

Del Ponte Again Unhappy With Belgrade

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Serb media speculate she will ask the EU postpone signing of an SAA until at least one more war crimes fugitive is arrested.

The chief prosecutor at the Hague tribunal, Carla Del Ponte, this week urged the authorities in Belgrade to cooperate more fully with her office.

“Although we have seen some results in the past four months, progress has been rather slow,” said the prosecutor in an October 3 statement. She added that the tribunal’s prosecutors are “still waiting for documents, some of which were requested last year”, as well as full access to government archives.

“Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić, Stojan Župljanin and Goran Hadžić remain at large. I am increasingly worried that this slow progress,” said Del Ponte.

The chief prosecutor visited Belgrade last month in order to assess cooperation with the tribunal - a key pre-condition for Brussels granting Serbia a Stabilization and Association Agreement, SAA, which would be a first step towards membership of the European Union.

She is expected to give her evaluation of Serbia’s efforts in this regard to EU representatives in Brussels on October 16.

So far, the prosecutor has declined to say in public what she will tell the latter. A positive report from Del Ponte would mean that Belgrade and Brussels would likely sign an SAA agreement by the end of the year.

During her last visit to Belgrade in June this year, Del Ponte praised Serbia’s cooperation with the tribunal and said she was satisfied with its efforts to arrest remaining war crimes fugitives.

Around the time of her visit, police had seized two suspects from the Hague’s most wanted list, Zdravko Tolimir and Vlastimir Djordjevic.

After the June trip, she filed a positive report to the EU which led to the resumption of SAA negotiations that had been stalled for a year due to Serbia’s lack of cooperation with the Hague court.

However, Serbian media are now speculating that Del Ponte will not be so generous this time. The Belgrade daily Blic reported this week that the chief prosecutor will most likely ask the EU to postpone the signing of the SAA until at least one more war crimes fugitive is arrested.

In her October 3 statement, Del Ponte reiterated that “the four remaining fugitives, and in particular Ratko Mladić, must be located and arrested”. She added that all pending requests for assistance must be complied with and all outstanding documents delivered immediately. She also sought “full and unconditional access to requested government archives”.

“Any further delay in fulfilling these obligations jeopardises the successful completion of the tribunal's work and interferes with the tribunal's ability to fulfill its mandate. It also inevitably brings into question Serbia's willingness and ability to fulfill its commitment of full cooperation with the ICTY,” concluded Del Ponte.

But the head of the Serbia's National Council for Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, Rasim Ljajic, told Beta news agency this week that “when it comes to our collaboration in locating the remaining war crimes fugitives and submitting documentation requested by the tribunal, Serbia has made significant progress”.

He added that over the past four months, Serbia undertook “a series of operative measures and activities in order to locate the indictees” and submitted “19,500 pages of documents to the prosecution”, which he said was “more than ever”.

“In effect, there are no overdue requests that we have not met in terms of submitting documents,” said Ljajic, although he admitted that some had been destroyed.

Merdijana Sadovic is IWPR's Hague programme manager.

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