

'Belgrade' Sanctioned Zugic Killing

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The murder of a senior Montenegrin official fuels tensions between Belgrade and Podgorica

Belgrade ordered the assassination of Montenegrin presidential security adviser, Goran Zugic, senior officials in Podgorica believe.

Vice president of the of the Montenegrin parliament, Rifat Rastoder, accused Belgrade of a classic Serbian-style political assassination designed to stoke up already simmering tensions between the two republics.

"Since this outrageous crime happened at the height of the crisis between Serbia and Montenegro, I am afraid it is a desperate attempt to transfer 'revolver politics' from Serbia to Montenegro," he said.

Zugic, one of President Milo Djukanovic's closest associates, was killed in front of his flat, near the centre of Podgorica, on Wednesday night. He was shot several times in chest and head. In the wake of the killing, police detained several hundred people. So far nobody has been charged with the murder.

Addressing a memorial service for Zugic the day after his assassination, Djukanovic declared that the killer has "committed a terrorist act against the democracy in Montenegro and against the safety of its citizens."

The president said that the murder would not dissuade Montenegro from pursuing its goal of independence. "Nothing will stop or discourage us from our policy of turning Montenegro into a stable and democratic country."

Senior Montenegrin officials believe Belgrade ordered the murder. They suspect it was politically motivated and intended to provoke a confrontation with Podgorica.

Belgrade's response to the killing appears to give their conviction some credence. The Federal Minister for Information, Goran Matic, suggested that anti-terrorism legislation to be introduced in Serbia, to combat Otpor activists, may be extended to Montenegro following the assassination. The law would be used by Milosevic to pressure Djukanovic.

Signs of escalation in the conflict between Belgrade and Podgorica were evident before the killing. The Yugoslav army ordered its officers to 'deal' with opponents of the Federal leadership, namely Otpor which has given the Djukanovic government strong support.

It was no coincidence that the order was issued a matter of days before local elections in Montenegro. The June 11 poll is a significant test of support for Milosevic and Djukanovic in the tiny republic.

If, as the last public opinion survey shows, the pro-Milosevic's SNP loses, Djukanovic will have a stronger case for calling an early referendum on independence. It's unclear, however, how the Zugic murder will affect the ballot.

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