

Dvor Massacre 'Cover-up'

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The discovery of what are believed to be the bodies of Serbs from the village of Paulin Dvor may raise difficult questions for Croatia.

Identity documents found with 18 corpses exhumed earlier this year suggest they are the remains of Serb victims of one of the worst atrocities of the Croatian war, it has emerged.

High-placed sources in the interior ministry confirmed that the papers, found this spring alongside the bodies in a mass grave in the western Lika area, were those of Serb civilians killed ten years ago in the village of Paulin Dvor, some 500 km to the east.

The case raises uncomfortable parallels with the 1999 discovery in eastern Serbia of the bodies of what were believed to be Albanians who'd been killed in Kosovo and transported in a refrigerated truck and dumped in the Danube.

Like the Serbian case, it seems that Dvor bodies were relocated as part of attempts to conceal evidence of a massacre.

The state forensic institute in Zagreb is now seeking to make a formal identification of the Lika remains. "Identity cannot be established solely on the basis of documents found near the bodies," said Ivan Grujic, head of the Office for Missing and Imprisoned Persons.

"The matter concerns highly sensitive issues and it is not our practice to go public with details while the identity of the deceased has not been established with any degree of certainty."

Unlike other Serbians in Croatia, the people of Paulin Dvor had remained loyal to Zagreb during the war. But on the night of December 11, 1991, Croat troops marched in and locked 19 people - 18 Serbs and a Hungarian national - in the house of a local man called Andrija Bukvic. Most of the village's 168 residents had already fled.

According to police investigators at the time, the troops flew into a rage after one was killed by a Serb sniper in a nearby village. Ten soldiers are said to have burst into the Bukvic house and murdered all the prisoners before blowing up the house. Just one of the bodies was found; that of Dara Vujnovic, whose remains were packed in an ammunition box. No indictments were brought as the Croatian prosecutor said there was "insufficient evidence".

The village was later seized by Yugoslav People's Army units and Serb paramilitaries, with Zagreb only recovering the area after an agreement on its peaceful reintegration in January 1998.

The events at Paulin Dvor were detailed by Vojin Dabic and Ksenija Lukic in their book *Crimes Without Punishment*, published in English in 1997. The names and dates of birth of the victims are given, as well as claims that their bodies were transported from the massacre site in a TAM truck of the kind used at the time by the Croatian army.

Osijek County State Prosecutor Davor Petricevic told IWPR he had "unofficially heard" that the Lika remains were those of people from Paulin Dvor but would not comment further. The interior ministry confirmed that police teams in Osijek and Zagreb were investigating the discovery.

Such official scrutiny could prove uncomfortable for former Osijek zone commander Karl Gorinsek who, in November 1991, ordered that all Serb villages should be "be put under supervision" - that's to say controlled by the Croatian military.

A Slovene, Gorinsek deserted the Yugoslav army to fight for the Croat forces in 1991. He was replaced after an unsuccessful and costly attempt to liberate the Baranje region the following spring and retired soon after. The ex-general now lives in Zagreb and is a senior official in the Liberal Party - a member of Croatia's current coalition government.

Following the discovery of the Lika corpses, The Hague is calling for more information on the Paulin Dvor atrocity. IWPR has learned that police inspectors have now been assigned to not only apprehend those responsible for the massacre, but also to investigate who gave the order for the bodies to be transported across the country.

The discovery may finally explode the myth - promoted by former leader Franjo Tudjman - that Croats could not have carried out such atrocities as they fought a purely defensive campaign. It is looking increasingly likely that not only did Croatian forces commit war crimes; they attempted to cover them up.

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