

The Riis family lawyer goes berserk with estate

- He demands close to 40 out of the 55 million NOK of the settlement
- He sues Sarkozy and Prince Albert II
- He stabbed me in the back, says his client

Berserk with estate

Crime: Herman Berge wants close to 40 of the 55 million NOK of Amelia Riis' settlement. Now he has also sued Nicolas Sarkozy and Prince Albert II for billions on behalf of the Riis-family.

by KJETIL SAETER

Amelia Riis (78) fought for 30 years to get back the money she says was stolen from her in the inheritance proceedings after her mother's death. Lawyer Herman Berge (44) now says he should have almost 40 out of the 55 million NOK she received in the record settlement with the State.

- He stabbed me in the back, says Amelia Riis.

Monaco

Amelia and her two children have now fought against Berge for over 2 years to get access to the inheritance left by Amelia's husband, Einar Riis, who died in 2006. Einar Riis lived in Monaco, and Berge claims he is the executor of the estate.

He has presented to the courts in Monaco several documents signed by Amelia and Einar Riis which he means prove his rights. All these documents have been rejected by the Norwegian courts. But Berge, who announced his move to Luxembourg in March 2007 – shortly after Amelia Riis denounced him – doesn't give up. He wants that money, and he will not back down in front of the Norwegian courts. Two years ago Berge demanded a payment of 27.9 million NOK. from the estate. When the Norwegian television channel TV2 confronted him about this demand, he claimed that he had withdrawn it. He had not.

What is the police doing?

Berge has already earned plenty of money from Amelia Riis. Finansavisen has documents showing that he has received more than 10 million NOK from the Riis couple after the settlement. The sum also includes a supposed investment in a Norwegian company. Very little of this sum appears in his tax statements, something that the Norwegian Internal Revenue Service is well aware of, according to Finansavisen. If one adds to this sum the amount that Berge has demanded in Monaco, this 44-year old man thinks he has a right to almost 40 out of the 55 million NOK that Amelia Riis fought for 30 years to recuperate. Amelia has gone through the lengthy proceedings of the Norwegian courts to claim her right. Several of Finansavisen's

sources who know Berge think that the police should now intervene. Helge Elvebakk, who supported the Riis couple for several years in one of the many other lawsuits they were involved in thinks that the police should have intervened long ago: “Berge runs away with the money. Then he leaves the country conveniently without the Financial Crime Authority (Oekokrim) lifting a finger. This is incredible”, he concludes. Oekokrim is not investigating Berge, they inform Finansavisen.

Tired of the struggle

Amelia Riis has had enough. She is tired of money, lawsuits, journalists and lawyers. But what she is the most tired of is Herman Berge. During half of her 78 year long life she has fought to get her mother’s money back. She could have become very rich twice, but has been repeatedly swindled by people she trusted. She says she is not bitter, though. “When it comes to the money I am quite indifferent,” she says with disarming simplicity. But she is not indifferent to all the lawsuits started by Berge on behalf of her husband’s estate.

Sarkozy and Prince Albert

In a new request to appear before the European Court in Luxembourg, Berge demands on behalf of the estate the payment of 200 million Euros (1,8 billion NOK) from the French state, president Sarkozy personally, and Prince Albert II of Monaco. The reason for this demand is an airplane accident in Italy in 1980 (see below) and what Berge defines as inhuman treatment and torture suffered by himself.

“This completely absurd, but we have been forced to write to the defendants that Berge does not have any power of attorney to represent the estate”, says Amelia Riis.

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[1] Wants money from Riis: Herman Berge wants 40 of the 55 million NOK Amelia Riis was granted from the State in the record settlement of 2003.

[2] Nicolas Sarkozy has been sued by Herman Berge supposedly on behalf of Einar Riis’ estate.

[3] Sued: Prince Albert II of Monaco has been sued by Herman Berge, supposedly on behalf of Einar Riis’ estate.

