

# Organ Smuggling: Turkish Hospitals Traffic Injured Syrian Citizens' Organs

By [Les Blough](#)

Global Research, February 08, 2014  
[axis of logic](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)  
Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)  
In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Were it not for the well-documented terrorism and atrocities that we know are being committed by Turkey's Erdogan government in Syria, we might pass over as political fiction the hand-me-down news report (below) about injured Syrians being robbed of their organs when taken to Turkey's public hospitals for treatment.

But in the context of Turkey's role in supporting and arming the terrorists to overthrow the Assad government in Syria and its history with trafficking human organs, there's reason enough to take the report seriously.



The Turkish public health sector has a history of operating in international human organ smuggling for money. In 2010 [The Guardian reported](#) the theft of human organs by Yusuf Ercin Sonmez, a Turkish surgeon who was sought by Interpol in an international manhunt at the time. Sonmez has been indicted for illegally taking human organs for sale from patients in Kosovo and accused of the same in Azerbaijan and of being involved in an organ theft ring in Ecuador. In Kosovo, Sonmez was indicted for taking organs from Serb soldiers, captured in the 1998-1999 US war on Serbia and leaving them to die. Linked to [Hashim Thaci](#), the US-backed Prime Minister of Kosovo, Sonmez had been repeatedly arrested for these crimes in Turkey but later released. According to The Guardian:

Yilman Altun, 23, was the desperate young Turk who said he was promised a rich reward for his organ by a broker in Istanbul. Alongside him lay Bezalel Shafran, a 74-year-old Israeli who had paid £76,400 for the black-market kidney he hoped would prolong his life...

"According to an indictment released this week, the surgeon transferring the kidney between these strangers in the Medicus clinic in a deprived suburb near the Kosovan capital, Pristina, was Yusuf Ercin Sonmez, a 53-year-old medic...

"But it is Sonmez who prosecutors believe has been the central figure in the

trafficking. The Turk has been repeatedly arrested for organ transplants in his native country, where colleagues describe him as an accomplished but rebellious surgeon. In 1998, Turkish TV, whose reporters posed as donors, found seven patients, mostly from Israel. Sonmez was later banned from working in Turkey's public health sector...

"Since then he has been linked to clinics operating on donors and recipients from across the world. He has admitted to doing thousands of transplants, but says that his donors sign disclaimer forms declaring they are giving their organs for humanitarian purposes...

"Patients from Canada, Germany, Poland and Israel had received organ transplants at the clinic. But despite promises of payment of up to €20,000 (\$33,000), the donors had left empty-handed."

### **Arrested and Released**

If the reports cited below sound confusing, perhaps some of the original publishers meant them to be so. Many of the news stories in western media tell only parts of the story, omit key elements or simply do not followup on the arrests. But when the reports by various news agencies are examined closely and integrated certain things become clear. For one, when the corporate media reports that a person has been "arrested" it doesn't necessarily mean that he has been prosecuted or imprisoned or even detained.

Yusef Sonmez was working with Moshe Harel, an Israeli, at the time of his "surgical attacks" in Medicus, a medical clinic owned by Lutfi Dervishi in Kosovo where Sonmez and other doctors worked. Sonmez was the primary surgeon and Moshe Harel was known as "the fixer" for the organ theft&sell ring, recruiting or finding 'donors' and recipients for organ removal and transplant by Sonmez and a few other surgeons working for them.



Dr. Yusef Sonmez (L) and Moshe Harel

In 2008, Moshe Harel was [arrested in Pristina](#) but fled Kosovo "after he was released from detention." Subsequently, Kosovo authorities issued an international arrest warrant for both, Sonmez and Harel which stated that at least 30 illegal kidney removals and transplants were carried out in the Pristina clinic in 2008. The police raided Medicus that year "after a Turkish man collapsed at Pristina airport waiting for a flight back to Istanbul after having a kidney removed." [Haaretz](#) later reported,

“In 2008 investigators closed down the private health clinic where the doctors worked as part of the initial investigation. Kosovo police launched a raid triggered by suspicions that a Turkish man had sold his kidney to an Israeli recipient after he appeared fatigued at Pristina airport trying to board a flight to Turkey.”

In November 12, 2010 [Haaretz](#) followed an AP report stating that Interpol had issued an arrest warrant for Harel and Sonmez adding, “Two other doctors, Israeli national Zaki Shapira and Turkish national Kenan Demirkol are identified in the 46-page document as unindicted co-conspirators.”

On December 20, 2010 [Haaretz reported](#) that Moshe Harel was “on the run” and:

“Moshe Harel, an Israeli of Turkish descent, is known as “the fixer” of the alleged organ ring, for his suspected role in matching potential donors recruited in Turkey with recipients, many if not all of whom had connections with Israel.”

