

HRTKOVCI IS CLOSE TO BELGRADE

(A letter to the Assembly of Serbia and Helsinki Watch, New York)

The first cases of emigration of Croats from Hrtkovci occur at the time of war in Slovenia. Seven or eight families have left, mostly elderly people who have exchanged or sold their houses. They have moved to Croatian territory around Zagreb. According to the people of Hrtkovci, people who feared that a possible war would separate them from their children living in Croatia were the first to emigrate.

According to the data of the Local Community Office of Hrtkovci, about 40 families had emigrated by 1 June 1992. They moved because of the threats they used to receive at public rallies, ultimatums from refugees, and also because of distrust that the government would really protect their personal safety and property.

Fear has taken over in Hrtkovci since the day the Serbian Radical Party was formed. At the beginning of April, at the founding meeting, Šešelj specified the activities that the party will be engaged in: "All the Croats who have done something wrong should leave". The elected secretary of the party, Žilić, read the list of such people and announced "personnel" changes in companies. He demanded the replacement of the Director of Drvara (the timber yard), Mato Šamo, who soon "resigned" and moved out. The list included: Franjo Šamo, an economist from Drvara (who did not move out), Ana Vranuš, an employee in the Local Community Office (who did not move out), Antun Grizelj (who moved out), Franjo Barićević (who moved out) ... In June, Branko Vuksanović, a long-term doctor in Hrtkovci, moved out, after being blamed for sending medicines to Croatia during the war.

Marko Fumić was lucky that the police arrived quickly (following a neighbours' call), and disarmed two uniformed persons who first claimed to have been sent from the Ruma Police Station as reinforcements, only to say later that they were members of the Vukovar Police. It was determined on the spot that the third visitor, wearing a sock over his head, was Miodrag Brašić from Ruma. During the hearing at the police station, one of the two uniformed men addressed Fumić with the following words: "In three days' time, you will move out and take nothing from the apartment." The Municipal Court in Ruma initiated proceedings and called Marko Fumić as a witness in a criminal case against the defendants Jovanović Zvezdan, Lešić Slobodan and Brašić Miodrag, accused of a criminal offence under Article 33, paragraphs 2-1. The procedure is ongoing, and the Fumić family is often visited by refugees sent from the Serbian High Commissioner for Refugees, and Marko, his brother and several family members went to Podravska Slatina to see what is being offered to them there. Family members (mother and daughter-in-law), of Serbian nationality, also went.

The Jurčević family from Maršala Tita Street was harassed for several days by the same refugees, only to be physically evicted from their house last week.

Molnar Julijana from 18 Maršala Tita Street has been exposed to daily pressures from a group of seven men and two women. They are increasingly demanding that the Molnar family move out. On 23 June they came twice. They would like to move into her house as soon as possible, because they want to live with their neighbours who moved in the house across the street. One of them pulled out a knife, swung across the table with it. The police found it still stuck there.

A few days ago, the Cultural Centre and the disco were "conquered". The President of the Local Community Council, Dobrosav Marković, a Serbian "traitor", was replaced, and secretary Ana Vranuš

was fired. Civilian power has passed into the hands of the newcomers. The locals are silent, the Croats are taking away their "family" Serbs, and those who care about Croats and Hungarians have been advised to give up such a risky business. Ostoja Sibičić, one of the few locals of Serbian nationality, sees the whole thing in a political context. During the election of the new government, he read out the list of 17 families, with the deadline, given by him, to move out by Vidovdan.

According to some foreign journalists, there are occasionally some other police in the village presenting themselves as serving the Republic. Thus, they have detained a French journalist and his translator for an interview, taken their details and inquired about their views on Hrtkovci.

Croats, Serbs and Hungarians still stick together, but they are more and more often locked inside their houses, and more and more rarely do they decide to defend each other in public. Until recently, they would come to Belgrade together. We had all reckoned that we were much stronger. The established civil (...) was their hope that they would not disappear without a trace. About 40 of us from the Civil Resistance and the Belgrade Circle and more than 200 locals found ourselves together in the "old" Cultural Centre of Hrtkovci: we encouraged them in their feeling that Hrtkovci was theirs and that they were one of us. At that time, May 30, the most determined was Julijana Molnar: "Where can I go? For me Hrtkovci is everything - Europe and the world. No one will drive me away! Shame on you people of Hrtkovci for abandoning what you built so easily".

Just in case, 250 of them have submitted an emigration request. Yesterday, I talked to the terrified Julijana. She and her husband go to bed dressed; they don't even go to their field. Extremely scared, she is not far from believing that this is not really her house, that she is a foreigner and that her place is waiting for her in Croatia.

I called the Ministry of the Interior of Serbia. I talked to the Inspector, who did not want to introduce himself, because, as he says, the press had misused his name twice. He advised me to look after Krajinas and to put everything about Hrtkovci on paper and send it to the court, but only if I am a lawyer and have an authorisation from the people of Hrtkovci.

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