

Martić Witness Says UN Favoured Croats

Author: [Katherine Boyle](#)

Ex-UN soldier says the international community ignored the plight of Krajina Serbs. The trial of the former leader of the rebel Serb authorities in Croatia Milan Martić this week heard testimony from a witness who accused the UN of favouring the Croats over the Serbs and claimed that the US and Germany were instrumental in providing Croatian troops with weapons during the bloody Balkan wars.

Patrick Bariot, a former UN Protection Force, UNPROFOR, soldier, strongly defended Martić and the Serbs, portraying the Serb population in the self-proclaimed Serbian Autonomous District of Krajina, SAO Krajina, as victims of an aggressive Croatian government and military and an international community that intentionally ignored their pleas for help.

“There was an embargo on arms [in Croatia] since 1991, but it was equally obvious that the Croats were arming themselves with help from Germany and the USA,” said Bariot who was a Lieutenant Colonel in the French army when he joined the UN peacekeeping mission in the Balkans. “There was no ambiguity that the Croats were arming themselves in order to take Krajina back.”

During cross-examination, however, prosecutor Colin Black pointed out that the American firm Bariot claimed was giving the Croats weapons was not affiliated with the US government.

Bariot also claimed the UN turned a blind eye to the under-the-table arms dealings even after finding American-made weapons in the hands of Croats.

However, he said an economic embargo imposed by the international community on Serb-held areas was strictly enforced.

“The [RSK] was totally cut off,” he said. “It was isolated from the world. There was total poverty for the people there. The peacekeeping marshals were in despair [over the situation].”

These circumstances, he said, put the Serbs on the defensive and left leaders like Martić with little choice but to respond to Croatian attacks.

Martić is charged with the persecution, murder and forced removal of hundreds of non-Serbs from the RSK and from large parts of Bosnia. He is also accused of unlawfully attacking Zagreb and various Muslim and Croat villages

Bariot became acquainted with Martić in 1994 when he spent several months working as an anesthesiologist for UNPROFOR at the Glina hospital in the RSK.

The Frenchman, who was later made an honorary RSK citizen and has acted as the area’s ambassador in Paris, is well known for his various books and articles defending notorious indictees including Martić and fugitives Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. All three men have written forewords for his publications.

He has described the Hague tribunal as “illegitimate” and affirmed this week that his views have not changed. Bariot has publicly stated that he believes Martić is innocent and should be allowed to go free.

Dismissing the charges listed in the indictment, Bariot rejected the suggestion that Muslims and Croats in the RSK were treated any differently than the Serb population.

Bariot said some Croats decided to leave the RSK for Zagreb because of the strict economic embargo imposed on the region.

He added that he met Croats who decided to stay in the RSK and live at peace with the Serbs, asserting that they were never attacked or harmed during his time in the region.

“There were never any threats, any forced expulsions,” he said. “I can say this with certainty, because I was taking part in the daily life of citizens of Krajina. I went to the hospital in Glina every day and also to small villages and isolated farms.”

During his time at the hospital, Bariot said that any Muslim or Croat who came to the facility received food and medical care, despite the scarcity of supplies. He said in the Glina hospital all patients were treated equally and doctors gave blood “even to Muslims”.

The only fear in the area, he said, existed among the Serb population.

“These people were really terrified,” he said. “They constantly referred to World War Two, the Ustasas.”

At first, the presence of the UNPROFOR reassured the Serbs, said Bariot.

“They feared the invasion of Krajina, and set all their hope on the international community,” he added. “They hoped they would be saved from aggression.”

Once these hopes were dashed, Bariot said Croatian Serbian leaders like Martić had no choice but to defend the Serbs in the RSK themselves.

The Martić trial will resume on November 13.

Katherine Boyle is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

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