

Dutch Autopsy on Milosevic Finds No Evidence of Unusual Drugs

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THE HAGUE, March 17 — A Dutch autopsy on [Slobodan Milosevic](#), the former Yugoslav president who was found dead in his cell last week, detected no evidence of any toxin, nonprescribed medication or even abnormal levels of his prescribed medicines, the [United Nations](#) war crimes tribunal announced Friday.

"So far, no indications of poisoning have been found," Judge Fausto Pocar, the tribunal president, said at a crowded news conference.

Judge Pocar stressed that the results were preliminary, but reiterated that the autopsy had already disclosed two underlying "heart conditions that Slobodan Milosevic suffered from." Those conditions, he said, could "explain the heart attack." The autopsy report did not identify the maladies further.

Even so, the new toxicology results from the autopsy on Sunday did not resolve the mystery surrounding the presence of an unusual, and potentially dangerous, antibiotic found in one of Mr. Milosevic's earlier blood samples.

Court officials confirmed at the news conference that the antibiotic, rifampicin, had been found in a blood sample drawn from Mr. Milosevic in January. Even if investigators determine that rifampicin played no part in Mr. Milosevic's death, the presence of such a potent, nonprescribed medicine in his system suggests some sort of foul play or at least medical manipulation within the walls of the United Nations detention center.

How Mr. Milosevic consumed the antibiotic, to what end and how it got into the high-security detention unit is unclear. "That is the burning question, and I have no ready answer to that," said Hans Holthuis, the court's registrar, or chief administrator. "The prison pharmacy has never stocked this drug."

Rifampicin is used to treat tuberculosis, but one of its side effects is to reduce the effects of other medicine, including a blood pressure pills. Court officials and two toxicologists have speculated that Mr. Milosevic took it intentionally to exacerbate his longstanding high blood pressure, in an attempt to gain a temporary medical release.

But no traces of rifampicin were found during the autopsy. The Dutch public prosecutor who provided the court with the results said that according to the Dutch Forensic Institute, "rifampicin disappears from the body quickly," and finding no traces "implies

only that it is not likely that rifampicin had been ingested or administered in the last few days before death."

Some doctors have said the investigation into Mr. Milosevic's death should focus more on whether he was evaluated or treated properly for heart disease while in prison. Judge Pocar said internal investigations were still going on.

Dr. Leo Bokeria, a Russian heart specialist who flew to The Hague to review the autopsy records this week, suggested that Mr. Milosevic had died from undetected blockages in his coronary arteries. "Two stents" could have saved his life and given him "many long years," he said, according to the Itar-Tass news agency, referring to tubes placed in arteries to reopen blockages.

Other doctors seemed to agree that causes other than the nonprescribed antibiotic were to blame.

"You can now exclude rifampicin; the story was exaggerated," said Dr. Joris Delanghe, a toxicologist at the University of Ghent, in Belgium, who had not treated Mr. Milosevic. "He has high blood pressure, he was 64, incarcerated in a foreign country," he said. "There was certainly cardiac risk."

Even so, Dr. Donald Uges, the toxicologist at the University of Groningen who first found the rifampicin in Mr. Milosevic's blood, suggested that even if the drug was absent at the time of his death, it might still have played a role. He said Mr. Milosevic could have precipitated a heart attack by stopping rifampicin a few days before his death, for fear that court officials suspected his illicit use of the drug.

If he had abruptly stopped taking rifampicin after using it to keep his blood pressure high, it could have caused his blood pressure to plummet abruptly and brought on a heart attack, Dr. Uges said.

Mr. Milosevic found out three days before his death that the rifampicin had been discovered in his blood tests. The next day he wrote a letter to the Russian Embassy, mentioning the drug, and his lawyer said he feared he was being poisoned.

In November, lawyers for Mr. Milosevic brought in three outside specialists who concluded that there had not been an adequate evaluation of his heart. They recommended a series of tests, which were never performed, according to Florence Leclercq, a French cardiologist who made the recommendation.

"We felt he needed additional investigations," Dr. Leclercq said. Court officials said they could not discuss what tests might have been done since then, until a full internal inquiry is complete.

Since December, Mr. Milosevic had been requesting release to receive medical treatment in Moscow, where his wife, son and brother live. The court denied that request, saying

that all the medical care he needed was available in the Netherlands and that any outside specialists were welcome.

During his nearly five years in prison, Mr. Milosevic was often seen by court doctors and independent specialists. It is not clear what tests were done, since the records are sealed. Reached by phone, Dr. Paul van Dijkman, Mr. Milosevic's court-appointed cardiologist, said that under Dutch confidentiality law, he could not comment.

On Thursday, the court said it would turn over all of Mr. Milosevic's medical reports to Dutch prosecutors investigating the death.

Marlise Simons reported from The Hague for this article, and Elisabeth Rosenthal from Rome.