

Hunt for Karadzic switches to Serbia

The Daily Telegraph

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29 September 2005

By David Rennie in Brussels

The hunt for Europe's most wanted man, the indicted war crimes fugitive Radovan Karadzic, has shifted focus from his wartime powerbase, Bosnia, to Serbia-Montenegro, United Nations prosecutors have disclosed.

In the past month, the trail has gone cold on Dr Karadzic, according to Carla Del Ponte, the chief UN war crimes prosecutor for the former Yugoslavia.

The former Bosnian Serb leader has spent 10 years running from charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and murder, and has reportedly had several close brushes with Nato and European Union forces tracking his movements.

But in the past few weeks, he has effectively vanished, Mrs Del Ponte told The Daily Telegraph, adding to a growing belief among UN investigators that he has slipped across the border from the Serb-controlled areas of Bosnia, and into Serbia proper, or its sister republic of Montenegro.

That has serious political implications for the authorities in Belgrade, who are already under pressure from the EU, the United States, Nato and the UN to hand over the Bosnian Serb military commander, Gen Ratko Mladic, who is named jointly with Dr Karadzic in UN indictments. Mrs Del Ponte, who arrives in Belgrade today for an official visit, said she would be confronting the government of Vojislav Kostunica with her evaluation that it is in the power of Serbian authorities to arrest both men.

On her last visit to Belgrade, Mrs Del Ponte received a commitment that Serbia was working hard to arrest Gen Mladic, and would have him in custody by Oct 5.

Mrs Del Ponte said she saw significant progress in Serbia, where authorities now admitted that Gen Mladic was on their territory. "Mladic is in Serbia, protected by the army. When I said that in 2001, there was denial. It was a scandal that I could say that. Now, frankly, they admit it," she said. However, she now felt obliged to confront Belgrade authorities about the case of Dr Karadzic, she added.