

Top Croat war crime suspect held

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BELGRADE, Serbia-Montenegro (AP) -- The chief U.N. war crimes prosecutor said Thursday that top Croatian war crimes suspect Ante Gotovina was arrested in the Spanish Canary Islands.

"Ante Gotovina was arrested this night in Spain," Carla Del Ponte said in Belgrade. "He's now in detention."

The U.N. court has accused Gotovina of masterminding the killing of at least 150 Serbs and the expulsion of some 150,000 others during Croatia's bitter 1991-1995 war.

Del Ponte said Gotovina soon would be transferred from the Canary Islands to a detention unit at the U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands.

Gotovina, the most wanted Croatian war crimes suspect, has been at large since the tribunal accused him in mid-2001 of the wartime atrocities.

"Since September we were working to find Gotovina and finally we could achieve that," Del Ponte said, thanking the Spanish authorities for the arrest.

For years, the failure to arrest Gotovina has blocked Croatia's membership talks with the European Union. But the EU eventually opened negotiations with Croatia in October after Del Ponte said the country was cooperating with the tribunal.

Gotovina is hailed as a hero by many in Croatia who credit him with leading the country's defense against rebel Serb assaults during the 1991 war.

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