

## **Belgrade Wants Del Ponte Memoirs Postponed**

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But some observers say its claims that book could harm Serbia's cooperation with tribunal are "ridiculous". Serbian officials have tried to block the publication of memoirs of the former chief prosecutor at the Hague tribunal, saying they could jeopardise Belgrade's cooperation with this court.

The book, *Hunt: War Criminals and Me*, which will not be published until March 20, but which has apparently been seen by some journalists, reportedly provides details of why top fugitives Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic are still at large.

Alleged excerpts from the book appeared on the website of Belgrade-based broadcaster B92. They quoted information from Beta news agency, whose reporters are said to have had access to the book.

According to Carla Del Ponte, who headed the prosecution team at the tribunal between 1999 and 2007, the Yugoslav army had Mladic on its payroll long after he was charged with genocide. She is said to have written that top Belgrade politicians were conspiring to prevent war crimes suspects being arrested.

Serbian officials have asked United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon and top tribunal officials to postpone the book's publication.

"In the letters to the UN secretary-general, and to the president and chief prosecutor of the tribunal, we suggested a postponement," said Dusan Ignjatovic, director of Serbia's National Council for cooperation with the tribunal.

"It is unbelievable that only two months after she left The Hague, the former prosecutor is publishing a book of memoirs, based on real events and people who are still working on finding the fugitives," he told IWPR.

He said that although he had not seen the book, it risked ruining ties between Serbia and the tribunal.

"If she gives secret information, which she used during her job, that could stop cooperation with the tribunal," he said.

Among the more potentially damaging revelations is said to be an account of a meeting she had with then-Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic in March 2001 in Lugan, when he described the difficulties of arresting the fugitives.

The B92 excerpts say that according to her, Djindjic said that Mladic, who is charged with genocide for the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, was still receiving a salary from the Yugoslav army. At a later meeting, when she was about to leave for Washington, she said that Djindjic told her Mladic had more than 20 people protecting him and that Serbian president Vojislav Kostunica also wanted to block his arrest, according to the radio station extracts.

“As far as Mladic is concerned, we haven’t seen him for over a week. But his case will come up for review soon too. We’ll arrest him and hand him over [to NATO forces in Bosnia],” she is reported to have quoted Djindjic.

“Karadzic is hiding in Belgrade. I know he wrote to Kostunica asking for help and protection, but Kostunica turned this down... Kostunica probably doesn’t know that Karadzic is in Belgrade.”

The Serbian media have been full of speculation about other revelations. Some say she recounts conversations with the chiefs of the Serbian security services about how Mladic and Karadzic were moved from one location to another, and how a Serbian interior ministry official proposed Mladic’s arrest in July 2001 to the “embassy of a friendly country”.

Some observers believe Serbian officials’ reactions to the reported excerpt are exaggerated, and that attempts to block the book’s publication are absurd.

“Serbian politicians are obsessed with secret services. But the argument that Del Ponte’s book would endanger Serbia’s joint efforts with the tribunal is ridiculous, because this cooperation hasn’t existed for more than a year,” said Natasa Kandic, executive director of the Humanitarian Law Fund.

“I think that this book will show to the public what was represented to them as cooperation with the tribunal. Everyone knows it is good to publish this book.”

The Forum for Security and Democracy agreed, saying in a statement that officials were embarrassed to be exposed as liars, not that operational intelligence would be revealed.

“We expect that this book will show that Serbian politicians were saying one thing to Carla Del Ponte, a second to their own Serbian people, and doing a third in practice,” it concluded.

I WPR attempted several times to contact Del Ponte, now the Swiss ambassador to Argentina, by telephone and email to find out whether the excerpts published by B92 were authentic and to ask for comment on remarks by Serbian officials. As IWPR went to press, we had received no word from her office.

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