

## **Blaskic Trial: Abundance of Defence Documents**

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"Sometime at the beginning of 1993", he said, "a group of armed men in Croatian Defence Council (HVO) uniforms intercepted the bus and asked the passengers--mostly Bosniaks, but several Croats as well--to hand over their money and other valuables. One of the passengers tried to protect himself by declaring he was a Croat, to which one of the attackers responded: 'This is not a census. This is a robbery!'"

Regardless of whether or not the story is true or merely apocryphal, the anecdote fits with the defence. Their aim is to prove that Blaskic, the commander of the HVO in the Operative Zone Central Bosnia, could not control all the armed gangs for whom the war proved to be a perfect opportunity for armed robbery, car theft, racketeering and smuggling. The defence claims that Blaskic did all that was in his power in order to "curb criminal elements" and secure public peace and order. In order to prove this, they submitted Blaskic's orders prohibiting uniforms and arms in populated areas. According to Marin, who was Chief of Operations at the headquarters of the Operative Zone Central Bosnia at the time, Blaskic had neither the logistics nor the manpower to enforce that order.

Like the previous defence witness, chief intelligence officer in Blaskic's headquarters Ivica Zeko, Marin also claimed that the HVO was not structured as "a real army" when Blaskic took over the command of the Operative Zone. It did not have professional military personnel or an effective chain of command. Blaskic had requested more than 100 people to staff the Operative Zone's headquarters. Yet in the latter half of 1992 there were not more than 25 people there, and only three of them had higher military training. In order to prove how insufficient this was, the defence cited "NATO standards" according to which the headquarters of an Operative Zone of that size should have had some 220 officers.

Blaskic's defence counsels (Anto Nobile and Russel Hayman) intend to introduce some 200 documents during Marin's time in the witness box and expect to take as many as seven working days for his hearing. They claim to possess some 20,000 documents, including many which the prosecution has been unsuccessfully requesting for nearly two years from the authorities of the Bosniak-Croat Federation and the Republic of Croatia, via subpoena duces tecum, and then by the Trial Chamber's "Binding orders". These documents are relevant both for the Blaskic trial and for the case of Dario Kordic, the political leader of Bosnian Croats who is currently in the Detention Unit awaiting trial.

In the quest for these documents the Tribunal's investigators, in cooperation with SFOR and IPTF, searched several locations in Mostar, Vitez, and Siroki Brijeg (in the so-called Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna) using search warrants issued by the Tribunal's judges. The prosecution has still not announced the results of its searches. According to Croat sources in The Hague, however, the search "missed the target", as those in possession of the documents allegedly knew some ten days earlier that the investigators were preparing an "unannounced visit".

**Location:** [Croatia](#)  
[Bosnia and](#)  
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