

COURTSIDE: Milosevic Trial

Author: [Mirko Klarin](#)

Witness testimony sheds light on tactics employed by Serbs to deport Kosovo Albanians.

In the first four weeks of the Milosevic trial, the prosecution has completed approximately half the evidence concerning the deportation of Kosovo Albanians in spring 1999.

Twelve out of 14 prosecution witnesses testifying so far described the circumstances under which they left their villages and towns at the end of March 1999 and took refuge in Albania, Macedonia or Montenegro.

This presentation of evidence on deportations may last until the end of this month, since the prosecution has announced that their violent, systematic and widespread nature will be demonstrated by the testimonies of witnesses from a total of 24 locations in Kosovo.

The testimonies of the victims and witnesses of deportations so far indicates two patterns or methods used in forcing Kosovo Albanians to leave their homes. The pattern applied in villages was different to that in towns.

The villages, as the prosecution witnesses described, were first encircled and shelled. The army and police would then enter, burning houses, killing some locals and forcing the others to leave and head for the border.

In towns, the army and police units would go from one house to another, forcing people to get out and join refugee convoys or directing them towards concentration points where buses, trucks or trains awaited them. In the process, they burned and looted houses and killed those who failed to comply without hesitation.

Three witnesses last week - Hasan Pruthi, a lawyer from Djakovica; Qamil Shabani, a teacher from Zegra, and Sabit Kadriu, president of the Council for Human Rights and Liberties from Vucitrn - confirmed this "recipe" for deportation.

Continuing his practice from the previous three weeks, Milosevic used the cross-examination to deny witnesses' assertions about army and police violence, suggesting they left their villages and towns of their own accord, because they feared NATO bombardment and found themselves in "the war zone" between the Serbian army and police and the Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA.

The witnesses replied that "they did not fear the NATO bombs" but saw them as key to bringing about an independent Kosovo. Almost without exception, they said they "knew nothing" of KLA military or terrorist activities during or after the events listed in the indictment.

Their testimonies, especially those of rights activists, Kadriu, and Halit Barani, might have been stronger if they had at least allowed for the possibility that KLA forces also violated human rights or committed war crimes. The Hague prosecution has placed some KLA leaders under investigation for crimes committed against non-Albanians in Kosovo.

Kadriu's testimony was especially important because it showed that violence in Kosovo did not start with

NATO air-strikes, launched on March 24, 1999. As head of the local human rights council, Kadriu monitored the Vucitrn area, where the Serbian army and police carried out attacks against the KLA during 1998, documenting crimes committed against Albanian civilians.

Kadriu said that after the KLA "expanded its activities to the area of Drenica" early in 1998, the Serbian army and police carried out "a series of coordinated actions" in this area in late February and early March, especially around the villages of Qirez and Likosina.

Visiting this area immediately after the military operation was complete, Kadriu claims he found the bodies of twelve members of the Ahmeti family in Likosina, and 63 bodies of the Jashari family near a hole in Prekaze.

That was when the first massive movements of population occurred, when more than 4,000 villagers from the area of Drenica found shelter in Vucitrn and other nearby places.

The next big offensive took place in September 1998 on Cicavica mountain. When after several days of military action army and police left the area, Kadriu visited Albanian villages in this zone and found 70 to 90 houses had been burned down. In Galice, he claimed, he found 14 corpses of civilians with "their throats slit, and their heads smashed with hammers". He also described the victims of crimes he claimed to have found in other villages.

Kadriu said the offensive and accompanying violence drove more than 50,000 people from the villages on Cicavica to the Resnik region.

He described how on April 2, 1999, the Albanian population of Vucitrn left for mountains controlled by the KLA. When a large group of refugees organised a convoy on May 2 and tried to return to Vucitrn, they were attacked that evening on the road by Serbian forces and exposed to heavy artillery and automatic gun fire. In this attack 109 people were killed (their bodies have been exhumed).

The survivors, including Kadriu, were taken to the agricultural centre in Vucitrn, where the following day the men were separated and taken to prison in Smrekovnica. Kadriu spent 20 days in jail, when he was forced to sign a statement admitting he was a member of "Shiptar (derogatory Serb name for Albanians) terrorist gangs".

After 20 days, the prisoners were taken to buses and deported to Albania. At the border they had to give in all their personal documents.

Kadriu's cross-examination was so fierce that the judges had to intervene frequently and warn both sides. While Milosevic asserted that "everything this witness said was a lie", Kadriu replied that the defendant's claims were "fairy tales" and "product of his imagination".

Kadriu was similarly dismissive of Milosevic's claims that mujahedin and al- Qaeda terrorists were present in Kosovo. Milosevic waved papers which he claimed had originated from FBI and other American intelligence sources to substantiate the point.

The origin of the papers was not clarified, however, possibly because Milosevic was in a hurry to finish the cross-examination and return to the prison unit, where, for the first time since the start of trial, his wife, Mira Markovic, was waiting for him.

He was in such a hurry that he even objected to the judges' decision to extend the hearing for another 15 minutes so that the amici curiae could examine the witness.

At the start of last week, Milosevic requested written witnesses' statements to be delivered to him through the tribunal's registry, in effect discontinuing his boycott of documents delivered by the prosecution.

As expected, the judges last week rejected Milosevic's oral request to be released. The trial chamber "was not satisfied that the accused, if released, would continue to appear for trial and would not pose any danger to any victim, witness or other person," they said.

Mirko Klarin is IWPR senior editor at the war crimes tribunal and editor-in-chief of SENSE News Agency.

Location: Albania
Kosovo
Macedonia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/courtside-milosevic-trial>