

## **Milosevic Extradited**

**Author:** [Marcus Tanner](#)

The Serbian government has finally plucked up the courage to draw a line under the Milosevic era.

With its extraordinary decision to hand over Slobodan Milosevic to the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague, Serbia has chosen to break with its recent past in the most dramatic way possible.

The Serbs have not only made a legal precedent by handing over their former head of state to be tried in a foreign court; nor have they simply responded to a crude US threat to withhold desperately-needed aid money at the Brussels donors conference on Yugoslavia which opens today (Friday).

The Serbian government has finally plucked up the courage to draw a line under the Milosevic era and, by surrendering the country's former leader to international justice, has acknowledged their country's role in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the former Yugoslavia.

This marks a crucial milestone in Serbia's return to normality, as even the reformist government that supplanted Milosevic had previously been rather coy in admitting Serbia's direct responsibility.

Until recently, the Yugoslav authorities maintained they would be better off trying Milosevic at home. The ex-president's successor, Vojislav Kostunica, vocally opposed the whole concept of The Hague tribunal. Serbian public opinion, the world was told, would never stand for it.

The prompt action of the Serbian government under Zoran Djindjic has exposed the lie at the heart of this assumption. Far from provoking a nationalist uprising, Milosevic's extradition brought only a few thousand of his most die-hard supporters on to the streets - a token display of rage in a city of more than a million.

It is, moreover, highly questionable whether the Serbian judiciary, much of which was appointed by Milosevic, would even have brought the ex-president to trial.

The behaviour of the Yugoslav constitutional court on Thursday, in trying desperately to block the whole extradition process, suggests many top Serbian judges harbour strong sympathies for the man who appointed them.

With Milosevic in jail in The Hague, in company with the former Bosnian Serb president Biljana Plavsic, the Serbs can at last emerge from under the dark shadow that his regime cast over their future.

His mere presence inside Serbia, even in the Central Prison in Belgrade, was a constant catalyst and a rallying point for the country's ultra-nationalist rump.

It posed a permanent obstacle to the country's slow return to the European democratic mainstream, bedevilling not merely Serbia's prospects but those of the entire Balkan region.

At the same time, his detention inside Serbia gravely undermined the work of The Hague tribunal. It begged the question of why relatively small actors in the Yugoslav conflicts should be sentenced to heavy

jail terms in foreign countries while the masterminds behind those bloody wars remained at liberty, or in prison at home.

With Milosevic in a Dutch cell, the tribunal can finish the job that the UN empowered it to do in 1992. In particular, it can dragnet former Yugoslavia for the criminals who organised the killing of several hundred hospital patients in Vukovar in November 1991 and the slaughter of some 6,000 Muslims in Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia in July 1995.

Serbia can never again be seen as a place where indicted war criminals can hide out with impunity. The men behind the shocking carnage in Srebrenica, the former Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, must be very afraid today, wherever they are.

The European Union and the United States now have a classic opportunity to put their money where their mouths are. They must open their purses at the Brussels donors conference and disburse the £1.3bn they have collectively offered Belgrade for its cooperation. It is time for the bridges across the Danube, which destroyed in Nato's air campaign of 1999, to be rebuilt.

A reborn Serbia, finally rid of Milosevic's destructive influence and committed to expanding its influence by peaceful methods, could be the motor that revives the whole region.

Even in its current ruined state, Serbia remains the biggest player in the Balkans outside Greece, and geography alone dictates that its re-connection with the world is essential. We need no black holes in the middle of south-eastern Europe.

Milosevic - and his supporters - always claimed that the West wanted to enslave and destroy Serbia, rather than save it. Now is the time to prove just how wrong they were.

Marcus Tanner was The Independent's Belgrade correspondent during the early Nineties.

**Location:** [Balkans](#)  
[Macedonia](#)  
[Albania](#)  
[Serbia](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/milosevic-extradited>