

Statement made on behalf of the Claimant
Witness: Bogdan Stefan Maris (Third)
Date of Statement: 09 December 2006

Court of Appeal Reference: A2/2005/1093

IN THE COURT OF APPEAL (CIVIL DIVISION)
ON APPEAL FROM THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION

Lower Court Reference:
Claim No. HQ03X03360

ALIN TURCU

Claimant/ Appellant

- and -

NEWS GROUP NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

Defendant/ Respondent

STATEMENT OF BOGDAN STEFAN MARIS

I, BOGDAN STEFAN MARIS, of Bloc 14/4, Roman Musat, Roman, Judetul Piatra Neamt, Romania will say as follows:

1. I was born in 1980. I come from a poor family in Roman, which is in north-eastern Romania. My mother was unable to look after me and between the ages of 3 and 10 I was brought up in a children's home in Peranta, Romania. Growing up in a children's home in Romania during the 1980s was hard. When I was about 10 years old I ran away. I went to various towns including outside Romania and lived on the streets. I used to steal to survive, or do some small bits of work such as washing cars.
2. In 1997, when I was 17 years old, I was sent to prison for theft. I took the name Alin Turcu from a person who was charged with me. I decided to try to come to England because I wanted to live somewhere decent, compared with where I had been brought up. I lied about my age and my background because I believed that it would help me to stay. I am not trying to defend what I did, but I think it is fair to say that my crimes are much less serious than the accusations made by the News of the World. I committed them with other young people who were in similar situations to me. None of them were connected to anyone in this case. And I have never been part of a gang of dangerous criminals.
3. I got into some minor trouble in the UK. I was convicted of shoplifting on 3 occasions. On the first occasion, which was in 1999, I was cautioned. On the second occasion I

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received a £50 fine. On the third and final occasion in July 2001, I was given a community punishment order of 120 hours. My community service involved helping people on behalf of a local church, and I actually enjoyed what I was doing. I got good reports.

4. Even before I received the community service order, I had been trying to establish myself in this country, find a job and have a decent life. I was very lucky to get a job with Mr David Calderhead. He is an amazing person, who was an orphan but managed to become a very successful businessman. He believes in giving people a chance and I was determined not to waste the opportunity he had given me. I was employed as an office assistant with the company, and I worked mainly with Mr Charles Firth. I would do word processing, some other computer work and filing. After I had been with the company for a while I used to go to some of the construction sites of the company's properties. I would visit various building sites and check what the workers were doing. I would sometimes be given the responsibility of paying the workers their wages, and sometimes I would deal with the tenants of some of the properties. I accept that I lied to Mr Calderhead about who I was. But as far as my work was concerned I would like to think that I was considered a good employee who was honest and hard working, and that is how I approached the job in the period I worked for the company. Tax and national insurance were taken from my salary before I was paid.
5. At the time that the News of the World article was published, I had a good job, I was living in a flat (that I had spent a lot of time decorating) and I had an active enjoyable social life. I knew a large number of people in England through work, socialising and from the neighbourhood in which I lived. I had had a number of girlfriends. Since arriving in England I was only known as Alin Turcu. I accept that I had got into England by telling lies. But for the first time in my life I did have a settled life that I did not want to lose. I had been given permission to remain until February 2004 and I did not want to do anything that would risk losing my chance of staying longer.
6. I deny the allegation in the News of the World that I was a member of a criminal gang with or without the other people named in the article. I deal below with the relationship I had with the various other "gang" members.
7. At the time of the article I had known Rusu Sorin or "Jay" as he was known to me, for about 1 year. He is also a Romanian. I met him socially – I think at a party – in a

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mutual friend's house in 2001. He was having to move out of the place where he was living and I agreed to put him up in my flat in Sutton. At that time he was working, and we became friends, like most young people who share a flat and we were both Romanian. He lived with me for 6 - 8 months at my flat. When he moved out, I discovered that a number of my things from the flat were missing, such as crockery and cutlery. I went to Jay's new place and saw my things there, which upset me although I did not raise it with him. Whilst I did meet up with him on further occasions after he moved out, and particularly when I was with Adrian (see below), I certainly did not "band together" with him to commit any crimes. By September 2002 he was no longer a close friend, as can be seen from the recordings.

