

Ante Marković prekinuo dvanaestogodišnje ćutanje

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Yugoslavia's last Prime Minister, Ante Markovic, broke a 12 year silence when he testified for the prosecution in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. He told the Court his program of democratic and economic reforms, which saved the country from hyperinflation and provided the last best hope for a peaceful transition, was undermined, obstructed and essentially destroyed by Serbia's former president, who sat in the dock to his left at the War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

The silver-haired former Prime Minister was the third witness to testify about the much-discussed Karadjordjevo meeting between Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman in March 1991. Following their meeting, Mr. Markovic initiated meetings with both presidents and confronted them separately with reports that they had agreed to divide up Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia, as well as removing him from his post. Milosevic, he said, quickly confirmed it. Milosevic argued that Bosnia-Herzegovina was Tito's artificial creation, and Muslims were converted Orthodox believers. Tudjman, when he finally admitted the plan, defended it, claiming Muslims were Catholics who had been forced to convert.

Mr. Markovic asked the same questions of both leaders, 'Do you think this will be so simple? Do you think you are able to do this without a bloodbath (blood up to your knees)?' "Didn't they think it would create a Palestine Bosnia-Herzegovina in which children would be born with a rifle in their hands and would die with a rifle in their hands?' Milosevic responded that Serbs and Croats made up the majority of Bosnia's population so there would be no conflict. Tudjman likewise denied it would lead to conflict, in his case because 'Europe would not allow a Muslim state in its heart.' Then he repeated a well-known saying, 'Bosnia falls quietly.'

The witness said he left each president, telling them he would fight against the division of Bosnia to the end and do everything in his power to prevent it. Milosevic repeated nothing would happen, but when Mr. Markovic insisted war would break out, he said only, 'Then we will see what we are going to do.' The witness testified that he told Alija Izetbegovic, President of Bosnia, about it sometime later. As for the agreement to remove Markovic as Prime Minister, each president blamed the other, but neither said they had opposed it.

Mr. Markovic, with extensive background in business, initiated a comprehensive program to stabilize the SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) which was in economic and social turmoil, experiencing unprecedented inflation up to 1000% per year. The program was aimed at democratization and economic reform. Milosevic opposed it and took a number of actions to undermine it. His reason, according to the witness: 'The Programme was an obstacle to Milosevic in his surge for absolute power in Yugoslavia. Introducing a multiparty system and elections in Yugoslavia would not allow Milosevic to stay in power.' Because of the initial success of the program, Mr. Markovic's popularity was high, which was also a threat to the Accused.

In one of his efforts to defeat Markovic's stabilization and reform program, Milosevic effected the illegal transfer of 2.5 billion Deutschmarks (US\$1.25 billion) from the National Bank of Yugoslavia to the National Bank of Serbia. Mr. Markovic called it the 'robbery of the century.' He told the Court this showed that Milosevic, who continually claimed he was fighting for Yugoslavia's interests, was really fighting for his own.

Immediately on discovering the theft, the former Prime Minister called Milosevic, who denied knowing anything about it. 'I was very sharp with him,' Mr. Markovic said. 'I said not a single detail in Serbia happens without his knowledge let alone daylight robbery.' Markovic called a special session of the government and ordered the Yugoslav National Bank to take vigorous steps to secure return of the money. Eventually a portion, though not all, of the funds were returned.

Over the period of Mr. Markovic's tenure, Milosevic secured control of the federal budget when he gained control of a majority in the Federal Assembly after the departure of Croatia and Slovenia. As a result, 81% of the proposed 1992 budget was for the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). For the federal Prime Minister the writing was on the wall. There was no way his program could succeed. In fact, the federal government was no longer functional. For the first time he found himself 'totally alone in Government.' He resigned on 20 December 1991.

The witness testified about his direct contacts with the Accused, as well. The first occurred after Milosevic

orchestrated the removal of his own mentor, Ivan Stambolic, from the presidency of Serbia. Milosevic asked if the Prime Minister could find a position for him, which he did. Later, when Milosevic decided Stambolic was interfering in Serbian affairs, he asked Mr. Markovic to oppose his reappointment. Markovic refused, and Milosevic cut off contact with him for several months. Punishment for thwarting his wishes was more important than that the government function, the witness told the Court.

Mr. Markovic provided a note of poignancy to these manipulations concerning Stambolic, who was a personal friend. During NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, Stambolic called him. 'Ante, I can see how things are developing,' Stambolic said. 'Though I have refused until now, I will have to become politically active.' A man generally respected for his integrity, he posed a potential threat to Milosevic's political power. Mr. Markovic added, 'It seems someone else understood this and that is why Stambolic disappeared.' His body was found in 2002. Milosevic and his wife have both been charged in Serbia with involvement in his murder.

The former Prime Minister's life was also under threat. He told the judges about narrowly escaping death when he was visiting Tudjman in his Zagreb palace in October of 1991. Shortly after lunching with Tudjman and Stipe Mesic in the dining room, a bomb exploded where they had been moments before. The projectile came from fast, high altitude JNA airplanes flying over the palace. Mr. Markovic believed he was the target. In his last weeks as Prime Minister in Belgrade, he slept with a pistol under his pillow.

By July 1991, he and others, including President Izetbegovic, knew Serbia was arming the Bosnian Serbs. The Bosnian President told him of an intercepted telephone conversation between Milosevic and Radovan Karadzic, leader of the Bosnian Serbs, which the Macedonian Foreign Minister brought to Belgrade and played for him. In it, Milosevic and Karadzic discussed preparations for war in Bosnia, including deployment of the army, procuring weapons and arming men. Though the foreign minister destroyed the tape, making it difficult for Markovic to convince the federal government of what he had heard, the Prosecutor played another copy in court. In it, Milosevic is clearly (and chillingly) heard giving Karadzic directions about war preparations.

