

Conflicting Evidence on Detention Camp Security

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Court hears seemingly contradictory evidence about which Bosnian Serb authority was responsible for camps.

The Hague tribunal trial of two former Bosnian Serb police chiefs this week heard apparently conflicting evidence about whether the Bosnian Serb army or the police were responsible for securing detention camps for non-Serbs.

Former Republika Srpska, RS police official Drago Borovcanin appeared at the Hague tribunal as a prosecution witness for the first time in the trial of former Bosnian Serb police commanders Mico Stanisic and Stojan Zupljanin, who are charged with crimes against Bosnian Croats and Muslims during 1992.

Borovcanin said the army had been tasked with guarding wartime detention camps both in the Sarajevo area and elsewhere in the country. However, prosecutor Joanna Korner noted that, in a 1992 Bosnian Serb police meeting, Zupljanin had said the camps had been “given” to the police.

Zupljanin, who became an adviser to the Bosnian Serb president and Hague indictee Radovan Karadzic in 1994, is accused of the extermination, murder, persecution, and deportation of non-Serbs in north-western Bosnia between April and December 1992.

Stanisic is charged with the murder, torture and cruel treatment of non-Serb civilians, as well as for his failure to prevent or punish crimes committed by his subordinates.

Stanisic and Zupljanin are alleged to have participated in a joint criminal enterprise aimed at the permanent removal of non-Serbs from the territory of an intended Serbian state. They are accused of crimes committed between April 1 and December 31, 1992, in 20 municipalities throughout Bosnia and Hercegovina, BiH.

Stanisic and Zupljanin are also charged with responsibility for the unlawful detention of civilians in camps in Bosnia as well as for “the establishment and perpetuation of inhumane living conditions in these camps”, the indictment says.

Borovcanin began working as a policeman in the BiH Ministry of Internal Affairs, MUP in March 1974. In April 1992, after the Bosnian Serb MUP had been formed, he became an inspector in the Security Services Centre, CSB, in Sarajevo. He currently works in the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees.

Referring to camps and collection centres in municipalities of Sarajevo which had Bosniaks and Croats as prisoners, the witness stated he had found out of their existence only on July 11, 1992, at a meeting of RS police commanders held in Belgrade.

“I found out about them from what Mr Zupljanin said, and had certainly known nothing before,” said the witness.

"The transit or collection centres, as you call them, were in the competence of the RS army; you see, any war creates population transfers and turbulent migrations."

Prosecutor Joanna Korner responded, "Yes, but you say that the centres were managed by the army, which is not what Zupljanin said at the 11 July meeting, where he said that the 'camps were given to the police'."

The witness responded that the police were "most probably" involved in the camps simply because of the shortage of military personnel.

"Well, if it did happen that the police was sometimes in charge of securing these camps, it was merely for lack of other people," he said.

Korner pointed out a photograph of the cultural centre in the Sarajevo municipality of Pale, which was identified by the witness and included on the record.

Borovcanin clarified that he had known that there were people of non-Serb nationality detained in the building, but said that he had never seen these prisoners.

He added that he did not know whether these people had been beaten, although he accepted having often visited that police station.

"It wasn't a usual prison like the one in Sarajevo - Kula, wasn't it?" Korner asked.

"I see it this way, people had fled certain war zones in the surrounding [area] or from mere fear from future events and they had come there," the witness answered.

Korner asked Borovcanin how he knew that the inmates had not been imprisoned there for some other reason.

The witness responded, "The army didn't want to take care of them and neither did the civilian protection service, the easiest thing was to give the 'hot potato' to the police, that's simply what happened.

"Every war has seen camps, collection camps, it's a necessary product of war, hence the army should have taken care of that issue, not the police."

The trial continues next week.

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