



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

**REX**

**-v-**

**IONUT-VALENTIN BOBOC**

**&**

**IACOB-BEBE CHERS**

**Sentencing remarks of the Honourable Mrs Justice Cutts DBE**

**At the Crown Court in Bristol**

**On the 21<sup>st</sup> day of December 2022**

1. Ionut Boboc and Iacob Chers, I am to sentence each of you for the murder of Denzil McKenzie and for the murder of Farhad Paramanik. For each of these grave offences there is only one sentence prescribed by law and that is imprisonment for life. That is the sentence I shall impose upon each of you in due course. However, I am required to determine the minimum period you should serve in prison before you are eligible to be considered for release on parole.
2. I approach your sentences by increasing the minimum term on each count to reflect the overall seriousness of your conduct.

3. It is most important that each of you and everyone concerned with this case should understand what the minimum term means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will be automatically released but the minimum time that you will spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board and it will be for the Parole Board to say at that time whether or not you will be released. If they say you should not, you will remain in custody. If and when you are released you will still be subject to licence and this will be the case for the rest of your lives. If for any reason your licence were to be revoked you would be recalled to prison to serve your life sentence in custody.
4. The two of you are Romanian nationals who by September 2021 had been living and working in Bristol for some time. It is plain from the evidence I heard that, notwithstanding the difference in your ages, you were good friends who would regularly socialise together after work. You had also, up until the summer of 2021, worked together at Tulips abattoir in the north of the city.
5. It seems likely that it was there that you met Denzil McKenzie. He had been employed there for a significant period of time. He was well-liked and respected. The manager who gave evidence in the trial described him as quiet and hard-working, he would always turn up for work. A lot of people got on with him.
6. He was also someone who both of you, although the evidence would suggest principally you Boboc, had met on occasions outside of work. Found on a device taken from his address after his murder were messages between you Boboc and Mr McKenzie in February and March of 2019. They revealed something of a complex relationship at that time.
7. You, Boboc, have for some years now had a serious gambling habit. You squandered your wages on slot machines. You turned to those you knew, including Mr McKenzie, to lend you money in order that you could pay your bills. He did lend you money but, after a while, sought sexual favours from you in return which at first you were

unwilling to give. It would seem from the messages that for a short time in 2019 you complied with his requests in order to get the money you required. By the end of the messages found Mr McKenzie was reluctant to lend you any further money.

8. There is little evidence of your relationship Boboc, if any, with Mr McKenzie between 2019 and 2021. However on the afternoon of Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September last year you had once again lost money on the slot machines. Having arranged to meet with Chers for a drink, at just after 6 PM you Boboc messaged Mr McKenzie, saying that you wanted to see him that evening. He said no but you pressed him. You said that you would only be there for 10 minutes for a beer to say goodbye. You lied to him, telling him you had a present for him and that he would like it. You would not tell him what it was, saying that you could only show him having tricked him, you both arrived at Mr McKenzie's address just after 8 PM. By the time you left some three hours later two innocent men had been attacked and murdered in the most brutal way.
9. I have carefully considered the sinister interpretation placed on this text exchange by the prosecution that this showed your then settled intent to kill him. You certainly deceived Mr McKenzie into allowing you access to his house. Standing alone, in light Boboc of your financial losses earlier in the day and your history of pressing him for money I would not be sure that was the case.
10. There is however other evidence and I am satisfied that, whilst not substantial, there was an element of planning to the murder of Mr McKenzie as opposed to a spontaneous reaction to what occurred in the house. CCTV footage showed that you Chers were carrying gloves as you walked towards the house. This was a warm September evening, certainly not one where gloves were required for warmth. After the murders and at the scene, Scenes of Crime Officers found apparent glove impressions left on the walls and light switches. This, together with a complete lack of fingerprints found clearly indicates that you were wearing gloves and had determined to do so before you entered the house. There were at least three knives used in the ferocious attacks on Mr McKenzie and Mr Pramanik indicating a ready availability in a way that would not be expected in fast moving events. There is a clear inference,

and I find, that knives were taken to the scene. Maria Boboc, your Aunt, Boboc, to whom you later confessed told the police that one of you spoke of a knife or knives being your own. Neither of you could have known that Mr Pramanik, a stranger to both of you, was also at the house. I accept that there could have been no plan in advance to kill him. However, having determined to kill Mr McKenzie, you could not have let Mr Pramanik, a witness, leave. He too became an innocent victim of your savage brutality.

