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A settlement between the Croatian State Attorney's Office and the Defense of The Hague prisoner's wife has been pending for five years now

SDP to reinstate Dunja Gotovina

Dunja has been a victim of politics. I am going to enforce the court's decisions upon the conclusion of the proceedings which have been needlessly going on for seven years now, says Defense Minister Kotromanović.

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When they got married in 1995, Ante and Dunja couldn't have even imagined what the future had in store for them
(Photograph: VL Archive)

In October 2004, Dunja Gotovina, the wife of Croatian General Ante Gotovina who was still a fugitive at the time, and the first female colonel of the Croatian Army, was already perceived as the 'wife of public enemy no. 1'. The Government of Ivo Sanader, a HDZ /*Croatian Democratic Union*/ government led by a man who actually won the elections by calling for a patriotic revolt against Ivica Račan's government and by using the name of General Gotovina to do it, became the fiercest opponent of Gotovina and his 'accomplices'. Direct negotiations with Carla Del Ponte brought about the so-called Action Plan which after a year and a half, in December 2005, resulted in the arrest of the escaped general on Tenerife. Dunja Gotovina had at that time already been an 'unassigned' officer for years, but even this type of suspended status was too much to take for Sanader's government. In October 2004, Defense Minister Berislav Rončević, the obedient soldier that he was, decided to banish her from the Croatian MOD. She was 41 at the time and Rončević sent her a retirement notice stating that 'they found her to have no further career prospects based on the number of years of holding her rank, or rather that she hadn't been promoted to a higher rank, and that she was being sent to retirement given her age and after reviewing the overall personnel potential.' The Croatian MOD added: 'She has the right to sue us if she feels aggrieved in some way. However, if she had further career prospects, she wouldn't have been served with a notice saying otherwise.' Naturally, Dunja

Gotovina immediately asked that her rights be protected, particularly because the Retirement Institute made it clear to her that she had no legal rights to a pension. She had no help from the political structures either, and to top it off, Andrija Hebrang said to her: 'your employment in the Ministry of Defense is an obstacle to Croatia's accession to the EU!'

Colonel without pay

Dunja sued the Croatian MOD for unlawful termination and relatively soon after the Administrative Court came to a decision. In 2006 the Administrative Court ruled in her favor and the Croatian Ministry of Defense was ordered to reinstate her. Five years have passed since then and nothing has changed. Dunja Gotovina remains unemployed. Moreover, for the past seven years, since the beginning of the litigation, Dunja Gotovina hasn't received a penny from the state and lives off the retirement of General Ante Gotovina, which is 6,000 kuna. According to certain estimates, the Croatian MOD already owes her between 600,000 and 700,000 kuna. But, no settlement has been reached. If they are not able to reach an agreement, a new private lawsuit will ensue which may prolong the issue for another two to three years. The source of the dispute lay in the fact that Dunja persistently demanded to be reinstated to duty, refusing financial reimbursement alone for the outstanding salaries which for a colonel of the Croatian Army are between 8,000 and 9,000 kuna per month. Every following defense minister, when asked about the Dunja Gotovina case, gave the same answer, that they were going to abide by the law, and former minister Davor Božinović said the following: 'for as long as I am running this ministry it will do everything in its power not to owe anything to anyone.' And still nothing happened. The new Minister of Defense, Ante Kotromanović, has found himself in an unusual, 'unpleasant – pleasant' situation with respect to this case. Staff Brigadier Ante Kotromanović has been a longtime friend, first as a fellow soldier and then as one of the closest family friends of Ante and Dunja Gotovina. He is one of the people who regularly used to come to visit the apprehended Ante Gotovina, several times a year, in The Hague Detention Center in Scheveningen. He has now been appointed as the Minister of Defense and even though Jadranka Kosor also visited Gotovina in The Hague as Minister of the Defenders, it is most likely that Kotromanović will not be able to continue to visit him since Gotovina has in the meantime been found guilty by a first-instance court for war crimes.

Croatian Helsinki Committee also on her side

- I will be as cooperative as I can be, I'll ask around and try to find a way to bring these proceedings to an end, no settlement has been reached yet, but if the judiciary decides that Dunja is to be reinstated to the Croatian MOD, that's how it's going to be – said Minister Kotromanović. - I am sorry that Dunja Gotovina's fundamental rights were violated back in 2004. Dunja was a victim of politics with respect to the situation regarding her husband. Legal proceedings were initiated needlessly which have been going on for seven years now, added the Minister. The then Defense Minister (Rončević) illegally removed Dunja Gotovina from duty, and the present Minister (Kotromanović) can reinstate her legally. This can all be resolved even faster if the State Attorney's Office of the Republic of Croatia, representing the interests of the Republic of Croatia in this matter, agrees to this kind of settlement. For now, the State Attorney's Office and the Defense seem to be arguing extreme demands. If they do not lower their ambitions, there will be no end to the dispute. The decision by the HDZ government to remove the general's wife was without a doubt a political decision. Dunja Gotovina and her son are victims of political persecution.

Among the rare institutions to stand up in her defense was the HHO /Croatian Helsinki Committee/ a few years back, and its then president Žarko Puhovski stated the following: 'it is unacceptable for the entire family to suffer and be punished because Ante Gotovina has been charged before The Hague Tribunal. Even if he were to be convicted, it would be absolutely unacceptable for his family to suffer because of it and for justice to be handed out in this way.' The ball is in the court of the new government. Will the Social Democrats' Minister of Defense, who is also a friend of the family and

Gotovina's brother in arms, help bring to an end this for Croatia a shameful dispute with a family which has already gone through enough?

Action plan persecuted Gotovina's son Ante as well

The persecution of Gotovina's family culminated in summer 2005 when the Police barged into their apartment at around 7 a.m. at 69 Srebrnjak Street in Zagreb. They started searching the apartment, and Dunja was noticeably upset because everything was going on in front of her son Ante who was seven years old at the time. The Police said that they would come after 9 a.m. after she takes her son to school, and the search deeply traumatized young Ante. During their search, the Police seized some 'trophy' weapons. As a matter of fact, for years the state refused to award a state-owned flat to Gotovina, and after the end of the war the family lived in the army hotel 'Zvonimir'. In 1999 they got a flat and became neighbors with General Agotić and Špegelj.