

Former UK Envoy on Belgrade's Ties to Bosnian Serbs

Author: [Velma Šarić](#)

Army, police and intelligence service all assisted Bosnian Serb military, ex-diplomat says.

This week, the trial of two former senior Serbian State Security, DB, officials continued with the testimony of the former British ambassador to Belgrade, Sir Ivor Roberts.

He appeared as a defence witness for Jovica Stanisic, who served as DB head between 1991 and 1998, and who is currently on trial alongside former DB officer Franko Simatovic. Both are charged with participating in a joint criminal enterprise with the aim of forcibly and permanently removing non-Serbs from large areas of Croatia and Bosnia through persecution, murder and deportation.

According to the indictment, Stanisic and Simatovic established, organised and financed paramilitary units from Serbia, which were trained and then sent into Croatia and Bosnia, where they committed crimes and forced non-Serb populations out of the towns and villages they took control of.

Stanisic and Simatovic, arrested by the Serbian authorities in June 2003, have both pleaded not guilty.

From spring 1994 to the autumn of 1997, Roberts served as British ambassador to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, where he conducted negotiations “on site, on behalf of the international community, with the authorities in Belgrade,” as he told the court.

Despite being called by the Stanisic defence, Roberts seemed to disagree with some of the claims put by Stanisic’s lawyer Wayne Jordash.

Roberts recalled that when he arrived in Belgrade in 1994, an “ongoing subject was the uneasy relationship between the Serbian authorities in Belgrade and the Bosnian Serb leadership”.

Jordash said that “as a senior officer of the Belgrade authorities, the defendant [Stanisic] was part of a group which wanted a peaceful solution for the conflict, but this was obstructed by the opposed interest of the Bosnian Serb leadership under Radovan Karadzic in continuing war”.

Roberts disagreed with this view, stating that his impression was that “Milosevic's motives for accepting the efforts for finding peace were not based on a humanistic or altruistic interest in peace, but that he was well aware that the military chance to win the conflict in Bosnia was gone, because the Bosnian Serb army was literally falling apart. “In addition, the economic situation in Serbia was miserable due to the international sanctions which had pressurised the country.”

He said that despite stresses in the relationship between Belgrade and the Bosnian Serbs, cooperation “on the military level, including all sorts of exchanges and support, was continuing as usual”.

“Both the army, the police, and the State Security were still involved with helping the Bosnian Serbs,” he said. “It is true that it was impossible for Milosevic to control the Bosnian Serbs – it resembled a monster which he had created and couldn’t control any more.”

During cross-examination by prosecutor Travis Farr, Roberts described his impressions of Stanisic, whom he had spoken to during negotiations to free United Nations peacekeepers taken hostage by the Bosnian Serbs in 1995.

He confirmed the authenticity of a telegram sent from the British embassy in Belgrade, which the prosecutor showed.

“In it, you [Roberts] explained that Milosevic was considering sending Stanisic to Pale [the seat of the Bosnian Serb leadership]” where the defendant could “bring Karadzic to somehow free the hostages,” Farr said.

The witness described Stanisic as a “good man for the job because Karadzic and the others [in the Bosnian Serb leadership] were afraid of him,” and remarked that Karadzic was anxious about “threats, including death threats” brought from Belgrade by Stanisic.

He also described the “colourful personalities” he had met in the Bosnian Serb leadership, who often left a “bizarre impression”.

Roberts singled out Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb army commander, who was so “maddened at how

Britain was treating the Serbs that he started swearing about British silk shirts, saying that he would stop wearing them”.

After this testimony, it was decided the trial would take a one-month break.

Both defendants have asked to spend this break in Serbia, and are waiting for the authorities in Belgrade to respond to the tribunal on the arrangements and guarantees that have to be put in place for this to happen.

Velma Saric is an IWPR-trained reporter in Sarajevo.

Topic: Courtside

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/former-uk-envoy-belgrades-ties-bosnian-serbs>