

July 19, 2005
New York Times

Milosevic Aides Found Guilty of Yugoslav Political Assassination

By **NICHOLAS WOOD**

PRISTINA, Kosovo, July 18 - The former director of Serbia's secret service, a onetime paramilitary commander and five others were given lengthy jail sentences by a Serbian court on Monday for the killing of a political rival to Slobodan Milosevic, then the Yugoslav leader.

After a yearlong trial in Serbia's special court in Belgrade, a judge found Rade Markovic, the chief of the secret service under Mr. Milosevic, and the commander, Milorad Lukovic, better known by his nom de guerre, Legia - or legionnaire, for his service in the French Foreign Legion - guilty of planning and carrying out the assassination of Ivan Stambolic, a former president of Serbia, in August 2000.

The pair were also found guilty of an assassination attempt in the same year on another of Mr. Milosevic's political foes, Vuk Draskovic, then a prominent opposition leader and currently Serbia's foreign minister.

The plots to kill both men were ordered by Mr. Milosevic, Serbian prosecutors contended, because he believed them to threaten his grip on power. Mr. Milosevic is standing trial for war crimes at an international tribunal in The Hague.

Human rights advocates and former opponents of Mr. Milosevic's autocratic rule said the trial had exposed in unparalleled detail the ruthlessness with which the Yugoslav leader sought to remain in power.

"This case shows how Milosevic's regime used his cadres and Legia's special unit as a liquidation unit," said Natasha Kandic, a leading human rights advocate in Serbia and director of the Humanitarian Law Center in Belgrade.

"It was a horrible crime organized by state structures," said Zarko Korac, a Belgrade University professor who was part of the democratic opposition. "This is a legal acknowledgement that Milosevic's regime participated in political murder."

Mr. Markovic was sentenced to 15 years in jail for having given the orders for both attacks to Mr. Lukovic. Mr. Lukovic was given the maximum 40-year jail term for leading the unit that carried them out. Five members of Mr. Lukovic's group were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 15 to 40 years. An eighth suspect, a member of the Serbian secret service, was sentenced to four years for failing to report or prevent the crimes.

Mr. Stambolic, who until 1987 was Mr. Milosevic's mentor and helped him rise through the ranks of the Yugoslav Communist Party, was perceived as a possible candidate for Yugoslav presidential elections in 2000. Mr. Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Party was then a strong opposition party. The ballot offered the opposition a chance to oust Mr. Milosevic after NATO's bombings of Serbia in 1999 over the war in Kosovo. He was ultimately deposed by peaceful protests in October 2000 after rejecting the vote result.

Allegations of Mr. Milosevic's involvement in the attacks could not be substantiated until three years later, when a member of Mr. Lukovic's police unit began to cooperate with investigators and led them to Mr. Stambolic's shallow grave.

The attempt on Mr. Draskovic took place in June 2000, in the Montenegrin resort of Budva, but he escaped with a bullet wound to his ear. After the verdicts were read out, Mr. Draskovic said Mr.

Markovic should have received a longer sentence.

Veljko Stambolic, Mr. Stambolic's son, also said that those who had ordered the killings had gotten off lightly. "I do think that a 40-year prison term is an adequate sentence for the executioners," he said in a phone interview. "However, those who gave orders need to be punished as well."

Ivana Sekularac contributed reporting from Belgrade for this article.

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