

## **Bosnian Serb Police Minister Says He Acted Within Law**

**Author:** [Rachel Irwin](#)

Karadzic defence witness says there was no joint plan for the wartime expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats.

The former interior minister of the Bosnian Serb entity testified this week that despite his war crimes conviction, he acted entirely in accordance with the laws and regulations in place at the time.

Defence witness Mico Stanisic, testifying on behalf of his former superior Radovan Karadzic, was convicted last year on counts of persecution, murder and torture and sentenced to 22 years in prison. (Reported in **Convictions for Bosnian Serb Police Officials**.)

The bench found that Stanisic was a “key member of the decision-making authorities” and “shared a close relationship” with Karadzic, who was president of Republika Srpska from 1992 to 1996.

The judgement concluded that Stanisic bolstered his police force by recruiting unqualified reserve officers, and that he coordinated with the Bosnian Serb army in order to “effect ethnic division on the ground”.

“Despite being aware of the commission of crimes by these joint forces, Stanisic consistently approved the deployment of his police forces in this manner,” the verdict stated.

Stanisic’s case is currently on appeal. He appeared at the tribunal this week as a result of a subpoena, and had his own lawyer present during his testimony.

“You and I – did we have some joint plan or understanding aimed at expelling Muslims and Croats from territories we believed we were entitled to?” asked Karadzic, who represents himself in the courtroom.

“No,” Stanisic replied.

“What was the position of your co-workers and subordinates in that respect?” the accused asked.

“I know what my position was and I can present it. I was just a man who held the post as minister, who did his job exclusively within the framework that was allowed to him by the law on the ministry of interior and other laws of the former SFRY [Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] because I was convinced they were not discriminatory in any way,” Stanisic said. “The former Yugoslavia was a signatory of all international conventions and covenants, and built all of that into its own legislation, and that is how I behaved throughout.”

He said that his tasks as interior minister were “clearly defined”.

“In accordance with that, I issued an order, namely that everything that was done necessarily within the scope of our duties was to prevent war crimes, and if this kind of thing did happen, all evidence should be collected,” Stanisic said.

Karadzic asked what happened when “Serbs committed crimes against non Serbs”.

“The MUP [interior ministry] acted in accordance with instructions and orders,” Stanisic replied. “It treated equally all perpetrators, especially when came to serious crime. Such crimes usually took place at demarcation lines where there was combat, and in that case the victims and witnesses usually went to the Muslim side and we had no position to interview them, to gather the necessary information about the perpetrators. You know well what kind of solidarity exists among such perpetrators who commit such crimes.”

Stanisic added that the interior ministry had a “problem with paramilitary groups”. This problem, he said, was caused by Biljana Plavsic, a high-ranking member of the Bosnian Serb leadership. Plavsic pleaded guilty to persecution at the tribunal in 2002 and was sentenced to 11 years in prison. She was granted early release in 2009. (See **Outcry at Plavsic's Belgrade Welcome**.)

Plavsic “even sent letters” to notorious paramilitary leaders like Zeljko Raznatovic, otherwise known as Arkan, “to send volunteers to help the defence of Serbs in Republika Srpska”, Stanisic said.

“All those who came for the most part were people prone to committing crimes, with prior convictions for similar crimes,” he continued. “So it happened that such groups which she invited reported to certain units, they were issued with arms, they would introduce themselves as special forces, get the best weapons, and then they would take off and commit crimes.”

Because their “initial status” was as part of the military, the paramilitary groups “excluded themselves

from the competence of the ministry of the interior” and instead fell under the jurisdiction of the “military security service, the military prosecutor and the military courts”, the witness said.

“Whereas [as] a matter of fact, they were not with the army, they were simply committing crimes in the rear. It was probably due to pressure put by Mrs Plavsic to present them as her forces and to not have them prosecuted [that] such things never found themselves on any agenda,” Stanasic said.

Karadzic asked his witness whether “I or someone relevant from the leadership of Republika Srpska asked you at any point in time not to have crimes investigated, crimes committed by Serbs against non Serbs”.

“You did not ask me,” Stanasic said.

During the cross-examination, prosecutor Matthew Olmsted put it to Stanasic that he was aware that “non-Serbs were being arrested, held and mistreated at detention facilities as early as April [1992]”.

“Show me; I don’t know. I cannot remember such a case, or perhaps there was some individual case. Show me where you are getting this from and then we’ll see,” Stanasic said.

The prosecutor presented a phone intercept from April 18, 1992, of a conversation between Stanasic and another official in the interior ministry. The official states that individuals “messing up with weapons” in Sokolac were arrested and that the officers “can beat them, do whatever they fucking want, then we will move them because we have no space here”.

Stanasic gave the reply of “fine” to his interlocutor, Olmsted said.

“This conversation relates to non-Serb prisoners, doesn’t it?” he asked.

“Where does it say that? Read it out to me that detainees are non-Serbs,” Stanasic countered.

“I acknowledge that there is no mention of ethnicity, but I’m putting to you that these are non-Serb prisoners, isn’t that correct?” the prosecutor asked.

Stanasic said that this was not correct, and that the weapons in Sokolac were actually “being abused and stolen by Serbs”.

“This has nothing to do with POWs or the non-Serb population,” he maintained.

The prosecutor produced a report dated May 20, 1992 and addressed to the undersecretary for public security in the interior ministry. It stated that 156 persons had been detained and taken into custody by the Yugoslav army and the Territorial Defence force near Sarajevo.

“It is noted the inadequate conditions of accommodation, food, hygiene and the state of health of the detainees. Mr Stanasic, the [interior ministry] had information about inhumane conditions in detention facilities in May 1992, didn’t it?” Olmsted.

“There was fighting going on, and these persons were taken prisoner and put up in Kula prison close to Sarajevo, and the ministry of justice was informed about that, and undersecretary for public security was informed about that, too,” Stanasic said.

The prosecutor then asked whether, at the beginning of August 1992, Stanasic had seen the now infamous footage shot by international journalists of emaciated prisoners being held at detention camps in Prijedor.

“Mr Prosecutor, correct, but since we didn’t have electricity most of the time, it was only on one occasion on the evening news there was a report, I think CNN or something,” Stanasic said.

Olmsted then put it to the witness that “despite all the information available to you regarding detention facilities” where non-Serbs were being held, the “first and only order” he issued to his subordinates on the issue was not until August 10, 1992.

Stanasic said this assessment was “not correct”.

“I tried to exert pressure so that members of the [ministry] would not have anything to do with prisoners, in terms of persons brought into custody, [and that they were] only treated on the basis of the law on criminal procedure and law on the interior,” Stanasic said.

The prosecutor countered that Stanasic’s previous instructions with regard to detention facilities all pertained to gathering information, and were not orders about what to do with the facilities themselves.

Stanasic replied that this was not correct, and that the detention centres were closed by September that year as a “result of this pressure”. He added however, that none of these places were established through “a decision of mine” and it was “the army that was involved in all of that”.

The trial continues next week.

**Rachel Irwin is IWPR's Senior Reporter in The Hague.**

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