

Mladic must be sent to UN tribunal by Nov. 20: Serbia-Montenegro minister

The Associated Press

28 September 2005

By KATARINA KRATOVAC

BELGRADE, Serbia-Montenegro (AP) - Serbia-Montenegro's foreign minister said Wednesday that unless fugitive Gen. Ratko Mladic is delivered to the UN war crimes tribunal by Nov. 20, the country will face an "extremely precarious situation."

In a talk show interview on Belgrade's B92 radio, Vuk Draskovic spoke at length about clear, repeated warnings from a senior U.S. official during a meeting in New York last week that time was running out.

"This was repeated to me at least 20 times," Draskovic said of his meeting with U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns. "If Ratko Mladic is not in The Hague soon, all our roads forward will be closed."

Most at stake is Serbia-Montenegro's push to forge closer ties with NATO and the European Union as a prelude to possible membership.

It wasn't clear from his comments if the Nov. 20 date was a firm deadline demanded by Burns or an informal target chosen by Draskovic for its symbolism. The day marks the eve of the 10th anniversary of the Dayton peace agreement that ended Bosnia's 1992-95 war.

Belgrade backed away from an apparent Oct. 5 deadline for Mladic's handover, denying claims by the office of the UN tribunal's chief prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, that Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica had promised to deliver the fugitive by that date.

Oct. 5 also seemed meant to generate pressure through symbolism as the anniversary of autocratic former president Slobodan Milosevic's ouster in 2000.

Del Ponte is due to visit Belgrade on Thursday to again press in person for Mladic's arrest.

Draskovic said that in their conversation last week, Burns warned that the failure to capture the Bosnian Serb wartime commander remained a "stumbling block" on the country's path out of international isolation.

U.S. and EU officials have conditioned Serbia-Montenegro's integration

into the European Union and NATO with Mladic's extradition.

"We shall find ourselves in an extremely precarious situation if Mladic is not in The Hague by Nov. 20 and the 10th anniversary of the Dayton agreement," Draskovic said.

"That's what everyone keeps telling us: 'Mladic, Mladic, Mladic.' Everything for us depends on Mladic," he said.

"Once Mladic is in The Hague, we shall have it all - NATO Partnership for Peace, talks for European integration, billions of dollars in investments," Draskovic said.

The UN tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands, is also after Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic.

The court indicted both men in 1995 on charges of orchestrating the massacre of 8,000 Muslims men and boys in the Bosnian Muslim enclave of Srebrenica, and other atrocities committed during the war, including the siege of Sarajevo.

While Karadzic is believed to be hiding in the Serb-controlled part of neighbouring Bosnia, Mladic is thought to be in Serbia, protected by Serbian army hardliners.

Copyright 2005 Associated Press