

Slovakia: Profound disappointment as suspected mastermind in Ján Kuciak murder acquitted again

Following today's acquittal of the suspected mastermind in the killing of Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak, we, the undersigned international media freedom and journalist organisations, express our profound disappointment, renew our calls for justice and convey our steadfast solidarity with the families of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová.

This acquittal of businessman Marian Kočner, which was announced earlier today following a retrial at the Specialized Criminal Court, represents another devastating blow to the fight for full justice for Ján and Martina's killing. The judges voted 2:1 to find Kočner not guilty of ordering the 2018 assassination.

The judges did convict Alena Zsuzsová, a close associate of Kočner, of ordering the hit and sentenced her to 25 years in prison. She was also convicted of ordering the murder of two Slovak prosecutors. Both her and Kočner's verdicts, which come after the Supreme Court revoked the initial acquittals in June 2021, can be appealed.

Kuciak and Kušnírová were shot dead in their home outside Bratislava on 21 February 2018. Judges again ruled that prosecutors had not presented the concrete evidence necessary to rule beyond reasonable doubt that Kočner – a businessman with links to Slovakia's political, judicial and security elite – had ordered the journalist's death. Both he and Zsuzsová are currently serving lengthy sentences for other crimes.

Our first thoughts go to Ján and Martina's families, who have endured years of painful court hearings and who have yet again been denied full justice and accountability. We share their intense frustration regarding Kočner's verdict and stand in full solidarity with the couple's family, loved ones and colleagues at this difficult time.

This repeated failure to secure the conviction of the suspected mastermind is another damaging setback in the fight against impunity for the murder of journalists in Slovakia, and in Europe. This case follows an all-too-common pattern in which the hitmen and facilitators involved in such crimes are put behind bars while the suspected masterminds who ordered the murder evade justice.

Another acquittal for the most serious crime against journalism in Slovakia's modern history also has worrying implications for the [fragile media freedom progress](#) made within the country in recent years. As we process this disappointing setback, we remain as committed as ever to securing full justice for Ján and Martina and will support the families during the appeal to the Supreme Court.

Those who order the killing of a journalist cannot be allowed to act with impunity. The fight for justice will continue.

Signed:

ARTICLE 19 Europe

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Free Press Unlimited (FPU)

International Press Institute (IPI)

OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
