

ANALYSIS: Reporters Disclose Vukovar Sources

Author: [Mirko Klarin](#)

Belgrade journalists identify sources for articles they wrote about the massacre of Croatian soldiers and civilians after the fall of Vukovar.

In the argument over whether reporters can be forced to testify in war

crimes trials, one thing neither side disputes is the right of reporters to

protect their sources. Both supporters and opponents of the subpoena issued

against the former Washington Post reporter Johnathan Randal agree that journalists

- whether they appeared in court voluntarily or under threat of punishment -

may not be compelled to disclose their sources.

Two Belgrade reporters who testified last week in the trial against Slobodan

Milosevic revealed their sources of information without any hesitation or

coercion, however.

Moreover, although the court offered to protect their identity through pseudonyms and distorted images, they renounced their right to such measures and volunteered to reveal the identity of their sources in a public session.

Some of their sources obviously did not like this, making threats to at least one of

the witnesses. The judges took the threats seriously enough to close the

remaining part of his testimony to the public on the second and third day.

The value of the testimonies of Dejan Anastasijevic and Jovan Dulovic who

both work for the weekly magazine Vreme was not the information they offered

- which has already been reported in Serbia - but the sources they revealed.

Back in 1994 or 1995, Anastasijevic published articles in Vreme, claiming that after the capture of Vukovar on November 20, 1991, Yugoslav National Army, JNA, soldiers took more than 200 wounded men and civilians from the local hospital, transported them in army trucks to the Ovcara agricultural complex and handed them over to members of the territorial defense - local army reserve units - who then executed them.

Citing unidentified "top JNA officers", Anastasijevic wrote in those articles that the officer in charge of this operation was Veselin Sljivancanin, commander of the First Guardian Motor Brigade.

Anastasijevic revealed to the court that General Aleksandar Vasiljevic, then head of the JNA counter-intelligence department, KOS, had told him and other journalists off record that Sljivancanin was responsible for the massacre.

After testifying, Anastasijevic said he disclosed his source because Vasiljevic had publicly said he would testify in the Milosevic trial and because he is convinced the general would confirm he was the source of this information in his testimony. The indictment against Milosevic names Vasiljevic as one of the participants in the "joint criminal enterprise".

The remaining part of Anastasijevic's testimony disclosed no other sources.

But it did what Jonathan Randal has refused to do - namely confirm before the court his interview in the early Nineties with The Hague indictee Radoslav Brdjanin, then president of the Serbian crisis staff in north-west Bosnia.

During the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, Anastasijevic published several interviews with the Serbian nationalist leader Vojislav Seselj, the notorious paramilitary chief and gangster Zeljko "Arkan" Raznjatovic, and the former Croatian Serb representative Goran Hadzic. All three are named in Milosevic's indictment as participants in a "joint criminal enterprise".

Last week, he confirmed before the court that all three had told him of their connections with the then Serbian secret police chief Jovica Stanisic and of the help Stanisic provided in arming, equipping and training their "volunteers" and paramilitary formations.

He confirmed that the commander of the Territorial Defense of eastern Slavonija, which "received" the civilians taken from Vukovar hospital by Slijivancanin, was one of Stanisic's secret police collaborators, Radovan "Bazda" Stojcic.

If Anastasijevic's testimony provided a "framework" for the prosecutor's version of the massacre in Ovchara, his colleague Jovan Dulovic supplied

abundant detail to this mosaic in his testimony before it was closed to the public.

Dulovic was also present in the Vukovar area shortly after the massacre, but thanks to the "patriotic" reputation of his newspaper, Politika ekspres, he was better placed than Anastasijevic, then a reporter for the "unpatriotic" radio station, B-92. Dulovic's testimony suggested JNA officers, local territorial defense members and volunteers from Serbia treated him as "one of them" and served as his sources.

They confided, boasted and even complained to him, and gave him free access to the JNA command center at Ulica Nova 81 in the Vukovar suburb of Borovo Selo.

