

PRESS RELEASE

Prosecutor's office files indictment in the „Hableány-case”

Public Prosecutor's Office of Budapest Districts VI-VII indicted the Ukrainian captain for reckless misconduct in waterborne traffic leading to mass casualties and for 35 counts of failure to provide assistance.

According to the indictment, the defendant, a 64-year-old Ukrainian man, has been sailing on the Danube since 1975. The defendant has been licensed as a captain since 1989. He has been working as a ship captain for a Swiss company since 2000. The man is also qualified for operating radio and radar equipment for ships.

The defendant left port “Akadémia” with a cruise ship residing on the left bank of district V in the evening hours of 29th May 2019, moving up north in the direction of Margit Bridge.

The captain was sailing the ship in a rainstorm, in heavy river traffic, amidst reduced visibility with street-lighting on both banks of the Danube. However, it was possible to see even with the naked eye within 1 km.

The tour boat “Hableány” was also cruising in a similar direction with thirty-three South Korean citizens, a captain and a one-man crew on board. The smaller ship passed the cruise ship from the left in front of the Parliament. Afterwards, it was cruising in front of the vessel, so it had the right of way while sailing under Margit Bridge. Despite this, the defendant, who was navigating the bigger ship, started to accelerate. During this time, for five minutes, the position, the direction and the speed of “Hableány” was clearly visible for the naked eye, and the ship could also be seen on the screen showing location data.

Furthermore, the defendant must have been aware that he would get dangerously close to “Hableány” and the two ships would collide if he continued to steer his ship in the same direction with the same speed. However, the captain failed to pay adequate attention, and he did not concentrate on the steering of the ship for several minutes, therefore, he did not keep safe distance, and he did not transmit radio and sound signals required for an overtake.

As a result of the conduct of the defendant, the cruise ship hit the rear end of “Hableány” under Margit Bridge, the smaller ship was turned by the vessel, and for a short time, the vessel was thrusting the smaller ship forward. In the end, the vessel pressed down the smaller ship. “Hableány” went completely underwater in thirty seconds and then sank. The thirty-five people being on board got into the water.

Despite the fact that he had participated in proper trainings and had led several rescue exercises in April and May 2019, the defendant did not render adequate aid to the thirty-five victims whose lives were in immediate danger.

In the accident, which was the result of the emergency situation, two Hungarian and twenty-five South Korean citizens died, one South Korean national is still being searched by the authorities.

The rescue operations were coordinated by the Counter Terrorism Centre with great expertise, the investigation was conducted by the Budapest Police Headquarters with exceptional thoroughness. The documents of the investigation are up to fourteen volumes and are more than ten thousand pages long.

The Public Prosecutor's Office of Budapest Districts VI-VII indicted the Ukrainian captain for reckless misconduct in waterborne traffic leading to mass casualties and for 35 counts of failure to provide assistance. The indictment was filed with the Central District Court of Pest.

According to the indictment the crimes with which the defendant is charged are punishable from two to eleven years of imprisonment as a cumulative sentence.

If the defendant pleads guilty during the preliminary hearing and waives his right to trial, the district prosecutor's office proposes the district court to sentence the defendant to nine years of imprisonment and to impose a nine-year suspension of driving privileges regarding water vehicles.