

## **Del Ponte: Mladic Obstacle to Serbia's EU Progress**

**Author:** [Aleksandar Roknić](#)

Offer of cash for information leading to general's arrest does little to convince prosecutor that Serbia is serious about capturing him.

Serbia must do more to aid international war crimes investigators if it wants to make progress in its quest to join the European Union, the Hague tribunal chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte told EU ministers on October 15.

Belgrade has handed over 30 suspects to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, ICTY, but four remain at large, including Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, two Bosnian Serb leaders accused of genocide.

The day before Del Ponte reported to European officials on Serbian progress, Belgrade published a million-euro reward for information leading up to the capture of either of the two men. But this was still not enough to convince Del Ponte.

"The situation today is much better than it was a year ago, but the cooperation is still too slow and insufficient," she said.

She added that she couldn't give a positive report to Brussels until Mladic, who is accused of ordering the murder of about 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995, was behind bars.

"I am absolutely convinced that Serbia's government possesses the resources and means to locate and arrest the fugitives. Translating this ability into tangible results remains the principal obstacle. Therefore, I cannot give a positive assessment of full cooperation until Ratko Mladic is arrested and transferred to The Hague," she said this week.

Serbia's failure to arrest Mladic has long been a key obstacle to Belgrade's signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, SAA, a first step on the way to membership of the EU.

Nevertheless, Del Ponte was positive about an eventual result.

"I am 80 per cent sure of this. Mladic could be arrested very soon, maybe in the next few weeks," she said.

Del Ponte is due to visit Serbia in late October to assess the situation more fully and the EU has postponed its decision on an SAA until after her return.

Serbian progress towards EU membership has been rocky since the democratic revolt that overthrew Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.

The EU suspended talks in 2006 over Serbia's failure to hand over Mladic and several other fugitives, then restarted them in June this year.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rhen said Serbia had to put more effort into capturing the fugitives, and had to open crucial archives, particularly those of the defence ministry and the Security and Intelligence Service, BIA, to gain approval for the SAA.

Nevertheless, he said progress was being made. "The cup is half full," he said this week.

Serbian officials said they were confident the SAA would be signed by the end of the year, and announced they were already taking further steps to close the ring around the remaining four fugitives.

Officials said Serbia planned to allow the seizure of assets of those supporting fugitives and to expand the role of the country's war crimes prosecutor to include jurisdiction over those who aid and abet the fugitives.

Other actions include a hotline for the public to call with information about the fugitives, and rewards for information leading to the arrest of the fugitives - the first time since 2001 that Serbia has offered cash for assistance in the capture of an indictee.

Information leading to the capture of Stojan Zupljanin and Goran Hadzic, who are accused of war crimes in Bosnia and Croatia respectively, will earn an informant 250,000 euro.

Serbia has history of suddenly cooperating with the tribunal just before Del Ponte is due to issue a report. In May, former Bosnian Serb General Zdravko Tolimir was arrested on the eve of a visit by the prosecutor to Belgrade.

According to opinion polls, more than a third of Serbs still think Mladic was a hero and would not cooperate with his arrest.

In the light of such an ambivalent public, Rasim Ljajic, minister for employment in the Serb government, said the EU needed to maintain constant pressure, while being careful not to push too hard and offend Serbian nationalism.

"I hope that we will sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement after Del Ponte's visit to Belgrade. After this visit, we will strengthen our efforts to arrest the rest of the tribunal fugitives," he said.

Most analysts think the Serbian government is finally gaining the political will to track down and arrest the last few fugitives, possibly out of sheer embarrassment.

"How does it look when some big state says it has all the power, but can't seem to catch four men?" said Vojin Dimitrijevic, director of the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights.

“Serbia will have problems until it shows it can do something to finish the cooperation with the tribunal.”

Aleksandar Roknic is an IWPR journalist in Belgrade.

**Location:** Balkans  
Serbia  
Croatia  
Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/del-ponte-mladic-obstacle-serbias-eu-progress>