

## **REGIONAL REPORT - Serbs Keep Their Secrets**

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The Hague is unlikely to get all the archive documents promised by Belgrade - and the ones they get might not reveal much.

The authorities have granted tribunal officials access to confidential wartime information, but the gesture is not expected to shed much light on Belgrade's involvement in the former Yugoslav conflict.

Under strong pressure from The Hague, the Serbian premier, Zoran Djindjic, recently promised that sensitive archive material would be made available.

At the end of May, it was disclosed that 14 requests for police documents had been granted, but it's doubtful whether they will reveal anything important because many key files were destroyed before and after the downfall of Milosevic.

Meanwhile, four tribunal requests for army material have been blocked by Djindjic's rival Yugoslav president Vojislav Kostunica, who controls the federal forces and is not ready to open up all its secrets.

The Hague has long been demanding access to documents that would throw light on the activities of war crime suspects. This, along with the extradition of indictees, was one of the main conditions for unblocking promised American assistance worth 115 million US dollars.

Some of the most vital documents in the republican and federal interior ministry archives are personal notebooks kept by security services of the Serbian police and the Yugoslav army.

But, however much Djindjic's wants to cooperate with the tribunal, he will not be able to provide these items as few remain.

An IWPR source close to security circles in the Serbian police said that members of the secret services handed them over to their superior officers who, after some time, ordered their destruction.

Nevertheless, the agents who made entries in these files must remember much of what they said. In theory, then, the tribunal might still hope to obtain important information from these people.

The anti-Hague lobby in the federal forces, headed by Kostunica, is against opening any military archives, claiming such disclosures threaten national interests. The Supreme Defense Council, the highest army authority, ruled last December that the war crimes court could not gain full access to all the documents it requests.

But IWPR has been told by sources close to the army leadership that if pressure builds, it is ready to cede certain documents, but only those that do not compromise it.

The tribunal is especially interested in information on operating methods of the army secret services, which had very broad insight into wartime events.

IWPR has learned from sources close to the high command that it maintained a parallel chain of collecting information and issuing orders. Due to the sensitivity of the operation, many orders were issued orally and never existed in written form.

The usual practice, especially in the Serb armies in Bosnia and Croatia, was to use a chain of associates to issue an order to an operational commander which was totally different from the one he received from his direct superior. Archives reveal only the formal orders, not the shadowy instructions passed on by word of mouth.

The army security services also collected information about atrocities committed by its enemies, the Croats, Bosnians and the Kosovo Liberation Army. The federal military leadership is likely to be keen to hand these over, but would not do so until it makes a formal decision to cooperate with The Hague.

All of which seems to suggest that tribunal officials, who must have been encouraged by Djindjic's willingness to hand over confidential military material, are for the moment at least going to be disappointed.

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**Location:** Kosovo  
Croatia  
Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

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