease persecuting this family,” Donnelly said in a statement posted online. “We will continue to support Bulgarian families as we have for over a decade now to attain the freedom to homeschool their children without unreasonable governmental interference.”

In a [strongly worded letter to Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov](#), Donnelly outlined the legal issues involved and expressed his concerns about the persecution. Also highlighted in the document were several blatant abuses of power that are unlawful even in Bulgaria, which did not officially free itself from communist tyranny and terror until about two decades ago.

“This case demonstrates a clear abuse of power by public authorities in Vidin in contravention with Bulgarian and international human rights law,” Donnelly wrote in the letter to Borissov, asking him to intervene and end the lawlessness as soon as possible. “In a democratic country such as Bulgaria, the abuse of a citizen’s constitutional rights constitutes a direct threat to the rule of law.”

The government of Bulgaria’s public information officials did not reply to repeated phone and e-mail requests for comment by press time. However, according to Bulgarian Homeschool Association President Peter Porumbachanov, homeschooling remains severely restricted in the nation — illegal for all intents and purposes.

Families that try to withdraw their children from government school often face vicious persecution at the hands of authorities, Porumbachanov added. HSLDA [states](#) on its website that there are less than 100 known homeschoolers operating in the country.

In Bulgaria, activists are also standing firm in defense of the persecuted pastor and his family. “These abuses of power by public authorities — social services and police in Vidin — are a direct threat to law and rule of law in a democratic society,” [noted](#) the Bulgarian Civil Initiative for Families, a pro-family network of citizens and organizations that fights for liberty and parental rights.

“Support Pastor Kostov and his family’s right to raise and educate their children without criminal



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charges [or the interference] of social services and public authorities,” the network said in a statement, asking concerned citizens to get involved. According to the group, government officials have violated the family’s fundamental rights with the “arbitrary” abuse of power, and activists must stand up to protect and defend Kostov for the sake of the nation and to prevent other, similar cases.

When asked if the persecution was related to his Protestant church, Pastor Kostov, a long-time family-rights activist, said he did not know. “But I can see that in the near future, with the current legislation in the name of the best interests of the child, we will witness people terrorize dissidents,” he [told](#) a local media outlet, according to a translation of the original report by Google.

Homeschooling continues to spread and remains generally tolerated in free Western countries. Even Russia now allows home education, and there are already an [estimated 70,000](#) homeschoolers exercising those rights in the former Soviet nation. But totalitarian-minded governments and rulers all over the world — National Socialists (Nazis), communists, and fascists, for example — have sought to ruthlessly stamp out alternative forms of education for at least a century.

The [battle](#) for parental rights, meanwhile, continues to rage on as well. Authorities in nations around the world are — quietly and slowly — seeking to disempower parents and unleash the raw power of the state in its drive to take over the responsibilities of raising children. Activists are fighting back with increasing urgency, however, in an effort to preserve individual freedom and strong families as the building blocks of a humane civilization.

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*Photo: Sofia, Bulgaria’s capital*



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