

Court Told Seselj Zvornik Speech Caused Incidents

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But Seselj claims it was made a year before war broke out and could “not have affected” events in eastern Bosnia.

A Bosniak who was held in Serb-run camps told the tribunal this week that a speech made by Vojislav Seselj in the eastern Bosnian town of Zvornik before the war “resulted in several ethnic incidents”.

Protected witness VS1013 said he had not listened to the speech himself, but had “heard about it from a lot of people because it was shocking”.

“I never thought a war would start in Zvornik. However, after that speech I remember hearing about incidents that happened,” said the witness.

The indictment against Seselj, leader of the Serbian Radical Party, SRS, says he “espoused and encouraged the creation of a homogenous ‘Greater Serbia’”. He is also charged with making “inflammatory speeches in the media, during public events and during visits to the volunteer units and other Serb forces in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, instigating those forces to commit crimes” between 1991 and 1993.

The prosecution says Seselj made an inflammatory speech at a rally in March 1992 thereby precipitating attacks on non-Serbs in Zvornik. “We are going to clean Bosnia of pagans and show them a road which will take them to the east, where they belong,” he is quoted as saying.

During cross-examination, Seselj admitted giving the speech but said it happened in 1991 - which the witness confirmed - and said his words could “not have affected things that happened a year later”.

According to the indictment, in April 1992 Serb forces, including volunteers known as “Seselj's men”, took control of Zvornik. Afterwards, hundreds of non-Serb civilians were detained, beaten, tortured and killed in the Standard shoe factory, the Ciglana factory, Ekonomija farm, the Novi Izvor building and the Celopek Dom Kulture.

The witness said he was captured on May 4 that year as he attempted to leave Zvornik and then taken to the Standard shoe factory.

“There were actually two groups of Serb volunteers in that building: volunteers from Loznica and a unit from the city of Kraljevo which all the Serb guards referred to as ‘Seselj’s men’, but we were only beaten by the Loznica volunteers,” he said.

“It was truly horrible. They would come several times a day to beat us in terrible ways. I was once beaten with an electric cord across my legs until I fell to the floor.”

After several days all the prisoners were transported to the Ekonomija farm, which the witness said was “the worst time of [his] life”. According to the witness, Seselj’s men took part in the torture at the farm, along with the Loznica group and other soldiers.

"I was beaten with a wooden stick across the shoulder until it broke, and as a result I now almost can't use my left hand," he said.

The witness said he overheard his captors' conversations and so could identify their leader as Vojvoda Cele. "There was also a major called Toro and several volunteers I only know by nicknames," he added.

"Vojvoda Cele was the worst of them. One night he stripped us all and told us to pray as Serbs to Jesus. He beat several men that night, and one old man died as a result of that beating.

"He wanted to kill us all, but a military official came in and said he needed strong people for work."

Seselj produced a statement from Miroslav Vukovic, known as Vojvoda Cele, denying these accusations. "I was not in Zvornik at the time of those crimes, and I look nothing like the witness' description," said the statement.

The witness said he found out that Seselj's men were from the SRS because he saw Major Toro holding a "black leather army ID card with gold or silver writing on it which said SRS".

Seselj said there have never been black SRS ID cards.

Seselj showed the witness a statement from 1993 in which he refers to Seselj's men as "unknown volunteers" and accused him of being coached by the Bosniak Secret Service, AID. The witness replied that he had given many statements, but the one for the ICTY was the "most complete".

Seselj also read several of his statements from 1992 in which he advocated "the arrest of various Serb paramilitary formations which were free to roam in Zvornik at that time".

The trial continues next week with the testimony of protected witness VS1015.

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