Several days before Vukovar fell, Dulovic overheard Seselj, president of the Serbian Radical Party and leader of paramilitary group known as the "Seseljians" or "Chetniks", make a speech to a large group of JNA officers.

Through a partly opened door Dulovic allegedly recorded every word Seselj uttered.

He quoted him before the court, "We're all one army. This war is a great test for Serbs. Those who pass the test will become winners. Deserters

cannot go unpunished. Not a single Ustasha (Croat extremist) must leave Vukovar alive. We have accepted the concept of a federal army so that there is no legal basis for the interference of foreign powers in our conflict. The army is fighting rebel Croats. The army has

shown it was able to cleanse its ranks. We have a unified command consisting of military experts who know what they're doing."

The prosecutor must prove that the JNA, territorial defense and the volunteers from Serbia acted exactly as Seselj said, as "one army" with a "unified command" and that the Ovchara massacre formed part of the plan to ensure "not a single Ustasha must leave Vukovar alive". Everything Dulovic saw and heard and told the court, naming the source of every piece of information, leads to such a conclusion.

Dulovic was present around midday on November 20, 1991 when Major Sljivancanin denied the ICRC access to Vukovar hospital. At that time, a large number of civilians were waiting in the courtyard of the hospital to be evacuated. Dulovic saw Sljivancanin at the entrance at the moment when his soldiers were taking the patients, wounded men and other civilians onto army trucks and buses, which then left one after another.

The following morning, Dulovic found out what had happened to those people over coffee and brandy with the hosts of the house where he was staying, a red-bearded "chetnik" from Smederevo and a woman named Dragica from Novi Sad, both members of Seselj's unit.

The male paramilitary boasted that he had been "killing Croats at Ovchara" from 5pm until 1am and that the victims were "wailing and begging not to be

killed", all in vain. The woman confirmed this to Dulovic when they were alone, admitting she had also killed several men.

Dulovic said Dragica told him Slijivancanin had not been present at Ovcar

but had left a note saying they "should not kill them all" but leave

"several men for him to test his weapon" - a machine gun he always carried

across his chest.

Dulovic then went to the JNA command centre on the other side of the street.

There, in a yard, he saw a pile of camouflaged uniforms with trouser legs soaked in

blood. He found the territorial defense commander, Stanko Vujanovic, who complained that after the JNA handed over the men from the hospital "he did not have enough men of his own and therefore had to deploy drunken Seselj men who were talking" of what happened at Ovcar the previous night.

The triangle that connected the JNA, the territorial defense and the

volunteers from Serbia appears to have been finally confirmed when he spoke to Captain

Miroslav Radic. When Dulovic told him about "rumours" of the events in

Ovcar, he angrily waved his hand, swore and murmured, "What was done... was

done".

In the late Nineties, Dulovic published several articles about "what was done" in Ovcar on

November 20, 1991 where he revealed most or almost all of the information

he presented in his testimony. But the articles did not name the sources,

which he now disclosed. Dulovic had given their names to the investigative

judge of the Belgrade military court, which invited him to make a statement in February 2000.

Although he revealed names of several participants in the Vukovar massacre, the investigation was conducted against "unknown offenders", and this fact, Dulovic said, showed the JNA and the authorities supported the offenders and were not interested in discovering or punishing them. As far as he knew, the military court never invited or interrogated any of the persons he named.

Due to "changed circumstances" the second part of Dulovic's testimony was in closed session, so we do not know whether or how Milosevic disputed his statements in the cross-examination or tried to devalue his sources. In the cross-examination of Anastasijevic, however, Milosevic said the fact that the men taken from Vukovar hospital on November 20, 1991 ended up in the hands of the territorial defense indicated they were killed in "a local conflict" that the JNA and Serbia "had nothing to do with".

