

Noose Around Markovic Tightens

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Mirjana Markovic, the wife of Hague indictee Slobodan Milosevic, could soon find herself under arrest.

Serbia's authorities "waited for the dust to settle" following the extradition of Slobodan Milosevic, before launching an official investigation into the activities of his wife, Mirjana Markovic, IWPR has learned.

A Belgrade police source says that Markovic has been under investigation for months for alleged involvement in war crimes, embezzlement and the suspected murder of the newspaper editor Slavko Curuvija. "Things are done in stages," said the source, "but the arrest will certainly follow."

An IWPR source in the Belgrade judiciary confirmed the claim, adding that a number of potential witnesses had been questioned.

Deputy Prosecutor Sinisa Simic, who heads the criminal justice department in the Belgrade District Prosecutor's Office, told IWPR that he had asked the police to interview Markovic last November.

"I submitted the request because of the investigation into the murder of Slavko Curuvija," Simic said. Curuvija, who edited Dnevni Telegraph (Daily Telegraph) and the Evropljanin (European), was killed on 6 April 1999 as the first NATO bombs fell on Belgrade. Three days earlier, Markovic had "incited" the publication of a column entitled "Curuvija

Invites Bombs," in the daily Politika Express.

"Several days ago, Dragan Karleusa, head of the police dealing with crime in Belgrade, told me the investigation was progressing and that I would soon be notified about it," Simic said.

According to IWPR sources, the police already have sufficient evidence to pursue a prosecution. They have been held back from making an arrest because of political fears that the public would consider it persecution of the Milosevic family.

Markovic is the only member still unaffected by court proceedings. The district court in Pozarevac is investigating her son Marko for abusing members of Otpor. And her daughter Marija is under investigation for firing an unlicensed gun after her father was arrested.

Her passport was also confiscated, making it impossible for her to accompany her mother to The Hague to visit Slobodan this week.

Senior officials in the Yugoslav Left, JUL, the party Markovic heads, also believe her arrest is in the pipeline. JUL spokeswoman Dragana Kuzmanovic said she was unaware of any investigation against Markovic, but said that police had harassed her party colleagues for months.

"There is a witch hunt going on," she said. "Police enter colleagues' homes, take them into custody and keep them there for as long as two months."

A lawyer, who frequently defends JUL members, but preferred not to give his name, suspects that the detention of Markovic's former associates is part of the police process of collecting evidence against her.

"Mirjana Markovic appointed her associates as heads of ministries, institutions and state-owned companies," he said, "and then allowed them to do what they wanted. There were many abuses." The proceeds allegedly went either into private pockets, or to finance the JUL.

Official investigations have been launched against Bratislava Morina, former minister for refugees, suspected of embezzling over 660,000 German marks; and against Nikola Mitrovic, the former director of the Institute for Radiology and Oncology, suspected of fraud in the import of cancer medications.

Nebojsa Maljkovic and Milovan Djurovic could also be dangerous witnesses against Markovic. Both were arrested on October 5 and quit the JUL shortly after.

Maljkovic, former director of the state-owned Dunav Insurance Company, is suspected of diverting company funds to the JUL election campaign, among other financial crimes. Djurovic, who once headed Alfa Plus and Globus Insurance, is similarly suspected of siphoning funds to the JUL, where he was chief of finance.

"All it would take to sink Markovic is for them to say that she asked them to abuse the companies' funds," said the lawyer.

There is little doubt that the arrested JUL members were offered a compromise plea. "That is the practice of the new authorities," said Dusan Masic, defence counsel of former secret police chief Radomir Markovic, at a recent press conference. "My client was specifically asked to confess everything he did so as to make it easier to collect evidence against Milosevic."

The most dangerous witness to confront Markovic on charges of war crimes and her role in the Croatian and Bosnian wars, is Serbia's deputy prime minister, Momcilo Perisic, who leads the Movement for Democratic Serbia. Perisic was Yugoslav army chief from 1994 to 1999 and stands accused of war crimes for ordering the shelling of Zadar in Croatia.

He was dismissed in 1998, allegedly because of Markovic. "She was his ardent enemy," one of his friends told IWPR. "The intolerance went to such extreme that she hurled insults at him in public. Perisic is a witness that Mirjana Markovic frequently attended meetings of the Supreme Defence Council where many important decisions were made. There are minutes and records confirming this."

Although Markovic remains the head of the JUL, the party virtually disintegrated after the October 5 uprising. Kuzmanovic says she rarely visits the party headquarters, but she remains involved in its affairs. "Mrs Markovic is under a lot of pressure because of everything that happened," said Kuzmanovic, "but she still has sufficient strength."

But not for long, judging by the swift-moving investigation now taking place in Belgrade.

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