

# Europeans Punish Serbia Over Fugitive Still at Large

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LJUBLJANA, Slovenia, May 3 — Citing the failure of [Serbia](#) to arrest its leading war crimes suspect, Gen. [Ratko Mladic](#), the [European Union](#) on Wednesday called off talks on closer ties with Belgrade, prompting the country's leading negotiator on relations with Europe to resign.

A little more than a month ago, Prime Minister [Vojislav Kostunica](#), promised European Union officials that by the end of April he would hand over General Mladic, the former commander of the Bosnian Serb army who has been on the run for 10 years. The transfer has not happened, and Olli Rehn, the union's commissioner for enlargement, said he had no choice but to suspend negotiations.

"It is disappointing that Belgrade has been unable to locate, arrest and transfer Ratko Mladic to The Hague," Mr. Rehn told reporters in Brussels when he called off negotiations that are a step toward European Union membership.

Just hours later, Miroljub Labus, a Serbian deputy prime minister and head of its European Union negotiating team, announced his resignation, blaming the prime minister for the failure to deliver General Mladic, who is accused of genocide, both in connection with the wartime siege and bombardment of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre, in which about 8,000 Muslim men and boys were killed in 1995.

It was not clear whether Mr. Labus's party, G17 Plus, would remain part of the country's coalition government or withdraw the support of its 31 deputies in Parliament, a step that would probably lead to the government's collapse because Mr. Kostunica has a working majority of just five in the legislature.

With General Mladic at large, apparently with at least tacit support from some elements of the country's security apparatus, the suspension of the talks ends for now a risky game in which Mr. Kostunica has sought to win closer European ties while at the same time avoiding a backlash from his country's voluble nationalist opposition.

Until recently a fervent critic of the tribunal in The Hague, which many Serbs see as biased against them, Mr. Kostunica recently cooperated to the extent of encouraging the negotiated surrenders of several war crimes suspects.

Good standing with the tribunal was the crucial condition the European Union imposed on Serbia for closer ties.

In recent months, the Serbian security services have adopted a more aggressive policy, arresting known supporters of the network that helps General Mladic to remain at large and unveiling several apartments in Belgrade once used by the fugitive.

Mr. Rehn's announcement suggested that neither he nor the tribunal's chief prosecutor, [Carla Del Ponte](#), whose advice he sought shortly before announcing his decision, were impressed by the efforts.

"The obvious conclusion is that I have been misled when I was told at the end of March that the arrest of Mladic was a matter of days or weeks,"

Mrs. Del Ponte told a news conference in the Netherlands.

She said she had received reports that the Serbian security services could have arrested General Mladic in January but declined because the government wanted him to surrender voluntarily, Reuters reported from The Hague.