Providing an insight into the Milosevic - Tudjman relationship, Mr. Markovic testified about a meeting with the republic presidents in The Hague in November 1991, while Vukovar and Dubrovnik were both being shelled. In his written statement, Mr. Markovic described the following interchange. "I confronted Milosevic with the shelling of Dubrovnik, and I demanded that it be stopped, and his reply was: "Who would be crazy enough to do that. Then I repeated the same question to Milosevic in front of Tudjman, and he repeated his reply and added: 'If that was the case I would know about it and stop it.' To my surprise Tudjman replied: 'You heard what Milosevic said.' I drew the conclusion that Tudjman accepted the shelling of Vukovar and Dubrovnik as something favourable for the Croation strive [sic] for independence, and Milosevic de facto admitted that he controls the army."

The picture this renders of the two presidents is one of leaders who are not only horribly removed from the suffering of their people, but are willing to sacrifice their people's lives, property, livelihoods, culture and way of life to their own goals - whether that be creation of an independent state or maintenance of personal power. It is reflected in Milosevic's failure to visit wounded soldiers who fought to keep him in power.

Mr. Markovic also described Milosevic as a man whose words differed from his thinking and actions. This was evident in his last meeting with the Accused, a meeting Mr. Markovic initiated. As on previous occasions, when the Prime Minister raised concern over the imminent threat of war, Milosevic responded, "Which war?" 'That was the way he always reacted,' Mr. Markovic wrote in his statement. 'We both knew that a huge JNA concentration existed in Bosnia at that time.' To Prosecutor Geoffrey Nice's question whether Milosevic was a nationalist, the witness laughed, "No, No. Slobodan Milosevic used everything he could to insure power for himself and power over people. If that was nationalism, he used that."

When Milosevic got his opportunity to cross examine Mr. Markovic, he accused him of starting the war with Slovenia. The former Prime Minister indignantly denied it, telling the Court he had no power to activate the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), only the President of the Federal Presidency could do that. The Accused read from minutes of an August 21, 1991 Presidency session that the witness attended where Milan Kucan, then President of Slovenia, accused Mr. Markovic of responsibility for beginning the war in Slovenia. Mr. Markovic turned to the Court in protest, 'May I ask the Court something? Am I the accused here or am I a witness?' Judge May explained the right of the Accused to 'put his case' to the witness and asked Mr. Markovic not to be offended. As Milosevic continued his aggressive cross examination, Judge May was called on to explain more fully to the witness the right of an Accused to confront witnesses against him. Mr. Markovic is not the first witness to express shock and outrage at being interrogated by the Accused. The practice is not allowed in the civil law system, which prevailed in Yugoslavia, where an investigative judge questions witnesses and provides a written dossier to the court. To some, Milosevic's cross examination more closely resembles police interrogation than a trial procedure.

Mr. Markovic clarified that the Prime Minister of the federal government has power to call on the border

police to protect borders and border crossings, which he did. He also directed the border police to cooperate with the JNA in performing its duties. Seemingly on their own, the JNA moved its troops out of barracks and deployed them throughout Slovenia. Mr. Markovic told the Court that President Kucan accused him of responsibility for the war because of 'political games' he was playing; 'it suited him at the time.' He noted that Kucan did not mention in the presidency meeting how he called Markovic at 4 a.m. to stop the JNA after it moved out of barracks, though he had no power to do so. The Accused persisted in arguing with the witness about his responsibility for war in Slovenia until Judge May interrupted to point out that the indictment doesn't cover that war.

The Accused's strategy with the former Federal Prime Minister was to accuse him of responsibility for the break-up of Yugoslavia and war, not only in Slovenia, but also in Croatia. 'You were Prime Minister and had de facto (actual) and de jure (legal) control over the federal government,' he told the witness. Mr. Markovic responded that the Federal Government had very modest competencies. He testified about his persistent efforts to find a peaceful solution to the growing crisis, including an unsuccessful effort to address the Serbian Parliament. When he addressed the Croatian Parliament, 'I said it was the first and last time I was speaking as a Croat, that I was not the same kind as you [his audience] are. You hate Serbs. It is not the case with me.' Mr. Markovic went on to testify that he 'told Tudjman not to talk to the Serbs through Milosevic, to talk to them directly. I said keep your hands off Bosnia.' He concluded by reiterating how modest his authority was: 'I did my best to prevent the worst happening and I failed in large part because of you,' he told Milosevic.

The Accused then presented the original of Mr. Markovic's agenda from the latter half of 1991. It startled both the witness and the Prosecution, which has been seeking documents from the Serbian and former Yugoslav archives for years. Mr. Markovic told the Court he had requested archived material of the Federal Executive Council (of SFRY's government), of which a whole library exists, but was 'not able to get anything from them.' One hopes this didn't escape the notice of the judges who have been rather permissive with the Government of Serbia and Montenegro about responding to the Prosecution's requests for access to archives.

Markovic's agenda, Milosevic pointed out, did not record any meeting with him in December 1991. The witness responded that he told his foreign minister, Budimir Loncar, and the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gianni de Michelis, about the meeting after it occurred.

This meeting with Milosevic aside, a good deal of Mr. Markovic's testimony was supported with reference to the diary kept by Borisav Jovic, President of the Federal Presidency, and Milosevic's close ally. As a contemporaneous account of a highly placed insider it is an invaluable source of information. How much the court will receive as evidence remains to be seen.

The day's court session ended before Milosevic was able to complete cross examination. Since the Court sits only three days per week and next week's witnesses are scheduled, it is unknown when Mr. Markovic will return to complete cross examination.

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