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Mladić's detention brings Serbia closer to the EU

The Serbian police on 26 May detained Ratko Mladić, a former commander of Serbian troops, wanted for war crimes in 1991–1995. The detention and transfer of Mladić to the Hague International Tribunal brings Serbia much closer to obtaining the status of an official EU candidate.

Ratko Mladić, commander of Serbian military troops in 1991–1995 in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is accused of crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansings, including the massacre of 8,000 people close to Srebrenica. He was detained in the village of Lazarevo in northern Serbia. He had been able to hide for sixteen years in Serbia because some people linked to the police and the security service who opposed surrendering Serbian citizens to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) had been helping him. The fact the Tribunal that handles war crimes also raises numerous controversies among Serbian public, who believe that it is biased and sentences mainly Serb defendants. For this reason the decision on the immediate extradition of Mladić to The Hague sparked protests in Serbia and Republika Srpska in BiH. However, they were less numerous than in 2008, when the former Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadžić was arrested (now between 8,000 and 10,000 people protested, while in 2008 over 20,000 took to the streets).

Obtaining candidate status before parliamentary elections scheduled for spring 2012 is a priority goal for the government in Belgrade. The Prosecutor of the ICTY, Serge Brammertz, during his visit to Belgrade on 24 May warned that this year's report on co-operation with the Tribunal would be very unfavourable for Serbia, which would leave no chance for a positive evaluation of the Serbian candidacy by the EU. Now Goran Hadžić, a Croatian Serb leader, is the last of the wanted war criminals at large. The EU is likely to be less determined in pressing for his detention, which may mean that even if Hadžić is not arrested soon contrary to the declarations of the Serbian government, Serbia will be granted EU candidate status. <MarSz>