

Comment: New Serbia 'Shields' Curuvija Killers

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Brother of prominent newspaper editor murdered during Milosevic era asks why new authorities never charged principal suspects.

Slavko Curuvija was my brother. An influential journalist in Yugoslavia, he owned two newspapers, the *Dnevni Telegraph* (Daily Telegraph) and the weekly *Evropljanin* (European). He was killed on April 11, 1999 during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia while Slobodan Milosevic was in power. His murder was the climax of a political campaign conducted against him by the then governing coalition comprising Milosevic's Socialists, his wife Mirjana Markovic's Yugoslav Left and Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party. To this day no one has been arrested or charged over the murder even though Milosevic is long gone.

During their election campaign the now ruling Democratic Opposition of Serbia, DOS, repeatedly said they would make a priority of my brother's murder and the kidnapping of the former Serbian president Ivan Stambolic. They pledged to identify and find those who had ordered the murders in their first hundred days in power. "The investigation is under way," they tell me when I inquire about the affair. But it has become almost impertinent today to continue to ask about Slavko's murder when the authorities are so pre-occupied with the reform process, the constitutional charter, the presidential election campaign and the fight against "anti-reformist hooligans".

Many of the people linked to my brother's death are still active in the media and parliament. Mirjana Markovic is still a parliamentary deputy, as is Seselj, a candidate for the Serbian presidency. Under the former regime, these people permitted their allies and supporters to organise an extraordinary campaign in the media against my brother before he was killed. The justice and police department personnel appointed by them ignored all my requests for an investigation of the murder when Milosevic was in power.

Relations between the Milosevic regime and *Dnevni Telegraph* had already become tense before 1998, when Yugoslavia first faced the threat of NATO bombing. But that is when the real campaign against Slavko began. On the night between October 10 and 11 *Dnevni Telegraph* was banned "until further notice". When the paper registered in Montenegro at the end of 1998 to avoid retaliation at the hands of the Belgrade authorities, they merely tightened border controls with Montenegro and seized any lorries transporting copies into Serbia.

After the bombing began on May 24, 1999 the atmosphere surrounding our family grew more ominous. Friends turned their backs on us. It became difficult to reach them and members and supporters of the regime in the media began calling Slavko a traitor and a lackey of the Americans. One such accusation was published days before my brother's murder in the daily *Politika Ekspres*. The article, headlined "Curuvija greets bombs", was tantamount to an invitation to lynch him. It was signed by Miroslav Markovic, no relation to Mirjana. The editor of the paper, Djordje Martic, later said it had been written on the suggestion of Dragan Hadzi Antic, editor-in-chief of *Politika*, *Politika Ekspres*'s senior partner. Antic and the Milosevic family were inseparable. The article was read out on all state television prime-time news broadcasts. As Slavko told us, "Every fool now has a license to kill me."

It was not until later that I realised the real goal of this media campaign was to prepare the public for a well-planned murder. Today Miroslav Markovic works in *Politika*'s archive department. Slavko was killed five days after his piece was published. He was shot in broad daylight while entering his apartment building with his wife Branka.

Our family has never uncovered the truth about what happened even though it has been two years since the new government came to power. Hopes that his killers might be caught were initially high after the Milosevic regime fell. A document entitled "Curan" (turkey cock) surfaced in October 2000, which we thought would speed up an investigation. Some anonymous member of Serbian state security had

forwarded the three-page document to Natasa Kandic, head of the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade. She immediately called a press conference.

The document caused a tremendous stir among the public. The text described the last few moments of my brother's life. He had apparently been placed under state security surveillance without his knowledge. But its agents had been withdrawn minutes before Slavko was shot. A short typewritten note submitted with the document explained that "Curan" was Slavko's pseudonym and that the order to place Slavko under surveillance had been issued by Rade Markovic - also no relation to Mirjana - who was head of the Serbian interior ministry, MUP, and Milosevic's right-hand man.

The latter had then conveyed the order to Milan Radonjic, chief of state security in Belgrade. The document said Markovic and Radonjic had then withdrawn the operatives on purpose on the day of the killing "so that they would not see the assassins, three men who fled the scene of the crime driving off in a white car, Golf 3". This was the first time information about the number of assassins and the get-away car had surfaced. As soon as the document surfaced, the Humanitarian Law Centre filed criminal charges against Markovic over his involvement in Slavko's murder.

But neither Markovic nor Radonjic were charged over my brother's death. Instead, they were arrested last summer for revealing state secrets and each jailed for a year. In the meantime, proceedings have been launched against them for the murder of three officials of the then opposition party, the Serbian Renewal Movement, on the Ibarska Highway in October 1999. That trial is now underway. The authorities have never reacted to the information revealed in the "Curan" document.

On January 21, my lawyer we filed criminal charges against Rade Markovic, Radonjic and Mirjana Markovic for my brother's murder.

I have contacted Djindjic several times in connection with the case. The first time, in November 2000, after the opposition took power, I wrote concerning reported claims that he possessed information on Slavko's murder and that it would be resolved within three months. I wrote again in May 2001 asking for the people accused of issuing the orders for Slavko's murder to be tried. Again I received no reply.

Sinisa Simic, the deputy public prosecutor who handled the case in the district public prosecutor's office under the Milosevic regime, and who ignored my pleas for new information, was promoted under the new regime to head the aforementioned office. Stevan Nikcevic, deputy chief of the Belgrade state security department that organised Slavko's surveillance, became deputy of the federal police chief Zoran Zivkovic and was recently appointed general director of Yugoimport, a company accused last month of smuggling arms to Iraq.

The state security members who know the identity of Slavko's killers and executed the orders issued by the former regime are still employees of the Serbian secret service. The chances of any of the guilty men and women behind my brother's murder being charged are slim while they still hold prominent public positions. The least that the new government should have done was to have removed from office. So far, not even that small step towards uncovering the truth has been taken.

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