

## **Kisses As Bosnian War Kicked Off**

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Bosnian presidency member Biljana Plavsic's warm greeting to Serb paramilitary who overran Bijeljina as war broke out.

Bosnian journalist Sead Omeragic has testified to the warmth with which former Bosnian Serb president Biljana Plavsic greeted notorious Serbian warlord Zeljko "Arkan" Raznatovic after his forces captured the town of Bijeljina in 1992.

Omeragic, who worked as a reporter for the Sarajevo weekly *Slobodna Bosna* in 1992, appeared as a witness in the trial of former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic on October 16.

He told the court how he joined a delegation from Bosnia's collective presidency consisting of Biljana Plavsic and Fikret Abdic, the Serb and Muslim representatives - who went to Bijeljina on April 6, 1992 after its seizure by Arkan's paramilitary "Tigers". Plavsic was later to serve as Bosnian Serb president in 1996-98, before being indicted for war crimes by the Hague tribunal, and sentenced to 11 years in jail in 2003.

The delegation also included two generals from the Yugoslav National Army, JNA, Dobrasin Prascevic, deputy commander of JNA forces in Bosnia, and General Sava Jankovic, commander of the JNA Tuzla corps.

After their convoy arrived at Bijeljina, the delegation went to the nearest JNA barracks. Inside, they found several hundred Bosnian Muslims who had sought refuge from the Serbian paramilitaries who controlled the town.

When the delegation met Arkan in front of the municipal offices in Bijeljina, Biljana Plavsic kissed him on the cheek. "She called him 'my child'," said Omeragic.

Plavsic said that Arkan had saved the Serbs in Bijeljina from crimes the Muslims were preparing to commit. In fact, 38 out of the 41 victims of shootings the previous day were non-Serbs.

General Prascevic gave Arkan a military salute and shook hands with him. "The JNA generals pleaded with Arkan to let the JNA take control of the town, but he turned them down," said the witness.

Omeragic said that he was standing in a corridor outside the office where Arkan was talking to Plavsic, Abdic and the JNA officers. Two soldiers wearing olive-green uniforms tried to arrest him, and one of Arkan's men dressed in a black uniform put a pistol to his temple. Arkan came out of the meeting room and waved a hand at the soldiers. They let him go.

In cross-examination, Milosevic insisted that some of the things had Omeragic said in written testimony had not been included in an article he published in *Slobodna Bosna* the same week Bijeljina was taken over by Serbian paramilitaries. Omeragic replied that he had not put everything into his article because space was limited.

He told the court that after the trip, he got back to the capital to find that war had broken out, "I returned to Sarajevo which was shelled. People were getting killed. Three and half tragic years were beginning."

Emir Suljagic is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

**Location:** Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

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