

Fugitives the Media Forgot

Author: [Michael Farquhar](#)

Media attention and political wrangling surround the high-profile cases of Karadzic, Mladic and Gotovina - but what of the four other indictees still on the run?

Much column-space is given over in the international media to the three most notorious war crimes suspects still on the run years after being indicted by the Hague tribunal - Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic, his army chief Ratko Mladic and Croatian general Ante Gotovina.

But care should be taken not to overlook four other senior figures who remain at large, despite having been charged with some of the worst atrocities of the Balkans wars, observers say.

While these last remaining fugitives do not grab many headlines, the crimes they are accused of affected vast numbers of people in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo in the Nineties.

And further delays in transferring them to The Hague could jeopardise longstanding plans for the tribunal to wind down its work over the next few years.

Perhaps the most infamous of these four fugitives is former Serbian police chief Vlastimir Djordjevic, accused of involvement in a brutal campaign to drive hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanians from their homes in 1999.

Also on the list is Zdravko Tolimir, who was assistant commander for intelligence and security of the Bosnian Serb army's main staff when its troops executed thousands of Muslim men from the town of Srebrenica in 1995.

The third is Stojan Zupljanin, onetime chief of police in Banja Luka and later an adviser to the Bosnian Serb president. Zupljanin allegedly played a part in a violent campaign in the early Nineties to "cleanse" large parts of Bosnia of non-Serbs.

Finally, the former president of the so-called Republic of Serbian Krajina, Goran Hadzic, also remains on the run. He is implicated in mass deportations and a number of killings, the most notorious being the massacre of over 260 people taken from a hospital in the Croatian town of Vukovar in 1991.

Florence Hartmann, a spokesperson for the Hague tribunal's chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, is quite clear about the countries where the four are lying low. "Vlastimir Djordjevic is in Russia," she told IWPR. Tolimir, Zupljanin and Hadzic are "mainly in Serbia", she added, though they may also be spending time in Montenegro and in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

According to local media reports, Republika Srpska police and European Union peacekeepers launched raids as recently as October 10 at a property owned by Zupljanin in the town of Banja Luka; at a petrol station in Maslovare, where Zupljanin was born; and at an apartment belonging to an employee of the petrol station.

The latter two raids may well have been targeting what Hartmann describes as the "strong and well-organised" networks of supporters who protect the fugitives. At least in Tolimir's case, Hartmann alleges,

this includes support from within the Serbian army.

There were signs that backing from Serbian officials may also have helped facilitate Hadzic's flight following his indictment by the tribunal last year. According to Del Ponte, the suspect's disappearance from his home on July 13 came just hours after her office delivered a copy of his charge sheet to the Belgrade ministry of foreign affairs and to the Serbian embassy in The Hague.

But perhaps the most important factor making the fugitives' lives easier is the apparent lack of political will to take action against them.

Serbia has long been at loggerheads with the tribunal and the international community over its reluctance to arrest indictees and disclose potential evidence relating to war crimes. A new Belgrade policy of encouraging suspects to hand themselves in voluntarily, which led to a stream of Serb indictees arriving in The Hague earlier this year, has failed to achieve results in these four cases.

The tribunal's relationship with Russia – Djordjevic's reported hiding place – has also been a complex one.

In May 2000 Yugoslav defence minister Dragoljub Ojdanic was received with full honours in Moscow, a year after he was indicted by Hague prosecutors for war crimes in Kosovo. Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov later blamed the episode on bureaucratic blunders and said care would be taken not to let such a thing happen again.

There have been some positive developments in the Hague tribunal's relationship with Russia in the past year, Hartmann noted, including Moscow's arrest of another indictee, ex-Bosnian Serb military policeman Dragan Zelenovic, in late August. But, she added, "It is also a pity that Russia refuses to have more intense contacts with us."

Prior to giving himself up last month, another Hague war crimes suspect, Sredoje Lukic, had also apparently been successfully hiding in Russia.

Whatever the reasons behind their continuing freedom, observers say it is vital that Djordjevic, Hadzic, Tolimir and Zupljanin should not be overlooked amid the clamour over the tribunal's more prominent fugitives.

"It remains vital that the four indictees stand trial in The Hague," Bogdan Ivanisevic, a Belgrade-based researcher for Human Rights Watch, told IWPR. "They are accused of extremely serious crimes and to somehow 'forget' about those crimes would be morally indefensible."

"No fish are small fish when it comes to war crimes suspects wanted by the tribunal," agreed Edgar Chen, who has long monitored trials in The Hague for the Coalition for International Justice.

It is an indication of how important the office of the prosecutor considers the four indictees that Hartmann says none of their cases are suitable for referral to national judicial systems in the Balkans.

The handing over of some cases to courts in the region is a key part of the tribunal's so-called completion strategy, according to which its work is due to wind down over the next few years.

It is with such time constraints in mind that prosecutors are particularly keen to see the arrests of Djordjevic and Tolimir, whose cases are joined to those of a large number of other suspects who are all already awaiting trial in The Hague for crimes in Kosovo and Srebrenica.

If Djordjevic and Tolimir are not in custody by the time these two joint trials begin, Hartmann noted, "It would mean that we would have to repeat the same trial, which would occupy one chamber and one courtroom for at least one year, maybe more."

"These delays... put at risk the completion strategy," she added.

Tribunal president Judge Theodor Meron has already said that various setbacks mean the court is unlikely to succeed in earlier plans, which would have seen all trials completed as early as 2008 and appellate proceedings finished by the end of 2010.

Besides the disadvantages for court staff, it is also very possible that the fugitives themselves - if and when they arrive in The Hague - will find that their flight has done their own cases no good.

Such considerations may be especially relevant to Djordjevic and Tolimir. "If they are absent for the [joint trials]," noted Chen, "one could speculate that the other defendants may try to pit blame on them."

Michael Farquhar is an IWPR reporter in London.

Location: [Balkans](#)
[Macedonia](#)
[Albania](#)
[Stavropol](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/fugitives-media-forgot>