

## HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION AND DIRECT THREAT TO PERSONAL AND PROPERTY SECURITY OF CITIZENS OF NON-SERBIAN NATIONALITY

The first cases of emigration of Croats occurred during and immediately after the war in Slovenia. Fearing that a possible war would separate them from their children who lived in Croatia, seven or eight families from Hrtkovci, about twenty families from Slankamen and some families from other settlements in Srem made their departure. The first emigrants sold their houses and properties, and since May, relocation has taken place in the form of exchange of property. According to the stories of the locals from Hrtkovci, the first emigrants, on the recommendation of the local Croatian authorities (from the vicinity of Ivanovo Polje), sent the local Serbs to Hrtkovci and invited their former neighbours to move to Croatia. This way, several families arrived, and others left.

Regardless of their nationality, the inhabitants of Hrtkovci, Golubinci, Ruma, Platičevo and Nikinci responded to the JNA army calls. There were about 350 participants in the war from Hrtkovci alone, with the status of volunteers. Refugees from war zones were being received into family households, and "guest workers" used to provide accommodation for families in unused houses. By 1 May 1992, there were about 500 refugee families in Hrtkovci. Since then, the pressure on all villages inhabited mainly by Croats has increased. According to rough estimates, another 800 families have moved to Hrtkovci, about 400 families to Golubinci and about 10,000 refugees to the Ruma area, mostly from around Podravska Slatina, Grubišno Polje, and from the areas of Bilogora, Papuk, Psunj, Virovitica and Bosanski Brod. According to some data, the majority of these refugees were housed in Ilok and surrounding Croatian villages, which were left empty after the departure of a convoy of civilians in October 1991.

At the beginning of May (6 May), the committee of the Serbian Radical Party in Hrtkovci was founded. The party president, Vojislav Šešelj, spoke at the rally, which drew a large number of refugees. He announced the displacement of all Croats "who did something wrong", and the elected local leadership read the list of the first seventeen people who would have to leave the village, the list of directors of companies who would be replaced, and the list of local government representatives who should be replaced by "real" Serbs. The authority over the criteria for the resettlement passed to Ostoja Sibinčić. In the presence of a large number of domestic and foreign journalists, he stated the following: all Croats, Hungarians and unfortunate Serbs who do not agree with the democratic postulates of Serbia, all Ustasha-inclined Croats who have children in Austria, Germany or another country, all Croats who are supporters or members of the Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina, all those who haven't publicly distanced themselves from Tudjman's policy and all unfortunate Serbs who protect Ustasha-inclined Croats, should leave.

By 1 June, 40 families from Hrtkovci had moved away, almost all from the first list, and by 15 July, about 300 families more. A hundred and twenty families left Golubinci. The same procedure applies to all the relocation cases. Unknown people appear in the village, first in groups of three. They visit certain houses, ask about the exchange and recommend their property and the property of others who have authorised them to do so. In Golubinci, they visit the Local Community Office and refer to Ostoja Sibinčić from Hrtkovci and Triva Ivković from Novi Sad. Telephone threats, menacing leaflets and public naming of persons influence people to make the decision to exchange their property. Contracts are concluded on a blind basis too, such as the case of a peasant from the vicinity of Slavonska Požega who arrived at an already inhabited house. According to the observations of locals from Hrtkovci and Golubinci, a special kind of refugees are those who come in larger groups (30-50 people). They are

armed, and usually arrive across the fields, enter houses without knocking, offer prepared papers on exchange and transfer of property, and threaten with physical expulsion. In this way, about fifteen families from Hrtkovci and four families from Golubinci have been thrown out onto the street. It happened to the Pakić family, who have a seriously ill child. Six cases of physical abuse have been recorded, including the smashing of the head of a woman from Golubinci, who was treated in hospital, and the beating of a Hungarian from Hrtkovci with sticks. Unknown people, who were found to be refugees residing in Smederevo and Sremska Mitrovica, brutally killed Milan Štefanac, a Croat from Hrtkovci who had received four refugees in his house.

All these events in Hrtkovci are known to the public. A large group of Belgrade intellectuals, gathered round the Civil Resistance Movement and the Belgrade Circle, spoke twice in June with locals and refugees in Hrtkovci. Belgrade intellectuals are criticised for protecting Croats who, "by the Justice of God", cannot live in beautiful houses on Serbian soil. A large number of publicly known personalities have tried to help solve the problems of the locals of Croatian and Hungarian nationality, and refugees from war zones. SPO party representatives are most directly engaged in promoting the human right to personal and property security, regardless of their nationality. The refugees have treated any engagement in the protection of human rights of non-Serb citizens as a betrayal of "the Serbian cause". Representatives of Vojvodina authorities and the Republic's authorities have responded to public pressure by giving contradictory statements: "These are individual incidents; the ones who are moving out are the ones who wish to move out, and everything will be done to prevent anyone moving out under pressure". The reduction of tensions and somewhat greater security of Croats and Hungarians came after the establishment of the Republic's police at the entrances in Hrtkovci, and the direct engagement of the authorities in cases of physical eviction of owners from their houses. Four families have been returned to their homes. According to the latest data from the field, it seems that the Republic's police in Hrtkovci have been withdrawn, and that the police from Ruma and Sremska Mitrovica, who the locals do not trust, are there again. In Golubinci, they say there are cases of collusion between the police and refugees.

The fact that things are going by the logic of an intensification of the conflict is best reflected in the examples of the violent change of local civilian government, and the renaming of streets, civilian public institutions and places. In Hrtkovci, these activities are finished, although the Municipal Assembly of Ruma has proposed a regular procedure for all these new initiatives. An attempt to elect a new refugee government has failed in Golubinci, but the people's distrust of the authorities is evident. The mixed population have organised themselves, and have an agreement to give each other notifications, by the firing of shots, about night visitors and supporters of violent exchange of property.

Data on the direct endangerment of non-Serbian citizens have been found in Ruma, Breg neighbourhood, Sremska Mitrovica and Belgrade. About 50 non-Serb citizens of Belgrade have been exposed to telephone threats and physical harassment by refugee groups referring to the Serbian Radical Party and the "Sveti Đorđe" (Saint George) organisation.

The problem of refugees and exiles from war zones is a problem that must be solved by the government institutions. The problems of eviction under pressure and the endangerment of the personal and property security of citizens, must also be on the agenda of the highest authorities. The public expects the authorities to determine the facts regarding these phenomena and to present data to the public, demonstrating whether or not it is true that the Serbian Radical Party, "Solidarnost" and "Sveti Đorđe" are

directly linked with the expulsion and harassment of non-Serb citizens, and whether or not it is true that this is being done with the consent of certain individuals from the government.

Data prepared from research in the field  
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