

# Milosevic Died of Heart Attack, Autopsy Shows

*The New York Times*

March 13, 2006

By MARLISE SIMONS

THE HAGUE, March 13 — An autopsy showed that a heart attack killed [Slobodan Milosevic](#), the [United Nations](#) war crimes tribunal said here on Sunday evening in a terse announcement. The statement served only to deepen the mystery over the circumstances surrounding Mr. Milosevic's abrupt death just as his prolonged trial was finally nearing an end.

The autopsy result was disclosed as new evidence emerged that Mr. Milosevic, the former Yugoslav president found dead in his prison cell bed on Saturday, had been taking medicine not prescribed by his physicians, including an antibiotic known to diminish or blunt the effect of the medicines he had been taking for heart and blood-pressure problems.

It was unclear why he had taken that antibiotic, but one of Mr. Milosevic's legal advisers said Sunday that Mr. Milosevic knew something was wrong, and had expressed fear in a letter written one day before he was found dead that someone had been trying to poison him. The United Nations tribunal has dismissed the poisoning speculation.

Dr. Donald Uges, a top toxicologist in the Netherlands who had consulted on the case earlier at the request of the tribunal, said today that he thought Mr. Milosevic had taken the drugs to undermine his health to support his plea for a medical transfer to Moscow, where his family now lives.

"I don't think he took his medicines for suicide, only for his trip to Moscow," Dr. Uges told Reuters. "I think that was his last possibility to escape the Hague. I am so sure there is no murder."

[Carla Del Ponte](#), the chief prosecutor at the tribunal, said at a news conference on Sunday before the autopsy result was released that she did not rule out suicide. She also said Mr. Milosevic had been thoroughly monitored by medical aides, and that it was "very strange, even if it is of course possible, that he should have died so suddenly without these medics having noticed a worsening of his condition."

The death of Mr. Milosevic, 64, sent shock waves through the tribunal here, putting it on the defensive just as a defining moment in the history of the Yugoslav war crimes prosecutions appeared at hand. His death also raised a whole set of new issues for the United States and [European Union](#), which had hoped that the conclusion of his four-year trial, with conviction widely expected, would help expedite resolution of other problems

that are vestiges of Mr. Milosevic's catastrophic rule in the 1990's. Reaction in his homeland was largely muted, but some newspaper headlines said he had been murdered.

The autopsy, which said Mr. Milosevic had died of a myocardial infarction, or heart attack, was performed by three Dutch pathologists at The Hague. A Belgian specialist and two forensic experts from the Belgrade military hospital also attended the procedure.

Their report identified "two heart conditions" that Mr. Milosevic had suffered from, which they said might explain the heart attack. The results of a toxicological report will be available later this week, the court said.

Lawyers close to Mr. Milosevic said the toxicological report could reveal substances in his blood that might have contributed to his death. But the question remained: If so, how did they get there?

During his trial here for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, judges were told that he had seemed to be manipulating his health. Proceedings were suspended more than 20 times. "He has a proven track record of taking unprescribed medicine, of messing with his medication," said Jean-Daniel Ruch, an adviser to Ms. Del Ponte. "I am not sure if we will know the full truth."

But a January report by the prison doctor that was disclosed Sunday by Zdenko Tomanovic, one of Mr. Milosevic's lawyers, said an antibiotic known as rifampicin, used to treat serious bacterial infections, like tuberculosis and leprosy, had been found in Mr. Milosevic's blood.

Dr. Uges was asked by the tribunal to confirm the findings in a further test in February, and said Sunday that he found the same antibiotic in a blood sample from Mr. Milosevic two weeks ago.

The antibiotic is known to diminish or blunt the effectiveness of the prescribed medicines Mr. Milosevic was taking, including beta blockers, as part of his treatment for his high blood pressure and heart problems, Dr. Uges said, and as a result may have kept the blood pressure high.

The court first asked for the blood tests in November, when it appeared that Mr. Milosevic's blood pressure would not go down and he was repeatedly taken ill.

Mr. Tomanovic said the findings, including Dr. Uges's confirmation, were received on March 7 by Mr. Milosevic, which prompted him to write to the Russian Embassy at The Hague last Friday — one day before he was found dead.

Mr. Tomanovic showed reporters copies of two letters from Mr. Milosevic. One, written in English, asked the embassy to forward the other four-page letter, written in Serbian, to the government in Moscow.

In Moscow, officials confirmed today that they had received the letter had been received by the embassy on Saturday, and said they were preparing to send a team of medical experts to The Hague to observe autopsy proceedings at the request of the Milosevic family, the Russian state news agency reported.

In the letter, which Mr. Tomanovic read aloud in Serbian and paraphrased in English translation, Mr. Milosevic said blood tests had found traces of a "strong drug" — an antibiotic — that Mr. Tomanovic said was used only for leprosy and tuberculosis.

"I have never taken any antibiotic in five years," Mr. Milosevic was quoted as saying.

Mr. Tomanovic said Mr. Milosevic wrote that the blood tests proved he was being poisoned. "I am writing to you and asking you for help in protecting me from the criminal activities being perpetrated in the institution operating under the sign of the United Nations organization," Mr. Tomanovic quoted the letter as saying.

The lawyer said the letter added that the people trying to poison Mr. Milosevic also had an interest in silencing him.

Throughout his political career, and over more than four years of proceedings here in his trial, Mr. Milosevic cast himself in the classic Serbian mold of victim and martyr.

At the news conference, Ms. Del Ponte, the prosecutor, said she expected doubts over the exact cause of Mr. Milosevic's death to be clarified by the autopsy and toxicological tests, but she also repeated her regret that Mr. Milosevic had died just as his trial was coming to an end.

"His crimes affected hundreds of thousands of people," she said, adding that "there were just 50 hours of hearings left" in the defense phase.

Ms. Del Ponte said the tribunal's attention would now turn to other war crime cases as well as the need to arrest other fugitives.

"Now more than ever, I expect Serbia to arrest and transfer [Ratko Mladic](#) and [Radovan Karadzic](#)," she said, referring to the two former Bosnian Serb leaders who have been on the run since they were indicted as war criminals in 1995.

Although the 66-count indictment of Mr. Milosevic dealt with the wars in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo, he devoted almost all of the time allotted for his defense to Kosovo, a Serbian province. As president of Serbia and commander in chief of its security forces, he would be legally accountable for crimes committed by them. He dismissed events in Bosnia and hardly touched on those in Croatia, because, he said, those were separate countries not under his command or control.

But prosecutors said he had instigated many crimes in Bosnia and Croatia through proxy armies which he supplied and financed.

Ms. Del Ponte said "of course, we are very sad and frustrated" by the unfinished prosecution, mainly because it had deprived the victims of the wars a verdict. She said the trial, which had taken up 466 days of hearings and in which testimony was heard from 295 prosecution witnesses, "represents a wealth of evidence that is on the record."

The trial was not only about a conviction, she said, "but also about facts and truth."

*Marlise Simons reported for this article from the Hague. John O'Neil contributed reporting from New York.*