

Greek ambassador Papadopoulou donates medical apparatus in Bitola

Bitola, – Head of Greek Liaison Office in the Republic of Macedonia Alexandra Papadopoulou Saturday donated medical apparatus worth 150.000 euros to Clinical Hospital in Bitola.

Deputy Health Minister Vladimir Popovski attended the donation ceremony.

The donation consists of colour Doppler ultra-

sound diagnostic apparatus, mammogram and apparatus for bone density measurement.

- This donation represents an important part of our goal which is improvement of the health of our citizens. Donated apparatus will enable modernisation of the medical diagnostic and better treatment of the patients from the entire region, Deputy Health Minister Popovski said.

Ambassador Papadopoulou was accompanied by the representatives of the Health Ministry who agreed mutual educational meetings with colleagues of the Republic of Macedonia.

- This donation is a confirmation of good-neighbourly relations and wish for further cooperation in every sphere in development of the state, Ambassador Papadopoulou said.

Australia denies residency for dad of boy with Down syndrome

SYDNEY, Australia (AP) -- Thirteen-year-old Lukas Moeller has Down syndrome. His father is a doctor who came to Australia from Germany to help fill a shortage of physicians in rural communities.

Bernhard and Isabella Moeller and their son Lukas moved to Australia from Germany two years ago.

But now Australia has rejected Dr. Bernhard Moeller's application for residency, saying Lukas does not meet the "health requirement" and would pose a burden on taxpayers for his medical care, education and other services.

The case has provoked an outcry in the rural region of southeastern Victoria state, where Moeller is the only internal medicine specialist for a community of 54,000 people. Residents rallied outside Moeller's practice this week, demanding that the decision be overturned, and hundreds of Internet and radio complaints from across the country bombarded media outlets Friday.

Moeller vowed to fight the immigration department ruling.

"We like to live here, we have settled in well, we are welcomed by the community here, and we don't want to give up just because the federal government doesn't welcome my son," he said Friday.

The doctor has powerful supporters. Victoria Premier John Brumby has pledged to support the family's appeal, and federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon said Friday that she would speak to the immigration minister about the case.

Moeller moved to Australia two years ago with his wife, Isabella, their daughter, Sarah, 21, and sons Lukas and Felix, 17, to help fill a critical need for doctors in rural areas. They settled in Horsham, a town of 20,000 about 100 miles northwest of Melbourne.

Moeller's temporary work visa is valid until 2010, but his application for permanent residence was rejected this week.

In its decision, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship cited Lukas' "existing medical condition," saying it was "likely to result in a significant and ongoing cost to the



Australian community," according to a statement Thursday.

"This is not discrimination. A disability in itself is not grounds for failing the health requirement -- it is a question of the cost implications to the community," the statement said.

Moeller said immigration authorities did not take into account the family's ability to provide Lukas with the care he needs.

"They think he is a burden for the Australian community," Moeller told Melbourne radio station 3AW. "But we are absolutely able to support him, and I don't want him to rely on any government pension anyway. He's well looked after. And actually, he can contribute to the community here. He already is contributing to it."

Immigration officials "weren't even interested in what we have done and are able to do for him," the doctor added.

Moeller said Lukas attends a mainstream elementary school, where he has an aide, and receives speech therapy. The boy also plays soccer, cricket, golf and table tennis.

Cora Halder, head of the Down Syndrome InfoCenter in Germany, called the decision outlandish.

"The case with the Australian authorities is disappointing and unacceptable, especially because Australia has very

advanced programs for people with Down syndrome, far more than in Germany," she said.

David Tolleson, executive director of the Atlanta, Georgia-based National Down Syndrome Congress, agreed.

"What is the cost implication to the community of a doctor shortage?" Tolleson asked. "I assume the son had the same costs for the last two years, and they were happy to have the family and use the dad as a doctor."

Down syndrome, caused by an extra chromosome, is characterized by mental retardation of varying degrees. Those with the condition also can have other problems: Nearly half will have a heart defect, some serious enough to require surgery soon after birth.

Trig Palin, the 6-month-old son of U.S. vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, has Down syndrome, and she has pledged to shift billions of dollars to programs for children with special needs if she is elected.

Tolleson said that people with Down syndrome have a spectrum of abilities.

"Some need more support, some go on to graduate from college with a four-year degree, and most are somewhere in between," he said.

Of the Australian decision, he said, "I would seriously hope they would rethink their policy and rethink the benefits which a person would bring to

the community, not the least of which is the dad."

Moeller made the same argument, noting that his qualifications were benefiting Australia at no cost to taxpayers.

"I am a specialist in internal medicine, and I am the only one here. This is a crucial service for the area," he told 3AW. "I'm a qualified, well-trained professional, and I came here without the Australian community having to pay anything for me to get this qualification."

Don McRae, director of clinical services at Wimmera Health Care Group, said the hospital had invested a lot of time and energy in recruiting Moeller.

"It's distressing for Dr. Moeller's family and distressing for the community who have welcomed him and relied on his medical services," he said.

Australia's immigration minister, Chris Evans, has no power to intervene in the case until after it is appealed to the Migration Review Tribunal or a court upholds the department's decision.

But Roxon, the health minister, said, "There is a valid reason for this doctor and his family to be eligible to stay here in Australia."

"As a government, we understand the importance of having doctors working in our rural and regional communities, and we support them in many ways and continue to do this," she said.

Neighbors in Bad Driburg, about 130 miles from Cologne in western Germany, where the Moellers lived before emigrating, recalled the family's excitement at moving to Australia, which they had fallen in love with while on a vacation.

"They were fine people," said Caecilia Thormann, a former neighbor, adding that Lukas "was a friendly boy, a very friendly child."

Australia's immigration department said it appreciates Moeller's contribution to the community but said it must follow the relevant laws in considering residency applications.

"If we did not have a health requirement, the costs to the community and health system would not be sustainable," the statement said.