

Deronjic Plea-Bargain Claims

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Milosevic accuses witness of lying to get reduced sentence.

Slobodan Milosevic this week accused a prosecution witness of lying in testimony as part of a plea-bargain deal struck with prosecutors.

He said Miroslav Deronjic, 49, who has already pleaded guilty to organising attacks on Muslims in Bosnia in a separate trial, had agreed to fabricate evidence in the hope of getting a lower sentence.

"With this agreement that you made with the office of the prosecutor to get a lower sentence... you agreed to testify against those they want you to?" said Milosevic on November 27. "My point is that this witness concluded an agreement with the office of the prosecutor in order to be able to lie here for the benefit of the prosecution."

Judge May asked Deronjic, "You have heard the allegation that you have come here to lie as part of an agreement with the prosecution. This is a very serious allegation. Is it true or not? Don't take it as an insult. The important part is that an allegation has been made and you should answer it."

"That is absolutely not true," said Denoric. "I'm testifying here that my absolute wish was to testify before this court. That wish has nothing do with with the agreement."

Deronjic's evidence is an important item in the prosecution contention that Milosevic is responsible for atrocities in Bosnia because units from Serbia, Serbian special forces and paramilitaries, were sent over to help with "ethnic cleansing".

Deronjic was president of the Bratunac crisis staff , an ad hoc Serbs-only local government which was set up in early 1992, and which helped control ethnic cleansing of the surrounding area.

As such, he had a good view of the events taking place in his part of eastern Bosnia, and having pleaded guilty, he can provide valuable information about the scope of the cleansing - and the involvement of Serbian units in it.

Deronjic has already pleaded guilty to ordering the cleansing of a Muslim village, Glogovac, in which 65 civilians died and scores of homes were burned and the mosque destroyed.

This week, he repeated evidence, already given in that trial, that units of the Yugoslav army, JNA, had crossed into Bosnia to join an attack on villages around the Glogovac area.

In a 70-page statement, he laid out the full extent of the planning and arming of local Serb units and the cleansing of unarmed Muslims that followed in the spring of 1992.

Deronjic said that weapons were transported from Serbia to the Bosnian Serbs on boats crossing the Drina in 1991, before the cleansing began.

And he identified an officer, Reljic, who he thinks was a captain, who commanded a JNA unit of 102 armoured vehicles, which arrived in Bratunac in April 1992, as deportations got underway.

He also said that the Red Berets commandos turned up - a significant piece of evidence: Milosevic, as president of Serbia, had direct command of these units from his interior ministry, whereas the JNA was under Yugoslav control.

And he said he met an official, Predrag Spasojevic, who said he was part of the Serbian secret police, and showed an identity card to prove it. In a tense confrontation on November 27, Deronjic accused Milosevic of being responsible for volunteer forces also arriving from Serbia to cleanse Muslims from villages around Bratunac, close to the Drina river. "I expelled volunteers from Bratunac. The JNA refused to do it so I did it myself," he said

"You probably expelled some men you had personal conflicts with," said Milosevic.

Milosevic insisted, in cross examination, that any military plans by Bosnian Serbs were purely defensive, taken as a protective measure after a referendum was held on Bosnia's independence in early 1992. "It was not the Serbs who made a plan to separate themselves. They were making plans to protect themselves," Milosevic said.

"The plan was meant to use killing and expulsion," replied Deronjic. "I'm talking about the beginning of 1992."

After heated exchanges, with Milosevic jumping from one subject to another, Deronjic said, "I apologise, your honour, I always keep thinking that Mr Milosevic will follow up on his question."

As part of Deronjic's plea bargain, prosecutors have agreed to recommend a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment for Deronjic.

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Location: Serbia
Bosnia and
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