

Italy investigates claims of tourists paying to shoot civilians in Bosnia in 1990s

... [bbc.com/news/articles/c3epyqg5272o](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3epyqg5272o)

Sarah Rainsford

November 12, 2025



AP Photo/Jerome Delay

Civilians risked their lives to cross Sarajevo's main boulevard during the Bosnian war

The public prosecutor's office in Milan has opened an investigation into claims that Italian citizens travelled to Bosnia-Herzegovina on "sniper safaris" during the war in the early 1990s.

Italians and others are alleged to have paid large sums to shoot at civilians in the besieged city of Sarajevo.

The Milan complaint was filed by journalist and novelist Ezio Gavazzeni, who describes a "manhunt" by "very wealthy people" with a passion for weapons who "paid to be able to kill defenceless civilians" from Serb positions in the hills around Sarajevo.

Different rates were charged to kill men, women or children, according to some reports.

More than 11,000 people died during the brutal four-year siege of Sarejevo.

Yugoslavia was torn apart by war and the city was surrounded by Serb forces and subjected to constant shelling and sniper fire.

Similar allegations about "human hunters" from abroad have been made several times over the years, but the evidence gathered by Gavazzeni, which includes the testimony of a Bosnian military intelligence officer, is now being examined by Italian counter terrorism prosecutor Alessandro Gobbis.

The charge is murder.



CHRISTOPHE SIMON/AFP

More than 11,000 civilians died in the siege of Sarajevo

The Bosnian officer apparently revealed that his Bosnian colleagues found out about the so-called safaris in late 1993 and then passed on the information to Italy's Sismi military intelligence in early 1994.

The response from Sismi came a couple of months later, he said. They found out that "safari" tourists would fly from the northern Italian border city of Trieste and then travel to the hills above Sarajevo.

"We've put a stop to it and there won't be any more safaris," the officer was told, according to Ansa news agency. Within two to three months the trips had stopped.

Ezio Gavazzeni, who usually writes about terrorism and the mafia, first read about the sniper tours to Sarajevo three decades ago when Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera reported the story, but without firm evidence.

He returned to the topic after seeing "Sarajevo Safari", a documentary film from 2022 by Slovenian director Miran Zupanec which alleges that those involved in the killings came from several countries, including the US and Russia as well as Italy.

Gavazzeni began to dig further and in February handed prosecutors his findings, said to amount to a 17-page file including a report by former Sarajevo mayor Benjamina Karic.



MICHAEL EVSTAFIEV/AFP

Snipers would shoot at civilians from areas controlled by the Bosnian Serbs overlooking Sarajevo

An investigation in Bosnia itself appears to have stalled.

Speaking to Italy's La Repubblica newspaper, Gavazzeni alleges that "many" took part in the practice, "at least a hundred" in all, with Italians paying "a lot of money" to do so, up to €100,000 (£88,000) in today's terms.

In 1992, late Russian nationalist writer and politician Eduard Limonov was filmed firing multiple rounds into Sarajevo from a heavy machine gun.

He was being given a tour of hillside positions by Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, who was later convicted of genocide by an international tribunal in the Hague.

Limonov didn't pay for his war tourism, though. He was there as an admirer of Karadzic, telling him: "We Russians should take example from you."

Italian prosecutors and police are said to have identified a list of witnesses as they try to establish who might have been involved.

However, members of the British forces who served in Sarajevo in the 1990s have told the BBC that they never heard of any so-called "sniper tourism" during the Bosnian conflict.

They indicated that any attempts to bring in people from third countries who had paid to shoot at civilians in Sarajevo would have been "logistically difficult to accomplish", due to the proliferation of checkpoints.

British forces served both inside Sarajevo and in the areas surrounding the city, where Serb forces were stationed and they saw nothing at the time to suggest that "sniper tourism" was taking place.

One soldier described the allegations that foreigners had paid to shoot at civilians as an "urban myth".