11. Only the two of you know precisely what happened at 20 Wood Street that night and why. You have given no truthful account of it and were silent at your trial. However, the number of injuries suffered by each man speak of the brutality of the attacks upon them. Mr McKenzie was clearly stabbed upstairs in his bedroom. No doubt in fear and in an attempt to get away from his attacker or attackers he stumbled downstairs. The blood smears on the wall show that he slumped against the wall whilst bleeding heavily on his way down. He was also attacked whilst bleeding by the door to the living room, which was shut at the time, no doubt to prevent his escape. Such was the ferocity of your attack that two knives were broken in the course of it. He suffered 23 separate knife inflicted injuries and must have been terrified as they were inflicted and it was clear he could not get away. These injuries alone show an intent to kill. I reject the account given by you, Boboc, to the police, that Mr McKenzie had tried to rape you and threatened you with a knife. Save for a bite to your finger you were completely without injury. I reject your suggestion made to the police that a drug of some kind was put into your drink. No drug was revealed in the toxicological results relating to you. The attack on Mr McKenzie was not done by a man whose actions were inhibited by a "date rape" drug.

12. I also reject the account, Chers, that you gave in a prepared statement to the police that you were first attacked by Mr Pramanik and acted in self-defence at that point. There was no element of self-defence in the attack upon him. True it is that you received a bite mark, no doubt as you held him, but you suffered no further injury yourself as opposed to the 46 injuries suffered by Mr Pramanik. He too must have been terrified as he no doubt saw what was happening to Mr McKenzie and realised

he could not get away from the two of you.

13. The pathologist in this case, Dr Cook, could not rule out that some of the injuries caused to both of your victims were caused by abuse – that is to say torture. However she could not be sure of it. For that reason I cannot be sure of it but the location of injuries, including a penetrating knife wound to the eyeball of Mr McKenzie, and the pain and suffering they must have caused is a factor I take into account in coming to the minimum term. I have no difficulty in finding that both men endured mental and physical suffering at your hands.
  
14. The ferocity of your attack on these men did not end with their deaths. A 32 cm vertical wound was inflicted on the dead body of Mr Pramanik which revealed and cut into some of his internal organs. It was reminiscent of the work at the abattoir in relation to pigs. A vertical wound was inflicted to the leg of Mr McKenzie after his death. In addition expanding foam was coming from Mr Pramanik's nostril, something the pathologist believed had been placed there in life but could not exclude had occurred after death. You sprayed both men's bodies extensively with black paint.
  
15. Thereafter you engaged in a detailed clearing up operation, something of which you Chers were later proud, taking steps to remove forensic evidence by spraying black paint on surfaces and washing walls and floors. When you finally left the house you stole a significant amount of property belonging to Mr McKenzie.
  
16. You took the phones of your victims which you disposed of along with knives you had used and the clothes Chers that you had been wearing. The following morning you Chers thoroughly cleaned your car in a bid to remove any incriminating evidence. You had no intention at that time of handing yourself in.

17. Notwithstanding those efforts you Boboc told your partner and aunt when you got home that you had killed a man. You confirmed it the following day. Rather than seek to help you flee they each told you to hand yourself in. It was your aunt who acted entirely appropriately when she called the police the following day. Thereafter you both directed them to 20 Wood Street. It was you Chers who rightly described what they were to find as a “horror movie”.

18. On that night in September last year you took the lives of these two men in a particularly cruel and savage way. I have heard impact statements read to me today. No one could fail to be deeply moved by what is said in them. I only summarise them now but I assure the friends and family of both men that I have listened carefully to every word.

a. Denzil McKenzie was a much loved family man. His daughters who are still young and those who knew him speak of a quiet, peaceful kind-hearted and humble man who was calm and dependable. He was plainly a good father who enjoyed a special relationship with his daughters, Cassie and Shakira. They have been left bereft and anxious as they try to face life without his love support and guidance. Other members of his family including his ex-wife, sister-in-law and nephew speak of the sleepless nights and continual nightmares since his murder which took place in a much-loved family home where for many years happy memories were made. They struggle with the trauma and pain of his loss. A family friend Mr Withy speaks of the warmth of their friendship, their shared love of food and cooking, the nightmares he has suffered, and his pain in trying to come to terms with his friend’s death.

b. Farhad Pramanik’s sister speaks of him as fun, loving, kind and honest who always put his family first. He studied hard and had a bright future ahead of him. A future that you robbed. He worked for the NHS and regularly sent money to his family in Bangladesh, becoming the main money earner for the family. His parents are devastated by his death and his entire family struggle to understand and come to terms with it and the

way that it came about. They are in the words of his sister condemned to a life of pain and sorrow.