On January 12, 2011 Yusef Sonmez appeared again in Turkey. The [BBC reported](#) that Sonmez was “arrested and bailed,” (i.e. released on bail by Turkish authorities in Istanbul) adding “The [organ] donors, said to have come from Moldova, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey and to have lived in ‘extreme poverty or acute financial distress’, were allegedly transported to Pristina Airport.” It’s noteworthy that the BBC said 8 others were charged a year earlier but made no mention of Moshe Harel in their report.

CNN also reported that Yusef Sonmez was [arrested](#) in Istanbul on January 12, 2011 on the Interpol warrant but that “Sonmez was then released by the court pending trial.”

On February 10, 2011 the [New York Times](#) ran an article in defense of Sonmez (excerpts):

ISTANBUL — For a surgeon wanted by Interpol and suspected of harvesting human organs for an international black-market trafficking ring, Dr. Yusuf Sonmez was remarkably relaxed as he sipped Turkish red wine in a bustling kebab restaurant facing the wind-whipped Sea of Marmara.

“Dr. Sonmez, refreshed from a ski trip to Austria, spoke last month while on a break from business trips to Israel and operations on cancer patients here.

“He boasts about the results of his kidney transplant operations, more than 2,400 by his count. He keeps friends (and, incidentally, investigators) up to date on his life via a blog and Web site.

“And in his seaside villa on the Asian side of Istanbul, he treasures a framed copy of a signed letter in 2003 from the Ministry of Health in Israel commending him for his life-saving aid to “hundreds of Israeli patients who are suffering from kidney diseases and awaiting transplants’.

“Of his surgical skills, he added, wryly, “I am the best in the world as long as my fingers aren’t broken.

On May 25, 2012 [Reuters reported](#) that Moshe Harel was finally arrested in Israel on the Interpol warrant.



Moshe Harel arrested in Israel but not detained.

“Moshe Harel was arrested along with several other people in connection with a parallel investigation in Israel, said the mission, known as EULEX.

“Harel is a key suspect in a separate, but parallel, investigation regarding the Medicus indictment, filed in June 2011, charging him with the criminal offences of trafficking in persons and organized crime,”

Reuters said the indictment stated Harel is, “An Israeli citizen [involved] in ‘identifying, recruiting and transporting victims ... ensuring the delivery of cash payments by electronic bank transfer’ prior to surgery.”

“Police in Kosovo accuse Israeli Harel of seeking out people in need of kidney transplants and luring donors to Kosovo from Turkey and the poorer countries of the former Soviet Union with the promise of 15,000 euros (\$20,000) in payment. It is not known whether they received the money. The organs were then sold on for between 80,000 and 100,000 euros (\$100,000-\$125,000)

On the same day, [AFP reported](#):

Also on May 25, 2012 [Press TV](#), reported on the story of Somnez & Harel and discussed broader findings of organ trafficking in Israel:

“Pristina - The suspected mastermind behind an organ trafficking network, sought for years by Kosovo authorities, has been arrested in Israel an EU prosecutor said on Thursday. ‘We have received information that Moshe Harel has been arrested in Israel on organ trafficking and other related offences,’ EU special prosecutor Jonathan Ratel said. ‘We are seeking confirmation with the Israeli authorities,’ he added.”

“Reports earlier this week by Ha’aretz, indicate that at least 10 Israeli citizens were arrested for being members of an organ trafficking gang. The Italian New Generation Foundation for Human Rights and the Everyone Group has presented evidence indicating that Sinai locals harvest the organs of the people they transfer to Israel. In this connection, a number of mass graves have been found containing the corpses of Africans missing some of their organs.”

## The Trial



Jonathan Ratel, EU's Special Prosecutor in Kosovo

The trial in Kosovo took place in April, 2013, 5 years after the organ trafficking crimes were committed in Kosovo. Jonathan Ratel is a Canadian lawyer who serves as head of the European Union's Special Prosecution Office in Kosovo. He began his investigation in March 2010 and the trial began in September 2011 before three international judges. Ratel pieced together the complex case covering countries that ran through Kosovo, Turkey, Europe, Canada, US and Israel. The trial included testimony from 80 witnesses and Ratel's closing arguments included 250 PowerPoint slides and lasted six-and-a-half hours.

On April 19, 2013 [The Star](#) (Canada) conducted a telephone interview with Ratel when he called this dark web of trafficking human organs, "the cruel harvest of the poor" and added, "The single motivating factor behind this enterprise was the opportunity for obscene profits available in the black market organ trade."