Anastasijevic pointed out two weak points in this interpretation. Firstly, JNA troops under Sljivancanin took the men from hospital and handed them over to the territorial defense. Secondly, the latter was then commanded by Radovan "Bazda" Stojicic from the Serbian state security service.

Dulovic added another potentially important link to the chain that may

establish a connection between Milosevic's Serbia and the JNA and other

forces engaged in Croatia in the second half of 1991. He enclosed a

classified document dispatched in autumn 1991 from the Serbian defence

ministry to the commander of the First Military Zone, covering western Serbia and eastern Croatia, which he allegedly received from a commander then working there, one Lieutenant-Colonel Milan Eremija.

In this "urgent" telegram, the defence minister, Tomislav Simovic,

complained to the JNA commander of the presence in eastern Croatia of paramilitary formations

from Serbia whose "main objective was not to fight the enemy but to loot and

molest innocent civilians of Croatian nationality". He described an incident

in the village of Lovas where volunteers from Serbia had forced Croat

villagers to walk across a minefield. Seventeen civilians were killed.

The minister suggested the JNA and Serbian authorities should jointly disarm

the paramilitary formations. But according to Dulovic, this was an "almost

impossible task" because of the large number of the latter and armed

volunteer groups and also because so few conscripts and reserve soldiers

from Serbia were willing to respond to calls to join the army. Dulovic said

he "never saw any attempt at disarmament of paramilitary formations", which

he said suggested Simovic's initiative "was rejected at top level" by both

the military and Milosevic's government.

Dulovic realised why this initiative had to be rejected in April 1992 when war broke out in Bosnia. Dulovic and fellow journalists toured the Drina river, the natural border between Serbia and Bosnia, and recognised many Seseljians and members of other paramilitary formations he had met in eastern Slavonija six months earlier.

There, too, they operated as an advance guard for the JNA, which provided artillery and other supporting fire from a distance, while they killed people, burned houses, destroyed mosques and drove people from their villages in

columns towards Bosniak - (Bosnian Muslim) controlled territory. Unfortunately, the larger part of Dulovic's testimony about what he saw in eastern Slavonija in 1992 was given

in closed sessions.

One of the arguments used by Jonathan Randal and the media organisations which support his appeal against a tribunal subpoena is that his appearance in court as a witness in a war crime trial may jeopardise reporters in future conflicts. Dulovic's case showed the risks attending taking the witness stand are about equal to those in war reporting.

Just before Dulovic entered The Hague courtroom, Prosecutor Geoffrey Nice submitted a request to the trial chamber for protective measures for some of the witnesses who will appear later in the Milosevic trial, indicating they were "individuals exposed to a high level of risk".

The request may have been instigated by the fact that one of the prosecution's planned witnesses, known by his code name C-028, has been

threatened. This information was revealed when it was agreed to hold a closed session hearing for this witness. "Former Yugoslavia is a dangerous place and we, who do the field work, are aware of that," Nice said in his request. The emphasis was on "we" (the prosecutors), as opposed to "you" (the judges).

Dermot Groome, one of Nice's prosecution team, afterwards announced the

arrival of protected witness C-004. He explained that the prosecution was

advised that "Yugoslav authorities had been informed that this witness

received threats" but still wanted to testify with his identity disclosed in

open session. The trial chamber accepted this request and after the removal

of protective measures, C-004 became Jovan Dulovic. Several days before

this, the same thing was done for witness K-1, Dejan Anastasijevic.

By agreeing to testify at this trial in public in spite of the risks,

Anastasijevic and Dulovic repaid part of the debt owed by their profession towards the victims in former Yugoslavia. Without the latter's blind, unreserved and enthusiastic support for Milosevic he could not have done what he did.

Mirko Klarin is IWPR senior editor at the war crimes tribunal and editor-in-chief of SENSE News Agency.

Location: Balkans
Serbia
Croatia
Bosnia and
Herzegovina

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former
Yugoslavia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/analysis-reporters-disclose-vukovar-sources>