

Is Tolimir Arrest Evidence of New Cooperation?

Author: [Sara Goodman](#)

Some tribunal-watchers say it remains to be seen whether the arrest amounts to a change in Serbian policy.

The arrest of the Hague tribunal's third most wanted man is important as much for his capture as for the role Serbia played in arresting him, say analysts interviewed by IWPR.

Zdravko Tolimir, a high-ranking Bosnian Serb army officer and close aide to fellow war crimes suspect Ratko Mladic, arrived June 1 in The Hague after being arrested in Bosnia the day before.

He is charged with genocide and crimes against humanity for his alleged role in the massacre at the UN safe zones of Srebrenica and Zepa in 1995, during which more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were executed.

"We're encouraged because it's the first time in about a year that we've seen movement from Serbia in cooperation with the ICTY," said Ben Ward, associate director of the Europe and Central Asia division at Human Rights Watch.

"It remains to be seen whether this amounts to the beginning of a positive trend or just an isolated event."

Dejan Djokic, public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC, pointed out that information about Tolimir's whereabouts came not from The Hague, but from intelligence in Serbia and Republika Srpska, RS.

He said the arrest shows greater cooperation by Serbia and the Bosnian Serb entity, which worked together in bringing about Tolimir's capture.

"This may be the first case where the Republika Srpska was involved in the arrest of a major alleged war criminal. It was a direct cooperation between the two police forces," said Djokic.

Pressure on Belgrade has been growing in recent weeks.

Tribunal chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte is due to travel to Belgrade on June 4, ahead of her June 18 report to the United Nations.

While there, she will meet with President Boris Tadic, Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and other government officials to discuss cooperation with the court, including the arrest of Mladic and the former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

Her visit to Belgrade comes in the wake of praise from EU enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn for Serbia's new "reform-and Europe-oriented government".

EU accession talks with Serbia were frozen a year ago after Belgrade failed to keep a promise to arrest Mladic.

Rehn has indicated that negotiations between the EU and Belgrade can now resume - after holding talks with German Chancellor and current EU president Angela Merkel and President Tadic.

"On the basis of a very careful and extensive assessment, the [European Commission] can resume the negotiations on the Stabilization and Association Agreement. We will set the date for the first round of negotiations upon the return of Del Ponte from Belgrade and in the light of the findings of her visit," he said on June 1.

The commissioner said that the Stabilization and Association Agreement talks - which are the first step towards Serbia joining the EU - could start early this month.

"I will, of course, listen to Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte upon her return from Belgrade and taking into account the findings of her visit," he said.

He added that he trusted that the Serbian government would make the most of Del Ponte's visit and "continue to make serious and significant progress, soon achieving full cooperation" with the Hague tribunal.

Rehn told Reuters earlier this week he would meet Tadic in Finland this weekend to detail the EU's to-do list for Belgrade - which includes working with the tribunal.

Ward said maintaining that pressure on Serbia is critical. "Serbia's record of cooperation has depended on firm pressure from the EU and the US. The EU needs to keep up the pressure on Serbia," he said.

Tolimir's arrest brings into question the timeline of the tribunal, which is set to finish all trials by 2008 and all appeals by 2010. With Tolimir only now arrested and Mladic and Karadzic still at large, some say the tribunal's mandate should be extended.

"We want to see a change in the completion strategy or a different interpretation of [the strategy] that allows for those people still at large to be tried at The Hague. We're concerned about the tight deadline because of the completion strategy, particularly when top suspects are still at large," said Omer Fisher, Balkans researcher for Amnesty International.

"The whole idea behind the tribunal was to try the most senior persons. It would be really ironic if the remaining suspects were to escape justice at The Hague."

Olga Kavran, spokeswoman for the ICTY, said that trying Tolimir takes priority over any completion strategy. "The trial of all these people is part of the fulfillment of the mandate of the tribunal. That's the most important thing," she said.

Tolimir will make his first appearance before Hague judges on June 4.

Sara Goodman is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

Location: Central Asia

Balkans

Macedonia

Albania

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former

Yugoslavia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/tolimir-arrest-evidence-new-cooperation>