[4] Demands the lion share of the Riis settlement – Oekokrim should intervene. Tired of the battle: Amelia Riis is tired of fighting about money. Now she would like to end all trials so that she can live her last years in peace. Herman Berge, the old family friend, disagrees.

Amelia Riis has been forced to open a website – ameliariis.no – where she warns in Norwegian, English and French against Herman Berge’s actions on behalf of the estate.

Panicked

The last chapter of the story has yet to be written. Even though Amelia Riis now has Norwegian court decisions in her favor, this does not mean that the courts in Monaco

and Luxembourg will automatically accept them. She must therefore pay lawyers in both countries in the fight against the former family friend.

- Why does he do this to you?

“I think that he panicked when my son asked him to see the detailed account of what sums he had received from us. The strange thing is that we never said we would not pay him.”

Herman Berge's allegations

Herman Berge has publicly made several sensational allegations. Below is a shortened list with “the best” of such allegations:

- Einar Riis was one of the biggest arms dealers in the world;
- Einar Riis was murdered with poison;
- A Danish citizen with ties to the Norwegian Secret Services supposedly offered Berge many million NOK to keep away from the Riis-case;
- “We have now found the thread that leads to the illegal financing of Okkupasjonberedskapet (National Organization for resistance in case of invasion) in Switzerland. This represents such amounts that the Norwegian Oil Fund – I can't say for sure – might be considered as a very dark shadow”.

The Amelia Riis case

- Amelia Riis' brother, Kristoffer Olsen jr., became director and new partner of the shipping company Olsen & Ugelstad after the death of their father in 1948. The disagreements between brother and sister became apparent since 1950.
- After the father's death, the mother was in charge of the unpartitioned estate, while Kristoffer Olsen jr. ran the companies. After the mother's death in 1970, the mother's estate remained undistributed.
- Amelia Riis has always thought that the court unfairly permitted Kristoffer Olsen jr. to handle the distribution of the property, and that this decision was not in the better interest of the heirs. Large values were lost.
- In 1978 Amelia Riis and her husband Einar Riis sued the State. In February 2001 – 23 years later – the court in Oslo rendered the judgment that gave her partial victory and obligated the State to pay her an indemnity of 43 million NOK. The State appealed the judgment, but later accepted the settlement.
- Amelia Riis has also started other trials, among them against the bankruptcy court for Hilmar Reksten.

Berge was not a determining factor

Herman Berge claims it was him who reached the record settlement with the State of 55 million NOK. in favor of Amelia Riis. This is incorrect, says Odd Einar Doerum.

Odd Einar Doerum was Chief of the Justice Department when the State and the Riis family agreed on a settlement in 2003. It was Doerum who decided to settle on behalf of the State. “Herman Berge was absolutely not significant for the settlement” he

says. Doerum states that it was the decision from Oslo City Court that was crucial for the settlement, together with the length of this process. Doerum almost goes so far as to mention that Berge's actions risked reversing the decision by dragging it out so long. "We showed great patience. We left the offer stand open a very long time" he says.

Not exactly idealistic

Berge was the law student who supposedly sacrificed a golden career to attack the country's legal elite. He was the unafraid idealist who obtained Norway's history's largest settlement with the State in favor of an aging and fatigued couple. This was the story Herman Berge (44) sold to the public, and this was the story that the public largely bought. But the truth is another.

As Berge himself writes to a judge in Monte Carlo (Monaco) in conjunction with his claim against the Einar Riis estate: "Even though I am an idealist, I did not do this just for the fun of it. Yes, I sacrificed a normal life, but of course in exchange for a possible victory with a very gratifying economical advantage."

