

**Serbian president denies Srebrenica genocide**  
**Reuters in Sarajevo**  
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Serbia's new president has denied genocide took place in Srebrenica, contradicting the international criminal prosecution of Serbian leaders from the Yugoslav wars and angering the Muslim co-president of Bosnia.

Tomislav Nikolic, the rightwinger elected as Serbian president last month, said on Montenegrin television: "There was no genocide in Srebrenica. In Srebrenica, grave war crimes were committed by some Serbs who should be found, prosecuted and punished.

"It is very difficult to indict someone and prove before a court that an event qualifies as genocide."

The former Serbian general Ratko Mladic is on trial in The Hague accused of genocide in Srebrenica. Bosnian Serb forces under his command slaughtered around 8,000 Muslim men and boys after capturing the town, which had been declared a safe haven by the United Nations, towards the end of Bosnia's 1992-95 war. It was Europe's worst atrocity since the second world war.

The Bosnian Serbs' wartime political leader, Radovan Karadzic, is also on trial in The Hague accused of genocide.

Bakir Izetbegovic, who shares Bosnia's presidency with a Croat and a Serb, said Nikolic's comments were insulting to the survivors. "The denial of genocide in Srebrenica ... will not pave the way for co-operation and reconciliation in the region, but on the contrary may cause fresh misunderstandings and tensions.

"By giving such statements Nikolic has clearly demonstrated that he is still not ready to face the truth about the events that took place in our recent past."

Nikolic said he would not attend the annual commemoration of the Srebrenica massacre in July. "Don't always ask the Serbian president if he is going to Srebrenica," he said. "My predecessor was there and paid tribute. Why should every president do the same?"

Both the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the international court of justice (ICJ) have ruled that the Srebrenica massacre amounted to genocide.

Serbia wants to join the European Union. A spokeswoman for the EU's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, said her office would seek clarification of Nikolic's statement but "would like to remind everyone that Srebrenica has been confirmed as genocide by both the ICTY and the ICJ. Srebrenica was the largest massacre in Europe since world war two, a crime against all of humankind. We should never forget and it should never be allowed to happen again."

Nikolic's win over the incumbent president, Boris Tadic, sent a chill through a region that still recalls his last spell in government – as deputy prime minister in a coalition with Serbia's late strongman Slobodan Milosevic when Nato bombed Serbia to drive its forces out of Kosovo during a 1998-99 war.

Nikolic has split from ultra-nationalists, recasting himself as a pro-European conservative and saying he will pursue Serbia's drive for EU membership.

Tadic oversaw the arrest and extradition of Karadzic and Mladic. He pushed an apology for the massacre through parliament and travelled to Srebrenica as part of a drive to foster reconciliation.

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