

## **Witness Gives Milan Lukic Alibi**

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He said accused was in Belgrade on day he is alleged to have murdered Bosniaks in Visegrad. War crimes suspect Milan Lukic was not in the town of Visegrad at the time he is alleged to have begun committing atrocities there during the Bosnian war, according to the testimony of his first defence witness.

Witness Zeljko Markovic, who said he became friends with Lukic as a student during the 1980s, told the Hague tribunal he met Milan Lukic on the morning of June 8, 1992 in the Serbian capital.

Markovic said that the accused, who appeared to be in a hurry and very tense, told him he had just taken his mother to hospital and was about to drive some Bosniak friends to the southern Serbia town of Novi Pazar.

“He said he had driven his sick mother to Belgrade for a medical examination, that he had some Muslims from Visegrad or wherever staying at an apartment in Belgrade and that he was taking them to Novi Pazar,” said Markovic.

“He asked me if the route was safe.”

Lukic is accused of persecuting Muslims and other non-Serbs in Visegrad, eastern Bosnia, between June 7, 1992 and October 10, 1994. Milan Lukic – who is on trial alongside his cousin Sredoje Lukic – is also alleged to have murdered seven Bosniak men on the banks of the Drina river on or around June 7, 1992.

Under questioning by defence lawyer Dragan Ivetic, Markovic said Milan Lukic first rang him on June 7, having just arrived in Belgrade from Bosnia.

He said he remembered the precise date of Milan Lukic's phone call because it was his wedding anniversary, which he was celebrating with his wife and close friends in his house in Zemun, a suburb of Belgrade.

“I invited him to come and join us. He was reluctant because he didn't want to be in the way, so we agreed to meet the next day at 10 in the morning,” said Markovic.

He said he met Milan Lukic at the agreed time at the Cafe Index, where they used to meet as students. Milan Lukic left after about 15 or 20 minutes, he said.

The witness said he next heard from the accused when he called him on June 10. According to Markovic, Milan Lukic told him he was taking the Bosniaks to Novi Pazar himself.

Markovic had earlier described how he first met Milan Lukic in Belgrade in the Eighties.

“He was a paragon of gentleman-like behaviour. All the students who met him were enthusiastic about him,” said Markovic, adding that he and his three roommates regularly spent time with him.

“One was Montenegrin like me and two were Muslims,” said Markovic. “I never saw any traces of intolerance in him.”

Markovic said that he and Milan Lukic continued seeing each other socially until 1989, when Lukic went to Germany then Switzerland.

The witness next saw his friend when they took a trip to Bosnia together in 1992, soon after the outbreak of war, he said.

They met on May 5 at the Cafe Index, and Milan Lukic, who had recently returned from Switzerland, said he needed to take his ill mother from Visegrad to Belgrade and asked for help finding a vehicle, said Markovic.

He said he could remember the exact day of this meeting because it was the day before St George's Day, which he had been planning to spend in Montenegro.

“I told him I didn't have a car and the only thing I could do was to take him to a car rental shop I knew,” said Markovic.

Markovic, who by this time had become a policeman, said he changed into his uniform so the staff would recognise him and went to the car rental centre with Milan Lukic. While the latter agreed to leave 1,000 Swiss francs as a deposit, the owner of the rental centre said only Markovic could be a guarantor for the car.

“It became clear that I would have to go to Visegrad too, because the car was in my name,” said Markovic.

They set off the next day, and crossed the Serbia-Bosnia border.

Shortly before arriving in Visegrad, they reached a checkpoint and where Milan Lukic showed his documents. “I think it was a passport,” said the witness.

Milan Lukic was told by a policeman that he would have to register at the police station, he said.

The two then traveled to the police station, and Markovic said he stayed in the car until Milan Lukic came out about 45 minutes later dressed in police uniform.

“He said he had been mobilised into the reserve part of the police,” said Markovic.

"I didn't know what to do. I asked if I should fetch his mother. I could see he was upset. He told me that I should just go."

Prosecution lawyer Dermot Groome questioned Markovic on some specific aspects of his testimony.

"Is your evidence that May 6 was the first time Milan Lukic [returned to] Visegrad after living in Switzerland?" asked Groome.

"I don't know whether he had been there before; he may have," said Markovic, who added that the two of them never discussed the war in Bosnia.

The indictment alleges that Milan Lukic first returned to Visegrad in the spring of 1992, and formed a paramilitary group that terrorised local Muslims.

Groome then referred to Lukic's 1994 meeting with Markovic in Belgrade in June.

"Milan Lukic asked you whether it was safe to bring Muslims to Novi Pazar from Belgrade. Did he call you to ask if it was safe to bring Muslims to Belgrade from Visegrad?" asked Groome.

"No, he contacted me when he arrived in Belgrade," replied Markovic.

Groome also questioned Markovic about Lukic's mother's illness.

"Did she have medical tests arranged for the morning of June 8?" asked Groome.

Markovic replied that he did not know. On further questioning, he said that he was unaware as to what illness Milan Lukic's mother was suffering from or the nature of her medical examination.

Markovic also faced questioning from presiding Judge Patrick Robinson, who asked him why he had not gone to the authorities with the information he presented as soon as he heard about the indictment against Milan Lukic.

"The allegation is that he was at a particular place doing very bad things and you had information that he was somewhere else, so I'm asking why you didn't go to the authorities," said Judge Robinson.

Markovic replied that he thought the authorities knew everything and that he did not have any new information to give.

The case continues.

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**Location:** Serbia  
Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

**Topic:** Courtside

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**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/witness-gives-milan-lukic-alibi>