

REGIONAL REPORT: Croatia Indifferent to Milosevic Trial

Author: [Andrea Feldman](#)

Milosevic's trial for alleged crimes in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo raises barely a murmur in Zagreb.

The tribunal's recent decision to combine all the charges facing former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic in one trial was greeted with seeming indifference in Zagreb.

To understand the apparent lack of interest in tribunal matters among the Croatian public one has to understand the selective and sparse nature of information about The Hague offered by the media here.

Croatian television limits coverage of The Hague to occasional and superficial trial reports, usually on the first and last days of proceedings. Managers, meanwhile, refuse to air reports from the SENSE agency, which supplies Bosnia-Herzegovina and other countries in south-east Europe with coverage of courtroom developments.

These serious omissions deprive viewers of any opportunity to hear witness testimony or prosecution and defence arguments, leaving them largely in the dark about the international court.

Following the January 2000 election, there were calls to turn Croatian TV into a genuine public service broadcaster, free of political influence, but to no avail.

Such an overhaul will require persistent and forceful public pressure. Not an easy task when people are so heavily influenced by the broadcaster - the sole source of news for 80 per cent of the population, according to opinion polls.

To change things, intellectuals and NGOs should insist on the public's right to correct and complete information.

As it is, not even the text of the Milosevic indictment relating to Croatia was published in the local press. The reasoning behind such apparent indifference is hard to grasp, as the names of those killed in Ovcar, Vukovar hospital and Dubrovnik are listed in the indictment.

Public knowledge of the indictment's contents would be a useful ally for those campaigning against right-wing politicians and parties advocating non-cooperation with the tribunal.

At present, the tribunal's outreach programme, which aims to reach a broader audience in Croatia, has had to be content with inquiries from a few interested individuals and NGOs. One has to ask why there is no information centre or reading room made available to the public, at least in Zagreb.

Public attitudes towards The Hague serve as an important litmus test for Croatian democracy. In order for people to understand the tribunal, they need comprehensive and reliable information about court proceedings.

At this crucial time, however, rather than report on the Milosevic trial, Croatia's media prefer to bombard

readers and viewers with reports of Drazen Budisa's victory as party leader at the Croatian Social Liberal Party, HSL, convention.

It was Budisa's reluctance to comply with Croatian law on cooperation with the tribunal, which was at the heart of his attempts to bring down the coalition government in the summer of 2001.

Should the lack of information relating to the tribunal continue, the Croatian public could be vulnerable to further attempts at political manipulation by those prepared to pedal The Hague bogeyman myth.

Andrea Feldman is the international secretary of the Liberal Party in Zagreb, Croatia.

Location: Kosovo
Croatia
Bosnia and
Herzegovina

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former
Yugoslavia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/regional-report-croatia-indifferent-milosevic>