Took the credit

Finansavisen has large amounts of documents showing that Herman Berge had a rather modest role in the settlement. The determining case against the State was prepared and handled by lawyer Ole Kristian Aaboe-Evensen in the Oslo City Court in the fall of 2001. When the State appealed the court's decision, it was the same Aaboe-Evensen who, after the change in government, laid the foundation for the settlement by writing personal letters to the leaders of the opposition before the election in 2001. It was also Aaboe-Evensen who later received the draft for the settlement from the State's lawyer, a draft that is essentially identical to the agreement that Berge has taken the credit for having negotiated after Aaboe-Evensen retired from the case.

Incomprehensible

Odd Einar Doerum is outraged to hear that Amelia Riis has still not been able to access the money from the settlement. "That the money belonging to the couple should have ended up somewhere else defies my understanding. The people who decided to settle the case were hoping that the couple might enjoy some good years towards the end of their life. I hope that justice is carried out in full, and that she does get to enjoy some good days" says Doerum.

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[1] Justice: "I hope that justice is carried out in full, and that Mrs. Riis will be able to enjoy some good days" says Odd Einar Doerum, who took the decision to settle the case on behalf of the State.

[2] "Won the case": Lawyer Ole Kristian Aaboe-Evensen has prepared and handled the process which led to the settlement with the State, a settlement that Herman Berge takes credit for.

Big damage

Shortly before Herman Berge was meant to go to court for a client, it turned out he lacked the authorization to proceed as court lawyer.

It is not only the Riis family who has unfinished business with Herman Berge. Right before he was supposed to show up before court to try a case against the State on behalf of Vidar and Morten Strandskogen, he suddenly retired. The family Strandskogen owned the chain of stores selling Bredo television sets until its bankruptcy in 1989. They said the bankruptcy was not right and that the handling of the liquidation was marred by corruption. Therefore they sued the State for 60 million NOK. Berge was a lawyer in Ingjald Oerbeck Soerheim's office. Soerheim had hired Berge on Einar Riis's advice. Soerheim had worked for the Strandskogen family for several years on other cases.

"Shortly before the case came up before the Oslo City Court in May 2004, I received a telephone call from the court. It turns out Berge had not received authorization to work as a lawyer in my office" says Soerheim. The reason was, amongst other things, that in a short time had managed to incur 6 irregularities that he had never informed me of. When I confronted him with the fact that the authorization had really been withdrawn, he retired from the case. I told him he could not abandon his clients like that, but he just blamed others" said Soerheim.

"Berge caused a great damage to Strandskogen by causing this case to be stopped" says the lawyer.

The Ustica mystery

The DC-9 plane was approaching Palermo airport. Suddenly the plane disappeared from the radars. Flight 870 from Bologna to Palermo disappeared in the water outside the Italian island Ustica on June 27, 1980. All 81 people on board died. But why did the plane crash? That question has haunted the Italian public for almost 30 years, but without answers.

Journalists, writers, filmmakers and others who have researched the accident are reasonably sure that the plane was shot down, and that the whole incident was something nobody wants to take responsibility for.

The conflict between NATO and Libya was quite intense, and several Italian media have announced that there were Libyan MiG-fighter planes in the Italian airspace when the passenger flight went down. The theory is that a rocket from a NATO plane hit the passenger flight instead of one of the Libyan fighters. This was never confirmed by the Italian defense or NATO. Italy's ex-president, Francesco Cossiga, said earlier this year to the Italian media that there was supposedly a French fighter plane that launched the rocket which might have hit the passenger flight. The target was a plane that supposedly carried the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Einar Riis was part owner of the company that owned the plane. This is what Berge bases his billion NOK claim against the French State on.

Amelia Riis and her two children distance themselves from this claim.

Spreading rumors

Herman Berge uses the Internet to spread grave accusations against the Riis family and a series of well known politicians and legal figures. The site YouTube presents dozens of home videos where Herman Berge attacks the Riis family. Berge also airs at times grave accusations against famous people like Gro Harlem Brundtland and Jens Stoltenberg. Pretending to unveil power misuse and secret networks, Berge also uses his own website Rettsnorge to vent serious and mostly undocumented accusations against judges, politicians and lawyers.

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