

## **Prosecutors welcome Canada's ruling to extradite Kosovo war crimes suspect**

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BELGRADE, Serbia-Montenegro, Sep 23 (AP) - Canada's decision to extradite a Serb paramilitary soldier accused in a 1999 Kosovo massacre is a show of confidence in Serbia's ability to hear crimes cases at home, a war crimes prosecution spokesman said Friday.

"This is definitely a sign of support for our judiciary," said Bruno Vekaric of the war crimes prosecutors office.

The suspect, Dejan Demirovic lost his final bid to remain in Canada this week and will be deported to Serbia-Montenegro to stand trial.

A member of the dreaded unit known as the Scorpions, Demirovic is accused of killing at least 14 ethnic Albanian civilians when his unit stormed the northern Kosovo town of Podujevo in March 1999.

Survivors of the massacre had described horrific scenes of the paramilitaries lining up children, women and elderly against a wall and spraying them with machine-gun fire.

Demirovic fled to Canada in 2001, applied for refugee status and lived with his immigrant parents in Windsor, Ont. He was arrested in January 2003 on a Serbian warrant but petitioned to stay in Canada while in a Toronto jail.

Natasa Kandic, Serbia's leading human rights activist, said Friday that bringing Demirovic to trial in Serbia "opens way for all those responsible for the Podujevo massacre to stand trial for war crimes here."

The Podujevo case had been a key test for Serbia's judiciary to handle war crimes cases - a feat possible only after the 2000 overthrow of former president Slobodan Milosevic, who is answering genocide and war crimes charges before the UN tribunal at The Hague, Netherlands.

Dragomir Todorovic, a Belgrade lawyer representing Podujevo massacre survivors, said that if Demirovic is convicted, he could face a sentence similar to that handed to Sasa Cvjetan, sentenced in June by a Belgrade's district court to 20 years imprisonment - the maximum sentence under Serbian law at the time of the crime.

An ethnic Albanian girl, Saranda Bogujevci, who was 13 years old at the

time, survived the execution despite being shot 16 times, and testified last year in Belgrade to watching her mother, brothers, grandmother, aunt and friends being killed before her eyes.

Bogujevci also later travelled to Canada to testify in the hearings on Demirovic's motion against deportations.

The Scorpions came into focus following the broadcast in June of gruesome footage showing a 1995 execution of six Muslim civilians from the Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica, allegedly by other Scorpions active in the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

In Kosovo, thousands of ethnic Albanians were killed in the conflict before NATO's 1999 air war forced Serbia to relinquish control of the southern province to the United Nations.

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