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Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Amnesty International calls for investigation into the murder of Slavko _uruvija

Amnesty International expressed deep concern today about the murder of Slavko _uruvija, editor of several newspapers critical of the Yugoslav government, calling for an investigation into the case.

“The Yugoslav authorities must take all the necessary steps to ensure a prompt and independent investigation into his death and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice,” Amnesty International stressed, calling also on the Yugoslav authorities to lift restrictions on press freedom.

Mr _uruvija was murdered on 11 April 1999 outside his home in Belgrade by two unknown men. Many observers suspect that his murder was instigated by the authorities, in reprisal for his role as a leading independent journalist.

Serbian state television and the pro-government press had recently accused Slavko _uruvija of welcoming air-strikes by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), although friends reportedly say that he opposed the bombings. His death heightens concern for other independent journalists and members of Serbia’s beleaguered opposition.

Slavko _uruvija was editor of the independent Belgrade daily, *Borba*, until it was taken over by the authorities in 1994, when he resigned. The same year he founded the weekly *Nedeljni Telegraf*, and later the daily *Dnevni Telegraf* and *Evropljanin*, a magazine.

In October 1998 when NATO threatened air-strikes, the Serbian government introduced a decree which effectively banned several newspapers, including the *Dnevni Telegraf*. The rebroadcast of foreign stations like the BBC, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle was also banned. The decree was quickly followed by a draconian new Law on Information which allowed for fines of up to 80,000 US dollars and gave limited opportunities for appeal.

Under this law the *Evropljanin* was heavily fined for an article critical of President Milošević. The two publications were re-registered in Montenegro, Yugoslavia’s other republic, where they were printed, but attempts to distribute them in Serbia were frequently frustrated by seizures.

Slavko _uruvija’s passport was confiscated and in March 1999 he was sentenced, together with two other journalists from the *Dnevni Telegraf*, to five months’ imprisonment on charges of “spreading false information” for an article which linked a minister in the Serbian government to the murder of the director of a Belgrade medical institute. The three remained free pending appeal.

Slavko _uruvija had written for a number of foreign newspapers, including the British press - the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *European*. In December 1998 he had expressed his

concerns about restrictions on the Yugoslav press to the Political Committee of the Council of Europe. At the same time various reports indicate that until some six months ago he was on good terms with the wife of President Milošević and had connections within the state security police.

Other sections of the media in Yugoslavia have been subjected to severe restrictions which have led to their closure. On 21 March, *Koha Ditore*, the only Albanian-language daily newspaper still publishing at the time, was heavily fined, as was its editor. The paper has since ceased to publish. Two other Albanian-language papers had been forced by fines to close a week earlier.

The electronic media in Serbia has repeatedly complained about unreasonable and politically motivated restrictions on the issuing of licences which have led to the forced closure of radio stations, seizure of equipment and the prosecution of station directors. On 24 March police closed down the main Belgrade independent radio station -- B92 -- claiming that it had infringed its licence.

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