

Seselj "Controlled" SRS Volunteers

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Witness also says he recalls hearing defendant order them to fight in Srebrenica.

A former volunteer with the Serbian Radical Party, SRS, said its leader Vojislav Seselj was in charge of party volunteers in the area of Croatia where he is alleged to have been responsible for war crimes.

The indictment against Seselj alleges that in 1991, volunteers from his party committed crimes in the Croatian town of Vukovar and in Western Slavonija, a part of Croatia seized by Serbs and retaken by Croats in a 1995 offensive.

He is also accused of inciting Serbs to drive Bosniaks and Croats out of parts of Bosnia and Croatia. Prosecutors say Seselj "espoused and encouraged the creation of a homogenous 'Greater Serbia'" through his inflammatory speeches and actions.

At the Hague tribunal this week, a protected witness, introduced only as VS033, described Seselj as "the boss" and "in control" of party volunteers, who were entitled to a salary, days off and a pension through certificates handed out by the SRS war staff.

The witness, most of whose testimony was given in closed session, recalled seeing Seselj receiving a bag of money from local Serbian politicians in Western Slavonija.

According to the witness, Seselj worked closely with the government in Serbia, too, so Serbian police knew the volunteers would be passing through the territory under their jurisdiction, and would merely wave their buses through.

He also said he recalled hearing that Seselj ordered SRS volunteers to Srebrenica to fight alongside Serbia's paramilitary force the Red Berets.

The witness described how he joined the first group sent by the SRS to Western Slavonija. They traveled through Bosnia into Western Slavonija, he said, where they were housed by Yugoslav People's Army, JNA, forces in a camp near the village of Vocin.

Witness VS033 explained that the group was under the command of Radovan Novacic, who was appointed by the SRS and remained in constant touch with the party's war staff.

"Novacic insisted on discipline and obedience. He refused to accept drunks or criminals in the volunteer units and would send them back to Serbia. He had a lot of trouble with Seselj because of this, and Novacic even confessed to me that Seselj wanted him dead," said the witness.

Seselj rejected the entire testimony of the witness, who was convicted by a Serbian court and sentenced to three years' imprisonment in 1996 for several attacks on non-Serbs in Belgrade. Seselj called him a "terrorist" and challenged his credibility as a witness.

During cross-examination, Seselj produced transcripts from the trial of the witness which stated that he threw explosive devices into a mosque and a Catholic church in Belgrade, and also placed several explosives in the cars of ethnic Albanians living in the capital.

Although the witness accepted that the transcripts were genuine, he said that his past behaviour was a result of “post-war syndrome” and added that he made sure no one was hurt during the incidents.

“I was bitter because of everything that I saw during the war, and most of us volunteers were forgotten by the government. That’s why I did those things,” said the witness.

Asked by the judges whether he had committed the crimes under the orders of any organisation, the witness replied he had been a member of the Serbian Volunteer Humanitarian Fund “which worked in the same building as the SRS at that time”.

Seselj denied any connection between the two organisations.

Seselj also produced a statement from a friend of the witness, Aleksandar Gajic, who said that VS033 had been “offered a large amount of money to lie and testify against Seselj” by prosecutors at the court.

According to the statement, the witness “will say Seselj and SRS committed war crimes, and in turn he will be given money by Hague prosecutors”.

The witness said his friend had been “coerced into writing the statement” and said it was “full of lies”.

Seselj also said Natasa Kandic, director of the Belgrade Humanitarian Law Fund, FHP, put the witness in touch with Hague prosecutors and then coached him before he testified.

“I did meet Natasa Kandic, however I wasn’t prepared for my testimony. Also, I was put in touch with Hague prosecutors by Ljubisa Petkovic, commander of the war staff of the SRS party, not by her,” replied the witness.

The trial continues next week when the court will hear recordings of Seselj’s public speeches.

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