

FEDERAL MINISTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND MINORITY RIGHTS

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HUMAN RIGHTS: Cases in which the right of citizens to personal and property security has been violated

According to many verifiable data, the war in Croatia was fought without much regard for the civilian population. Destruction and burning of personal property was the strategy of all regular and irregular military formations. The goal was to intimidate and displace the population of a certain ethnicity. This practice continued after the armistice was concluded on 4 January 1992, with increased pressure on the personal and property security of Serbs in peaceful parts of Croatia, and on that of Croats in Vojvodina.

The fact that, during the armed conflict in Croatia, there were situations in which the personal property of Serbs was recklessly, destroyed and looted by those who were considered protectors of Serbian interests, is alarming. In some cases, it is known who the direct perpetrators are; but the military and civilian authorities have not taken steps to punish these perpetrators and compensate the people who have become homeless and without assets.

One of these cases concerns the Božić family from Sisak. At the beginning of August 1991, the family of five fled that town, owing to the fear of a possible war and the belief that, being of Serbian nationality, they could be directly endangered. At the time, news was circulating that many Serbs had been arrested or taken away somewhere. Since fighting was ongoing in the Municipality of Kostajnica, the Božić family could not break through to Donji Hrastovac, near Sunja, where they had a big house, and which they counted on as a safe place, since it was under the control of Serbian forces. They left for Austria, whence they returned around 10 October to Sunja and Donji Hrastovac. In their house, they found members of the II Detachment of the Kostajnica Territorial Defence and tank units from Banja Luka led by officer Petar Drakulić, as well as other units consisting of the officers Damnjanović and Bogoljub Petrović. They found the house and the building with the yard violently broken into and in ruins, and could not find many valuable things in it anymore: furniture, gold, objects from cutlery to kitchen towels, had disappeared. Tools, machines and everything useful had disappeared from the garage and the auxiliary room. The remaining things were taken out and put in trucks in front of the Božić family. The house itself was turned into a military position, and shots were fired from there; so, of course, when the Croatian forces discovered this, they fired at the house as if it were a military facility.

The Božić family lost an apartment in Sisak, where the family of a military guard member lives, and a house that the JNA have looted and turned into a military facility. As far as the looting and destruction of personal property is concerned, the Božić family have addressed many military and civilian institutions of SRS Yugoslavia to determine the damage and receive a possible compensation. They received a more detailed answer on 28 February from the Military Attorney, signed by Mladen Simić, captain 1st rank. This answer, bearing the stamp of the highest military institutions, shows individuals in this army taking sides ideologically, not hesitating to express in writing the assessment that every citizen of Serbian nationality who did not take up arms and defend his place and home was suspicious. The abovementioned captain says: "They did not ask you for the keys, to hand over the house to them, probably because, as a refugee, you left the village where the other inhabitants remained and put their

energy into defending the village. We fully understand your anger towards members of the Territorial Defence and the Army, because, as you say, members of the Croatian forces never came to you, and that is why you exclude the possibility that they could have looted and harmed you. That is why it is not clear to us why you left your house, as well as your apartment in Sisak, and moved, as a refugee, to the territory of Serbia and Bosnia, where you enjoy some kind of help from the war-torn population".

Many abuses will be left unpunished, as has already happened in previous wars. But there, in a country loudly proclaiming respect for human rights and the punishment of all those involved in acts which discriminate against citizens on the basis of ethnicity, political beliefs or patriotic feelings, it is the duty of the authorities to take measures without delay that will effectively protect the right of citizens to personal and property security.

There are also other concerns about violations of the basic human right to a safe life.

Observing the organised pressure on Croats and Hungarians to move out of Hrtkovci and many other settlements in Vojvodina, the authorities have responded by arresting local organisers of intimidations and expulsions, strengthening the police surveillance of militant refugee groups, removing one of the "ethnic cleansing" strategists from the authorities, and announcing that an investigation would be launched and the facts made public. They haven't said a word about the representative who has been the official spokesman for the policy of "ethnic cleansing" for a year, the guilt and responsibility of the main political ideologists are avoided, and the arrest of petty criminals is presented to the public as an act that has eliminated all possible abuses of human rights of non-Serbs. But data on incidents in Nikinci and Ruma show that non-Serbs are still exposed to pressure. At the end of August, two bombs were planted in Nikinci, a fire was started in Hrtkovci, and on 5 and 7 September, three explosive devices were planted in front of the homes of Croats and Hungarians in Ruma. Two explosive devices were placed in front of the house of Slavica Rakoš, who has been threatened more often by phone, since the day she was with a group of citizens talking to federal ministers. Although the municipal government in Ruma has made decisions on returning families to forcibly occupied houses in Hrtkovci, no solution has been realised: the police remain powerless before a group of refugees who have gathered to prevent the scheduled eviction. There are indications that the Serbian Radical Party has also started intimidating the citizens in Ruma by making lists of those who are undesirables. Allegedly, one of these lists was made on 2 September, and included citizens of non-Serbian nationality, but also Serbs who are not politically approved by this party.

Near Subotica is the village of Trešnjevac, containing Hungarian locals who have been trying to say for months, by means of peaceful protest, that they don't want to fight and don't accept being mobilised for a war between the peoples of the former Yugoslavia. JNA tanks are stationed in this village, although there was never an army there. They have been in the primary school yard for months, scaring both parents and children. There is concern that the military and civilian authorities do not show any intention to remove the tanks and free the locals from the fear that the tanks could be used against them as well.

It is obvious that discrimination against non-Serb citizens is being carried out according to a model publicly announced by the leader of the Serbian Radical Party: Expel Croats and thus solve the refugee problem.

When one looks at the announced programme of the Serbian government for the accommodation of 30,000 refugees and exiles, there are elements that lead one to the suspicion that now is the time for

those settlements in Vojvodina from which 25,000 Hungarians fled before the mobilisation to be populated.

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Sincerely, Nataša Kandić
Civil Resistance Movement

