

## **Mladic Trial Probes Ballistics of 1994 Markale Attack**

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Police expert challenged on accuracy of methods used for investigating shell impacts.

A former ballistics expert with the Sarajevo police appeared at the trial of former Bosnian Serb army chief Ratko Mladic to tell the court about incidents he investigated during the 1992-95 siege of the city.

Mirza Sabljica appeared in court under his own name, but image distortion was provided as a protective measure.

His testimony focused mainly on an attack on the Markale market in central Sarajevo on February 5, 1994, in which 68 civilians died and more than 140 were injured.

As wartime head of the Bosnian Serb army, General Mladic is alleged to be responsible for crimes of genocide, persecution, extermination, murder and forcible transfer which "contributed to achieving the objective of the permanent removal of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from Bosnian Serb-claimed territory".

The 44-month siege of Sarajevo, which features prominently in the indictment against Mladic, left nearly 12,000 people dead and many more injured.

Sabljica has already testified in several other cases at the Hague tribunal concerning Sarajevo, including the ongoing trial of former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

In his testimony this week, which coincidentally started exactly on the 19th anniversary of the 1994 Markale massacre, Sabljica told tribunal judges that he had investigated a number of mortar bomb explosions that led to civilian deaths and injuries.

After the 1994 Markale attack, he said, a group of local and international experts studied the shell crater to determine where it was fired from.

"An investigation was carried out almost immediately after the mortar hit, [as soon as] the scene was cleaned of human remains", Sabljica said. "We analysed in detail the traces of shrapnel as it hit the asphalt, the characteristic pattern it had left on the ground."

When Sabljica reached the scene, there were many human remains and other "visible traces of the tragedy still around", he said, explaining that as a first step, "the crime scene was secured by markings I had placed there by myself".

The prosecution showed the court video footage showing instruments at the scene of the mortar bomb impact. Commenting on this, Sabljica said a "trigonometric method was used to determine the direction from which the mortar [bomb] came".

"The mortar had come from the direction of north-northeast, which led us to the conclusion that it came from an area which was under the control of Bosnian Serbs," the witness said.

During cross-examination, Mladic's defence counsel Branko Lukic put it to the witness that the "results of the investigation were subjective and therefore wrong", and that the findings showed a significant bias in favour of "one party".

Lukic asked the witness whether the Bosniak investigation produced the same findings as that of the United Nations peacekeeping force UNPROFOR.

"There were certain differences", Sabljica replied. "But UNPROFOR had confirmed that the mortar came... from a direction where there were [both] Bosnian Army and VRS [Bosnian Serb army] positions."

"It was not possible to use ballistic methods to determine the exact place where the mortar was fired from, or who had fired it," the witness said.

Lukic then asked the witness to comment on two reports from Bosnian police which contained completely different data on the mortar projectile that hit Markale.

"Neither of these reports is a ballistic report", said Sabljica, "therefore they cannot be used as relevant data. They were merely police documents relating to the event as such."

Lukic then turned to an earlier shelling incident, which occurred during a football match in the Sarajevo

suburb of Dobrinja in June 1993. He suggested there was a discrepancy between the findings of an international team that investigated the attack, and Sabljica's ballistic report on it.

"Why does the UN report mention two mortar shell craters, and yours only one?" Lukic asked.

"Well... either we were taken some place else, or the UN was," Sabljica replied. "But at the site which we investigated, there was only one crater. And that's how we wrote it down."

The trial of Mladic continues next week.

**Velma Saric is an IWPR-trained reporter in Sarajevo.**

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