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Serbia and Montenegro: Alleged military cover-up in the Topcider deaths

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Serbia and Montenegro to resolve the contradictions surrounding the deaths of two soldiers. The organization raises its concerns following the announcement of the findings of the State Commission of Inquiry into the deaths of the soldiers which contradict the official military version. The soldiers, Drazen Milanovic and Dragan Jakovljevic, were found dead on 5 October 2004 while on sentry duty at the Topcider military complex in Belgrade.

"The State Commission's findings are in contrast to the conclusions of the military investigations which denied any third party involvement, and raise suspicions that the military has attempted a cover-up," Hugh Poulton Amnesty International's researcher on Serbia and Montenegro said.

Amnesty International notes that forensic scientists working for the State Commission of Inquiry have definitely ruled out the possibility that either soldier committed suicide, and ballistic analysis shows that both were shot with the same weapon.

"If there was third party involvement, the two men were murdered and those responsible must be brought to justice. Furthermore, there should also be an impartial investigation into what appears to be a military cover-up of the incident," Hugh Poulton said.

The possible lack of impartiality in the military investigation raises further concern about the continued existence of a military judicial system which by now should have been replaced, according to the Constitutional Charter of Serbia and Montenegro, by a civilian judicial authority,

The initial military investigation into the deaths claimed that after a quarrel Drazen Milanovic had shot Dragan Jakovljevic and then had committed suicide, and that there was no other party involved in the killings. However, a spate of rumours and allegations surfaced claiming that they had in fact been murdered, possibly because they had seen a high-profile indictee of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia who, it was suggested, was in hiding in the Topcider complex.

Background

On 13 October an independent inquiry into the deaths was ordered by the President of Serbia and Montenegro Svetozar Marovic and a State Commission of Inquiry was set up to do this.

Meanwhile the military judiciary continued with its own investigations which subsequently announced that their findings now indicated that Dragan Jakovljevic had shot Drazen Milanovic and then

committed suicide. In all its scenarios the military repeatedly denied any third party involvement.

On 14 November the military investigative magistrate heading the military inquiry, Captain Vuk Tufegdžić, announced that their inquiry had established that there was no third party involvement in the killings. On 19 November this was repeated by the President of the Belgrade Military Court, Colonel Djordje Trifunović, and on 22 October the Supreme Defence Council of Serbia and Montenegro again reiterated that no one else had been involved in the deaths.

After a long delay and much speculation, the State Commission of Inquiry flatly contradicted the military versions.

Public Document

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