

Del Ponte Banned From Promoting Book

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The Swiss foreign ministry says the work contains statements “not permissible” for a government representative.

The Swiss foreign ministry has banned Carla Del Ponte from promoting her account of her time as a war crimes prosecutor, saying the book does not benefit her new role as an ambassador.

“The Hunt: War Criminals and Me”, published in Italian, reveals details about Del Ponte’s eight years as chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, ICTY, before she stepped down this January to become Switzerland’s ambassador to Argentina.

“Carla Del Ponte’s book... contains statements which are not permissible for a representative of the Swiss government,” said foreign ministry spokesman Jean-Philippe Jeannerat in a statement issued last week. “Any public presentation of this work is incompatible with the author’s status as a Swiss ambassador.”

The foreign ministry of the neutral state has asked Del Ponte to return to Buenos Aires before a scheduled presentation of her book takes place in Milan.

Geri Mueller, who chairs the foreign affairs committee of both houses of parliament, said he hoped Del Ponte would resign from her ambassadorship.

“If she does not do so on her own, then, in my opinion, the Swiss parliament’s foreign affairs committee must consider and decide the matter. I would like to see Del Ponte recalled from her post in Argentina,” Mueller was quoted as saying by the Russian news agency Regnum.

The Swiss media are rife with speculation about which parts of the book have worried government officials most.

“‘The Hunt’ does not have mercy on any of the protagonists of the ex-Yugoslav conflicts; its vocabulary is devoid of any diplomacy. Serbs and Croats are called ‘sons of bitches’ for their failure to collaborate with the tribunal. Other charges are much more serious,” said the Geneva-based newspaper *Le Matin*.

Le Matin said allegations that Kosovo Albanian guerrillas transported hundreds of Serbian prisoners to northern Albania, killed them and “harvested” their organs for sale were especially problematic for the Swiss government.

Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper focused on the same episode.

“In the book, Del Ponte writes that her investigators visited a house in the remote mountainous region outside Burrel, Albania, which was allegedly being used as an impromptu clinic for the butchering of 300 young Serbs captured by the Kosovo Liberation Army,” said a report by Ian Traynor, from April 12.

The tribunal's spokesperson Nerma Jelacic addressed these allegations at a press conference held this week in The Hague.

She said the tribunal "is aware of very serious allegations of human organ trafficking raised by the former prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, in a book recently published in Italian under her name".

She noted that "no evidence in support of such allegations was ever brought before the tribunal's judges".

Some observers believe the Swiss government is particularly uncomfortable about Kosovo-related claims in Del Ponte's book because it has officially recognised the province's independence. Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey recently attended the opening of a Swiss embassy in Pristina.

Serbian officials have already tried to block the book's publication, saying it contains information that could jeopardise efforts to bring four war crimes fugitives to justice, including former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his army chief, Ratko Mladic.

On the other hand, the book makes unpleasant reading for Belgrade because it underlines its failure to arrest the fugitives.

In her book, Del Ponte accuses western powers of obstructing the arrests of war crimes fugitives and of operating double standards.

According to Le Matin, Del Ponte recalled having several heated discussions with senior western officials who were supposed to be her allies. For example, she wrote that the then CIA director George Tenet dismissed her requests for more support in her efforts to arrest the fugitives, saying he didn't care about her opinion.

De Ponte has said her book, written together with New York Times reporter Chuck Sudetic, is simply an account of her time with the tribunal.

"The message that I wanted to get across in this book is [that I have] great faith in international justice," Del Ponte was quoted as saying by Swiss media a few days before the foreign ministry stopped her from plugging the book.

"It is possible to obtain justice for the thousands of victims of these criminals despite all the difficulties that obstruct the path to justice," she concluded.

Further controversy is expected when the book is published in English and in Balkan languages.

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