

Seselj Denies Close Cooperation with Karadzic

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Politician rejects charges that he and the defendant were part of joint criminal enterprise.

Giving evidence in the trial of Radovan Karadzic this week, Serbian nationalist politician Vojislav Seselj denied that he and the defendant were part of a joint criminal enterprise.

In a separate trial, Seselj has been accused of making inflammatory speeches in Serbia and recruiting a force of volunteers there who committed atrocities in the Croatian and Bosnian conflicts in 1991-93. The judgement in his trial will be delivered this October.

Seselj appeared as a defence witness in the trial of the wartime Bosnian Serb president this week. He and Karadzic are accused of being part of the same joint criminal enterprise or JCE, which aimed to permanently remove Bosnian Muslims and Croats from territory claimed by the Serbs.

Karadzic, who was president of the self-declared Bosnian Serb republic from 1992 to 1996, is accused of planning and overseeing the 44-month siege of Sarajevo that left nearly 12,000 people dead, as well as the massacre of more than 7,000 men and boys at Srebrenica in July 1995.

According to a summary of Seselj's witness statement which was read aloud in court, "The allegation that he and Dr Karadzic participated in a joint criminal enterprise... is false. Dr Seselj states that Radovan Karadzic did not have an antagonistic attitude towards Muslims or Croats."

"Dr Seselj was frequently in conflict with other alleged members of this so-called joint criminal enterprise such as [late Serbian president] Slobodan Milosevic, who had him arrested several times, and Zeljko Raznatovic aka Arkan, who he frequently denounced. Dr Seselj supported Radovan Karadzic on some issues, but opposed him on others."

During his testimony, Seselj said that the volunteers he raised were engaged in "protection" of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, and that he did not see anything wrong with that.

Seselj made reference to the tribunal's recent acquittal of ex-Yugoslav army chief Momcilo Perisic and of wartime Serbian intelligence officials Jovica Stanisic and Franko Simatovic. In both cases, judges found there was not enough evidence to prove that the assistance which the defendants provided to Serb forces in Bosnia and Croatia was "specifically directed" towards the commission of crimes. (For more on these rulings, see [Yugoslav Army Chief Acquitted on Appeal](#) and [Serbian Security Chiefs Acquitted](#).)

"It's one thing to provide help and another to commit crimes," Seselj told prosecutor Alan Tieger. "You saw that the tribunal acquitted Momcilo Perisic, through whom all military aid was going. The tribunal also acquitted Mr Jovica Stanisic and Mr Franko Simatovic, who were in charge of police and intelligence aid. These were the two main leverages of Milosevic's help [to Serb forces in Bosnia and Croatia]."

Seselj confirmed that Milosevic, who died in 2006 before his trial in The Hague ended, provided "crucial help" to Serb forces in Bosnia and Croatia.

"Without help from Serbia, neither Republika Srpska [in Bosnia] nor Republika Srpska Krajina [in Croatia] would [have been] able to survive," Seselj said.

He said this was not a JCE, but rather legitimate assistance, and a "duty" that anyone in Milosevic's position would have assumed.

Seselj described how his own volunteers were armed by military and police officials in Serbia and sent off to fight in Croatia and Bosnia, where they operated under local command.

The prosecutor presented Seselj with a series of speeches he had made in which he made threats against Croats and Bosniaks even before the wars erupted. Seselj replied that he gave these speeches in order to "dissuade Croats and Bosniaks from entering into the war", and not to encourage his volunteers to commit crimes against non-Serbs, as the prosecution claims.

In an attempt to counter Seselj's assertion that he did not cooperate with the defendant, Tieger reminded Seselj that he and Karadzic had worked together on establishing nationalist Serb "Chetnik" units as early as in 1991, a year before the war began in Bosnia.

The witness confirmed this, explaining that it had been done for the purpose of protecting the Serb people. He added that he regarded Bosnian Muslims and Croats as Serbs as well, arguing that they did not identify

themselves as such because of “historical manipulations”. For this reason, towns like Dubrovnik in Croatia were actually Serbian, he said.

“I still think that the Drina [between Bosnia and Serbia] is a river that runs through the heart of Serbia. The border at the Drina is artificial and cannot survive. No one can permanently divide the Serbian nation,” Seselj said.

In order to support his claim that there was nothing wrong with the actions of his volunteer units, the witness claimed that current Serbian president Tomislav Nikolic – a former deputy leader of Seselj’s Serbian Radical Party – had served as one of his volunteers in Croatia. He said he made Nikolic a “Chetnik Duke” in 1993, a title awarded to his best fighters.

“If I was involved in war crimes, than Tomislav Nikolic was my accessory,” Seselj said.

The Karadzic trial continues next week.

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