

## **Bosnian Serb Srebrenica Regret**

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Republika Srpska's contrition over atrocity and discovery of missing wartime documents too little, too late for PfP programme.

In an unprecedented speech, Bosnian Serb president Dragan Cavic this week expressed regret for the Srebrenica massacre, admitting that his people were responsible for the deaths of some 7,000 Muslim men and boys nine years earlier.

The move came a week before the NATO summit in Istanbul, where Bosnia is seeking admittance to the Partnership for Peace, PfP, programme, and was followed by news that a lost police archive had been rediscovered and was being delivered to the Hague tribunal.

Observers, however, warn that this sudden turnabout in the Republika Srpska, RS, authorities' willingness to deal with the Bosnian Serbs' wartime record is a case of too little, too late, and is unlikely to lead to PfP membership.

They also point out that the unmistakable connection between the NATO summit and the timing of the admission is unlikely to go unnoticed by the general public, and may lead people to believe that they are being coerced into facing up to the past.

Cavic's June 23 speech came hard on the heels of a dramatic report released by an RS governmental commission on Srebrenica, which for the time recognised the extent of the crimes committed there, and revealed the location of 32 new mass graves.

"During the nine days of July 1995, crimes were committed in Srebrenica," Cavic said and began to read out loud some of the more gruesome findings from the commission's report. "These nine July days ... are a black page in the history of the Serbian nation," he went on, reminding Bosnian Serbs that "every nation has a duty to take its own steps towards the truth, and that means first and foremost facing the sinners within one's own ranks".

But as the president was trying to confront his nation with the gravity of the crimes committed nine years ago, the public was gripped by with a story concerning the appearance of "misplaced" documentation that could contain evidence on wartime events in RS.

The existence of these mystery files was recently revealed by the international community's High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lord Ashdown, while visiting one of the 32 mass graves sites listed by the Srebrenica commission. He said that the interior ministry had found 16 boxes of files containing information that the commission had not had access to.

Just two days after the boxes were turned over to Hague investigators, Sasa Misisic - who was the commander of the police station where the records were discovered - was suspended from his post. The Bosnian Serb media reported this event as a "punishment" for finding the wartime archive, and noted that an explosive device had been discovered under a car belonging to Misisic's father that same day.

RS interior minister Radomir Njegus and representatives of the European Union Police Mission in Bosnia denied allegations that the decision to suspend Misisic was connected to the discovery of the archive and its delivery to The Hague. They state instead that the commander was disciplined "for exceeding authority" in ordering a whole police shift to help set up a prefabricated summer house belonging to the RS vice-president.

Banja Luka's change in attitude towards war crimes issues came only after RS was threatened with sanctions and some of its high ranking politicians warned they could lose their jobs if Bosnia failed in its bid to join the PfP programme.

One of the main factors holding up membership is the Bosnian Serbs' reluctance to cooperate with the tribunal.

Speaking at a press conference in Banja Luka on June 23, the leader of the biggest opposition party, Milorad Dodik, fumed at the "paranoid way in which the authorities compete in expressing their eagerness to cooperate with The Hague". Such gestures should in principle be welcomed, he said, but warned that "having in mind the fact that they are an obvious result of the fear of sanctions, they can only trigger negative public reactions" to efforts to get locals to come to terms with the entity's wartime past.

Branko Todorovic, who leads the RS Helsinki Committee, shares this opinion, telling IWPR, "Despite of all

the government's activities and dramatic statements about facing the consequences of the war, the message that the public gets is that this is only being done out of fear of sanctions."

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**Location:** Bosnia and  
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