8. Adrian Pasareanu is a Romanian doctor. He knew Jay because Jay had gone out with his sister, although Adrian was not happy about the relationship. He wanted to come to England to be able to practise as a doctor here. Jay knew that I had a spare room and suggested to Adrian to ask me if he could stay with me at my flat. He had already qualified as a doctor in Romania. I was willing to help Adrian out and he moved in some time around September 2002, when he came to England. He lived with me up until the time of our arrest. Adrian and I became friends. He was a very different person to Jay. He was very keen to get his qualifications here. Adrian spent most of his time studying, and at the time I was working full time for Mr Calderhead. We became friends and we would do things together in our spare time. I would go shopping with him, or have a drink somewhere and stuff like that. We just lived together and hung out socially. I would tag along if he was going somewhere or to meet other people, because I liked his company.
9. It was through Jay that Adrian met Florin Gashi ("Flo") and through Adrian that I met him. Jay had bought a car from Flo and told Adrian that Flo was also selling a Ford Fiesta very cheaply. This would have been in October 2002. It was an old car and he apparently only wanted £80 for it. I recall that Adrian was concerned as to whether the car was stolen. I think he made some checks and found out that it was not stolen and he bought it. Flo would not provide any documents with the car but kept promising to do so. After we bought the car from him, he would often come over to the flat and invite us out for drinks.
10. I met Joe Rivas and Luli Krifsha through Adrian in October 2002. I would never have described us as friends. I met them socially on a handful of occasions, and only because I was tagging along with Adrian at the time.

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11. The Defendant says that I was aware of a number of crimes carried out by Luli, Joe, Jay and/or Adrian. I heard discussions about the theft of a crown from Sotheby's and its sale by Luli and Flo. I did not know much about it and had no involvement in it. I did not know whether it was genuine or not. I also did not know about any of the other crimes listed in the Re-amended Defence. I was aware that Jay's cousin had been arrested for fraud relating to cash machines. Even if I was not aware of those crimes, I did believe that Luli, Joe, Jay and Flo were involved in criminal activity and admit that it was obvious to me that Luli, Joe, Jay and Flo must have been involved in criminal activity. I had no involvement in any crime that they were committing and had no interest in getting involved.
12. It was not my idea to meet up with Jay, Luli or Joe Rivas on 24, 25 or 26 October. I only ended up meeting them because I was with Adrian who had spoken to Flo who had arranged the meetings. I had just returned from a short holiday to France. I basically tagged along to the bars and restaurant to have drinks and a bit of a laugh. On each occasion I had either already been drinking or ended up drinking when I was there. It was Flo who arranged these meetings. Each time he tried to interest us in talking about criminal activity and possible crimes. I thought that he was strange and often did not believe what he was saying. He said that he had been in a mental hospital and that his family had all been killed in Kosovo. He would encourage people to come together because he would spend money on food and drinks for everyone. I had no interest in becoming involved in what he was suggesting. But I had no problem being entertained with free drinks and food. I set out below, as best as I can remember, what happened on the meetings of 24, 25 and 26 October.
13. The meeting on 24 October took place in a pub in Brixton. I had been drinking whisky before Flo arrived and had a double whisky when he arrived. Adrian had told me that Flo had suggested to him the idea of robbing a Sotheby's security guard and that he wanted me to make an effort to go along with the idea. I did not think that Adrian was seriously considering it and I certainly would never have done so, but I was willing to go along with the conversation. When Adrian actually tried to get me to agree to be involved in the robbery I did make it clear that I did not want to. I thought that Adrian was taking it too far. Adrian then told me off for trying to make fun of Flo and said that I had to make more of an effort to appear serious. I accept that I made some reference to obtaining a pepper spray. I was not serious about this. I had no idea how

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to obtain such a spray and made no attempt to find out.

14. Later in the conversation Flo brought up the subject of kidnapping Victoria Beckham. He had raised this before and I had regarded it as a joke. I assumed that he also regarded it as a joke. I said that it would be like kidnapping the Pope to indicate how ridiculous the idea was. He kept asking us questions about it, like how much the ransom would be. But these questions were not meant to be serious, they were not about actually doing anything. I talked about the subject because he raised it and it was funny; he had bought me drinks and Adrian wanted me to be nice to Flo. It was funny because it was such a ridiculous idea, particularly coming from someone like Flo, who was basically a car dealer involved in petty crime. I did talk about how you would get such large sums of money from a bank as part of the conversation, because I did not think it was possible and it was part of the conversation. I did not speak to any contacts about the subject and do not have any. I have seen on the transcripts a reference to me saying "Christmas". That must have been in response to something said by Flo, but I deny that I was seriously suggesting that I was intending to kidnap Victoria Beckham at Christmas or at any other time. On leaving the pub, I now know that I was photographed by the News of the World.

15. On the evening of Friday 25 October I was out with Adrian after work. Flo had contacted Adrian shortly before we met up with him. Adrian told me that Flo wanted to impress somebody to whom he owed money by pretending that he would be recruited as a getaway driver and earn money for it. Adrian had agreed to go along with this to help Flo. We therefore met up with Flo and a man that I now know as Qureshi. I was present but, as is clear from the tape, I did not say very much apart from the odd word here and there. I clearly did not regard the discussion as serious because Flo had asked Adrian to pretend that he was recruiting Qureshi.

