

## Serbia Denies Top Suspect in Massacre Was Found

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By [NICHOLAS WOOD](#)

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia, Feb. 21 — The Serbian government sought Tuesday to quash news reports suggesting that the leading Balkan war crimes suspect, [Ratko Mladic](#), had been located and that his surrender was being negotiated.

Independent news and radio stations in [Serbia](#) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina issued conflicting reports Tuesday afternoon stating that General Mladic, former commander of the Bosnian Serb army, had been arrested or was engaged in talks to convince him to surrender for trial for crimes committed during the war in Bosnia, from 1992 to 1995.

B92, a Belgrade television and radio news network, reported that he had been located in Bosnia and would be taken to Tuzla, the site of a European Union military base and airport, from where he could be flown to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. It quoted unidentified sources.

The Associated Press, also quoting an unnamed security official, said that General Mladic had been located and that negotiations were under way to secure his surrender.

But a spokesman for the Serbian government, Srdjan Djuric, strongly denied the reports, stating that claims of General Mladic's arrest appeared intended to undermine the government's intention "to fully cooperate with The Hague."

Western diplomats and an analyst said that while there was no evidence General Mladic had been arrested, there were signs that Serbia was close to tracking him down.

"Everybody who is involved in this process is on standby," said a diplomat who is close to police and legal officials assigned to help find the general. "They possibly have his location, but are not yet moving in," said the official, who was granted anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Bratislav Grubacic, the editor of VIP, a news service, said, "There are some indications that they are using back channels" to negotiate with the general.

He said the government wanted to avoid having the general go before a Serbian court, which could prove politically embarrassing because the Serbian electorate remains highly nationalistic.

"They would like to have a solution that would be face-saving for them, in which he could be transferred somehow to Bosnia," Mr. Grubacic said. He said members of the security services had denied any operation to arrest the general or negotiate his surrender.

Numerous inaccurate reports of the former general's arrest have surfaced in the 11 years since he was indicted by the tribunal on charges of leading the massacre of at least 8,000 Muslim men and boys in around Srebrenica in July 1995.

But the speculation Tuesday was the most intense in years, and came as Serbia was facing possible suspension of political and trade talks with the European Union.

European governments have warned that the talks, a potential step toward eventual membership, could be suspended if Serbia failed to arrest General Mladic. The European Union's foreign ministers are due to discuss the issue on Monday.

[Carla Del Ponte](#), the chief prosecutor at The Hague, urged the European Union to suspend the talks until General Mladic was arrested. She has complained that cooperation with Belgrade had ground to a halt and recently demanded that the general be handed over this month.

Officials at tribunal said she had contacted Belgrade late Tuesday and was told that General Mladic had not been located or arrested, and that the press reports were false.

In New York, Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesman for Secretary General [Kofi Annan](#), said officials at the United Nations headquarters "have checked with the tribunal in The Hague, and we've been told that there is absolutely no information that Mladic has been arrested or located."

But he did say Milan Lukic, a Bosnian Serb paramilitary leader indicted in 1998, had been handed over to the tribunal by Argentina, where he was arrested in August 2005 after nearly seven years on the run.

He has been charged with murdering, severely beating, unlawfully detaining and terrorizing Bosnian Muslim and other non-Serb civilians and looting and destroying their property.

*Warren Hoge contributed reporting from the United Nations for this article, and Marlise Simons from Paris.*