

## **International Justice/ICTY: Mar '08**

### **Author: IWPR**

Project provides comprehensive coverage of long-awaited trial of three Croatian generals. The project covered several important events at the court, both in Tribunal Update and the radio programme Facing Justice, which is produced in cooperation with Radio Free Europe.

The beginning of the trial of three Croatian army generals, Ante Gotovina, Mladen Markac and Ivan Cermak, which opened in The Hague on March 11, provoked numerous reactions both in Croatia and in Serbia. This case – dubbed “the trial of the century” in Croatia – is the first prosecution of Croatian officials to be held at the Hague tribunal.

The three defendants are charged with crimes against Serb civilians during the 1995 Croatian military Operation Storm, aimed at regaining control over the Serb-held Krajina region.

General Gotovina is still seen as a hero in his homeland, and many Croats believe he has been wrongly accused. On the other hand, Serbs blame him and other top Croatian officials for the mass exodus of Serbs which followed Operation Storm and have high expectations from this trial.

The IWPR team provided comprehensive coverage of the atmosphere in Croatia and Serbia before the trial started, as well as initial reactions to the opening arguments of the prosecution and defence.

Another important case due to open in March but postponed until April was the trial of two high-ranking Serbian officials – Franko Simatovic and Jovica Stanisic – who headed Serbia’s secret service and the special operation unit in the Nineties.

Prosecutors accuse them of establishing paramilitary groups who fought alongside ethnic Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia and who allegedly murdered, persecuted and expelled Bosniaks and Croats.

In the report *Serb Officials’ Trial May Shed Light on Start of War*, Belgrade-based IWPR-trained reporter Aleksandar Roknic considered why this case is so important.

In the piece, published on March 21, he pointed out the fact that the proceedings might show how closely Belgrade was implicated in the war crimes of the 1990s.

An important development in March came when Bosnian and Serbian police raided houses of relatives and friends of the few remaining war crimes fugitives, believed to be hiding in Bosnia and Serbia. Close family members of one of the fugitives, Stojan Zupljanin, sent a letter to the local media in which they called on him to surrender and “put an end to their misery”.

In an interesting feature, Merdijana Sadovic considered possible reasons why fugitives ignored desperate calls from their family members and refuse to surrender, even if that causes their families to suffer.

People interviewed for War Crimes Fugitives Deaf to Relatives Appeals, which was published on March 28, offered several possible reasons for this – from selfishness and lack of emotion for anyone, including their close family, to “fear of the consequences of something they have done” and “an incredible lack of trust in the... the tribunal”.

Last month, the project team also started discussing activities for spring and summer, which will further raise the profile of both Tribunal Update and Facing Justice in the region.

A tentative date has been set for a round-table discussion about transparency at the Hague tribunal, and discussions are also being held on the possibility of publishing a book which would contain the best analytical reports from Facing Justice over the last several months.

The book would be accompanied by CDs with the audio version of the broadcast reports.

**Location:** Serbia

Croatia

Bosnia and

Herzegovina

**Topic:** Project Highlight

**Focus:** International Criminal Tribunal for the former

Yugoslavia

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