On April 29, 2013 the [New York Times](#) published this:

"Five people were convicted Monday in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, in connection with an elaborate organ-trafficking network that lured poor people to the country to sell their kidneys and other organs to wealthy transplant recipients from Israel, the United States, Canada and Germany. Organs sold for as much as \$130,000 each. "The defendants, all Kosovars, were tried before a panel of two European Union judges and one Kosovar judge. A special prosecutor for the union, Jonathan Ratel, called the case a landmark because doctors had been convicted. "Dr. Lutfi Dervishi, a urologist and the director of the clinic at the center of the trafficking ring, was sentenced to eight years in prison. His son Arban Dervishi was sentenced to seven years and three months, and Dr. Sokol Hajdini, the clinic's chief anesthesiologist, to three years. Two other defendants received one-year suspended sentences. "Mr. Ratel said the Dervishis were aided by Dr. Yusuf Sonmez, whom he called a notorious international organ trafficker. Dr. Sonmez is a fugitive and may be in South Africa, Mr. Ratel said."

### **On the Lam**

On April 29, 2013, [The Star](#) stated that Dr. Yusuf Sonmez and Moshe Harel, "remain at large, wanted under an Interpol 'Red Notice'."

On August 10, 2013, [Friends of Kosovo](#) reported, "Two foreign suspects in the case - Turkish doctor Yusuf Sonmez and Moshe Harel, an Israeli citizen - are still listed as wanted by Interpol but remain at large."

December 16, 2013 - According to [Balkan Transitional Justice](#), defendants Sonmez and Harel cannot be tried in their absence and their prosecution depends on their extradition:

“Turkish doctor Yusuf Sonmez and Israeli citizen Moshe Harel, both accused of people trafficking and organised crime, are listed as fugitives wanted by Interpol and have been on the run since the indictment in the case was raised in June 2011. “But EULEX judge Malcolm Simmons said that he was ‘worried that little or almost nothing has happened since then.’” “ ‘We can do little until the defendants are arrested,’ Simmons said at a hearing in Pristina that was held to give an update on the organ-trafficking case. EULEX prosecutor Allen Cansick, said the EU mission believes that ‘Harel is still in Israel,’ while ‘the mission has information that Sonmez is travelling around the world.’ But Cansick expressed hope that the men might be apprehended, saying that “‘there are however possibilities they might be brought to Kosovo some time later.’

Where have these two cretins gone? Where have they been in hiding and who is hiding them – since the time they walked from prosecution in Kosovo? Are either or both being given secret asylum in Israel as in the past? Are they continuing their ghoulish work in Turkey, protected by the Erdogan government, robbing organs from injured Syrian civilian and military who’ve been sent there for treatment and from Syrian soldiers who have been captured by the terrorists? The latter would certainly fit with their work in Kosovo where they robbed captured Serb soldiers of their organs before Kosovo’s “freedom fighters” killed them. The following report from Fars News Agency tells of how the organ theft business is thriving in Turkey.

---

February 5, 2014

[Fars News Agency](#)

Turkish Hospitals Traffick Injured Syrian Citizens’ Organs According to a report by the [Lebanese al-Safir daily](#), trafficking the injured Syrian people’s body organs is a phenomenon which has intensified in Turkish governmental hospitals. Ahmad Abdulkarim Muhammad, a 19-year-old young Syrian, is one of the victims of this phenomenon. He was injured in Syria in January and was transferred to Antakya hospital in Southern Turkey and died after a few days.

Despite being transferred to the hospital for head injuries, a video released after his death shows that his abdomen has gone under surgery operations which indicates stealing of his vital organs, including kidneys, liver, etc.

Earlier reports also said that Turkish authorities are engaged in trafficking body organs of injured Syrians that are taken to Turkey for treatment.

The [Lebanese newspaper al-Diyar](#) reported in May, 2013 that Turkish authorities transfer young injured Syrians to certain hospitals in the Turkish cities of Antakya and Iskenderun.

The report added that the Turks leave the injured Syrians alone to die after their body organs are removed in the hospitals. The dead are later sent to the Syrian border region to be buried.

Turkish doctors have confirmed that out of 62,000 injured Syrian civilian and military people who were transported into Turkey, body organs of over 15,600 of them were excised and their bodies were sent back into Syria to be buried, al-Diyar stated.

Turkish officials have made no comments over the issue so far.

The Lebanese newspaper also states that the body organs, including livers, kidneys and hearts are given to people waiting for treatment in Turkey.

Al-Diyar said European scientific websites acknowledged that body organ transplantation operations had increased in Turkey over the past two years, since the beginning of the crisis in Syria.

The original source of this article is [axis of logic](#)  
Copyright © [Les Blough](#), [axis of logic](#), 2014

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[Les Blough](#)**

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)