- c. You must each face the consequences of your actions in the punishment that I impose upon you today. I recognise that such punishment cannot bring either man back. Those who loved and cherished them must live forever with their loss.

19. I turn to your sentences.

20. In coming to the appropriate minimum term for each of you I must first decide where this case falls within Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020. I consider that in the case of both of you it falls within paragraph 3(1) in that the seriousness of the combination of the murders is particularly high. I have come to that conclusion for the following reasons:

- a. You each murdered two men;
- b. The theft of items in the house after the killings indicates that these murders were at least in part done for gain;

21. The evidence does not lead me to be sure that these murders were motivated or aggravated by hostility on the part of either of you relating to the actual or perceived sexual orientation of either of your victims. I do not sentence you on that basis.

22. The offences are in my view aggravated by:

- a. An element of planning; if that fell short of significant, in my view it was by no great margin.
- b. That the attack on Mr McKenzie was in his own home where he and his guest were entitled to feel safe;

- c. The number of injuries to each victim in savage attacks;
- d. By reason of multiple assaults and the sites and nature of injuries, there must have been a considerable degree of mental and physical suffering before death even if not for long duration;
- e. The use of knives which I have found were taken to the scene;
- f. The injuries inflicted after death;
- g. The extent of the cleaning up operation.

23. In the case of each of you the offences are mitigated by your lack of relevant convictions. I treat you both as men of previous good character, although that can carry little weight in a case such as this.

24. Boboc – I take into account all that Mr Langdon KC has said on your behalf:

- a. First you were relatively young at the time of the murders – some 20 years of age. You have had problems in your life, I have already referred to your gambling issues and have heard that you made attempts on your life in Romania in 2019. These factors can't begin to mitigate your actions in this case. I have seen nothing that would lead me to conclude that your maturity was other than would be expected of a man of your age.
- b. You pleaded guilty to the murder of Denzil McKenzie. That was on the day of the first trial although I accept you had indicated a wish to do so prior to that date. Medical reports were being sought upon you and there were some reasons why that guilty plea had not been tendered before that time. You will receive credit for that plea. However, in deciding the amount of credit to be afforded I must also bear in mind that I am in addition sentencing you for the murder of Mr Pramanik which of itself merits a minimum term of significant length. I will reflect your guilty plea



to count 1 in the overall minimum term that I impose.

25. Chers – I take into account all that Mr Smith KC has said on your behalf:

- a. It is plain you have worked hard over the years.
- b. That you do not speak English which makes your incarceration more difficult and I recognise that you have served time on remand with restrictions in detention by reason of covid. These factors can have little impact on the sentences for offences such as these.

26. The sentence I impose upon each of you in respect of each count is one of life imprisonment. In coming to the minimum term I step back to look at the total sentences to ensure that they reflect the overall seriousness of the offences.

27. Boboc - Taking into account all of the aggravating and mitigating factors as exist and your guilty plea to count 1 in my judgment the appropriate term in your case is one of 37 ½ years.

28. Chers – Again taking into account all of the aggravating and mitigating factors as exist in my judgment the appropriate term is one of 39 years.

29. Stand up both of you –

30. Boboc - for each of the murders of Denzil McKenzie and Farhad Pramanik I sentence you to life imprisonment. You will serve a minimum term of 37½ years less the 463 days you have served on remand on each of counts 1 and 2 concurrent.

31. Chers – for the murders of Denzil McKenzie and Farhad Pramanik I sentence you to life imprisonment. You will serve a minimum term of 39 years less the 463 days you have served on remand for each of counts 1 and 2 concurrent.

32. Thereafter it will be for the Parole Board to decide when, if ever, either of you should be released. If you are ever released you will remain on licence for the rest of your lives.

33. I do not make any deprivation orders in this case.

34. If the surcharge applies it will be drawn up in the appropriate amount.