16. On the night of Saturday 26 October I again went out for a meal with Adrian to the Atoca Restaurant in Wandsworth. As far as I was aware Gashi had invited everyone else and I tagged along with Adrian. Again I had been drinking and as far as I was concerned, it was a social occasion. It was a Saturday night and all I was interested in was having some fun, some drinks and a meal. By the time that Flo arrived with Jay I was drunk. Without the transcript, I doubt that I could have recalled what I said. But having looked at the transcript I can see that after Flo again raised the Beckham kidnap I got into a silly argument with Luli about whether it was possible to withdraw large amounts of cash from a bank. I did not believe that it was. He was trying to

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tease me and this resulted in me into getting an argument with him about it. I do not think anyone at the table was taking Flo's idea seriously. I certainly was not.

17. After that meeting I did not meet or speak to Luli or Joe again. I may have spoken to Jay. I did not discuss the Beckham kidnap again. I did not know that Jay had gone to the Beckham's home. I did know about the gun incident with Adrian. This was down to Flo wanting to persuade Qureshi that he was coming into some money. He had asked me to do it but I refused. Adrian agreed, but afterwards said that he did not want anything more to do with Flo.
18. The next thing that happened was that I was arrested by armed police at my flat. I was advised by my solicitor not to answer any questions during the police interviews and I followed her advice.
19. I first saw the News of the World article on Sunday 3 November, when it was shown to me by a police officer. I was already shocked to have been arrested by armed police and I was absolutely devastated when I saw the article. I could not believe what was happening to me. I was being accused of a terrible crime - intending to kidnap one of the most famous women in Britain and her two young children and being prepared to kill them. This was on the basis of some conversations in pubs. I could not believe that this could happen in England. I then found out that the story had gone round the whole world and that my picture had appeared in Romanian newspapers as a kidnapper. It was difficult enough being in prison for over 7 months for something that I did not do, but it was made harder because of what the newspaper had accused me of - it was like I had already been found guilty and the other prisoners and officers looked on me as a dangerous criminal. Over my time in prison I became bitter and angry about what had happened. I had been set-up by the News of the World just so that they could sell more newspapers and make money. I was also terrified that I was going to be found guilty for something I had not done and would serve a very long prison term. I had no faith that I would be acquitted because despite the lack of evidence against me, it took an incredibly long time for the charges against me to be dropped. Because of the publicity about the case, I think the police felt they had to explore every way of getting a prosecution before they were finally forced to drop the case.
20. Although I felt relief when I was released I was still bitter and sad. Also, I could not believe it when the News of the World continued to say that I was guilty, even after

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- everything that they had put me through. I thought that they were never going to leave me alone. I had already lost my confidence. I felt when I walked down the street that everyone was looking at me and thinking that I was a kidnapper who was prepared to murder a young mother. Although Mr Calderhead stood by me I did not want to speak to people at work. I lost interest in socialising. I moved back into my flat but felt uncomfortable there because my neighbours were suspicious and unfriendly.
21. I asked my criminal solicitor if she could help to bring a claim against the newspaper and she recommended that I see David Price, who agreed to represent me. On my return to Romania, I anticipated that at times it might be difficult for him to contact me, so I asked that Mr Calderhead should make any decisions about my case, if necessary.
22. Despite the efforts I made, I was unable to attend the trial in April 2005 because I was informed by the Romanian authorities that there was no possibility that I would get a visa. I owed some money to the municipal authorities in my home town and without paying these, which I was unable to do, I would not be granted a visa. I have not served a witness statement earlier in these proceedings because I was advised that it would be worthless if I did not give evidence at the trial.
23. My failure to attend trial or provide a witness statement is no indication of how I feel about the case. I care very much about the outcome of the appeal. I was devastated by the extremely serious allegations that the News of the World made against me. I have not been able to put it behind me even though the criminal charges were dropped. This feeling has been made worse by the unsuccessful libel case and I am very upset that the Judge found that the allegations were substantially true. The Beckham kidnap plot is regarded by the public as being genuine and the unsuccessful libel case has supported this view. The fact that the News of the World are able to rely on the outcome of the libel case as proof of the story being true upsets me greatly. They have repeated the allegations many times in the last 4 years. The only way that I can stop the News of the World repeating this allegation is by winning the appeal and finally clearing my name. I want to stop them ever making the same accusation again and I want to be able to show people that what they wrote about me was untrue.
24. At some point, if possible, I would like to return to England. This is more likely now that Romania is joining the European Union on 1 January 2007. Even in Romania however, the defamatory allegations made by the News of the World have been

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repeated extensively and my photograph published. Romanian newspapers and television covered the initial kidnap story in November 2002 and followed up all developments in the criminal trial. Most recently, the libel trial and its unsuccessful outcome has been reported in Romania.

25. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

7.12.06

Maris

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ALIN TURCU

Claimant/ Appellant

- and -

NEWS GROUP NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

Defendant/ Respondent

STATEMENT OF BOGDAN STEFAN
MARIS
