

KOSTUNICA AGAINST NON-EXTRADITION PACT WITH US

Agence France Presse
August 12, 2002

Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica voiced strong criticism Monday of efforts by the United States to gain immunity for US citizens from extradition to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Kostunica told the official Tanjug news agency that Washington's proposed non-extradition pact with Belgrade was a serious challenge to the "international legal order".

He also said Washington wanted to "legitimize the position that the court can try anyone except American citizens."

The US embassy has proposed a pact with Belgrade whereby both sides would only extradite the other's citizens to the ICC with mutual consent.

The United States is vehemently opposed to the court, which it fears will be turned into a political instrument to make malicious war crimes accusations against its soldiers abroad, particularly in UN peacekeeping operations.

More than 4,000 US troops serve in the UN-administrated Yugoslav province of Kosovo as part of the NATO-led peacekeeping mission. The Yugoslav federal government has yet to make a decision on the proposal. Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic said last week that it should be discussed with Yugoslavia's European partners.

Kostunica told Tanjug that the acceptance of the US proposal would "seriously undermine the international legal order, as well as the legal systems of the states which have ratified the statute of the court."

"This is extremely important for a country like ours, which has only just begun building its legal institutions," Kostunica said. Kostunica, a lawyer by training, insisted that the ICC "must be able to judge everyone."

"If this is not the case, we will just have another very expensive and very clumsy toy for the international bureaucracy," Kostunica said.

The Yugoslav president, who helped topple his hardline predecessor Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, has been an ardent critic of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Washington has signed similar pacts with Israel and Romania.