

FEDERAL MINISTRY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND MINORITY RIGHTS

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Second report on cases of threats to personal and property safety of citizens of non-Serbian nationality (10 August 1992)

The Civil Resistance Movement and the Belgrade Circle continue to determine details and facts regarding violation of the rights of Croats and Hungarians in settlements in Srem, where the process of forced and organised eviction of non-Serb citizens can be observed most clearly. The collected data indicate that the government, although aware of the facts indicating that the direct organisers and perpetrators of ethnic cleansing are members of the Serbian Radical Party, have not taken effective measures to protect the personal and property security of non-Serbian citizens. In Hrtkovci, the eviction process is almost completed, and according to the small number of still-not-evicted mixed families, acts of intimidation are still being organised. Mistreatment of children is on the agenda, and it increases fear and influences emigration decisions. In Golubinci, one can see elements of conflict between the locals, regardless of their nationality, and the refugees who fled to the territory of the Republic of Serbia from the war zones of Croatia a few months ago. Locals estimate that the militant behaviour of refugees from Virovitica, Podravska Slatina, Vinkovci and Grubišno Polje can lead to conflicts in the village. Public threats to Croats and the readiness of refugees to resolve the issue of their survival in Golubinci by force are evident. One such threat was made publicly at a rally of citizens organised by the Civil Resistance Movement and the Belgrade Circle.

On 21 July, an explosive device was thrown into the yard of the Žemberi family in Hrtkovci. The event was preceded by a discussion, on July 20, between immigrants from Croatia and members of the Žemberi family, who didn't want to hand over the agricultural tools that were left behind the household of the Žemberi family who had emigrated earlier on. When the immigrants from Croatia were told that they would not get anything, an argument and mutual pushing started. A local, Jurković Žarko, was also there. Marija and Josip Bagi, who live nearby, were on the street in a car. They stopped to see what was happening, and saw their neighbour Jurković Žarko running, and shouting that they wanted to kill him. At that moment, next to the car appeared Rade Čakmak, a refugee from Grubišno Polje, and his son, as well as Mirko Paunović, whom no one knows - the attacked locals found out his name in the village, because the police also didn't know, or didn't want to say his name or who he is. All three men were looking for Jurković. When Josip asked again what was happening, Rade Čakmak approached the car, and started choking Josip in the throat, claiming that he had hidden Žarko Jurković. Josip got out of the car, as did his mother and son, and entered their yard to show that there was no one there. Čakmak continued to hit Josip, and then pushed at the mother, who fell. The police came at someone's call, and they took details from Josip and Marija Bagi. Details were not taken from the attackers, however - the police told them to come to the police station on their own. When Josip Bagi asked why they had not taken the details from the attackers, one of the police officers answered that he should calm down and that it was not his business. The following night, an explosive device was thrown into the yard of the Žemberi family, and the police took the details. According to the medical findings, sixty-year-old Marija Bagi, of Hungarian nationality, suffered minor bodily injuries. She and her son Josip filed a lawsuit in the court in Sremska Mitrovica.

On 29 July, the singer Bora Đorđević was a guest at Svetozar Todorović's bar. Mirko Kalac, Majk Rendić, Mirko Klobučar, Saša Feketa, Dalibor Šamu and a few other young men were sitting near a table where Rade Čakmak and Ostoja Sibinčić, the local leader of the Serbian refugees, were sitting. According to Mirko Kalac, the young men were in navy-striped T-shirts, because everyone wore those - Majk Rendić served in the navy. During the break, Bora Đorđević came to say hello to them, as he knew them from before. Then Ostoja Sibinčić called Bora to come and sit "with the right people". When announcing the next song, Bora dedicated it to "the Sixth Fleet" – a reference to the T-shirts. All this time, Ostoja, Čakmak and others from his company were jeering at the young men and looking at them angrily. The first to approach was an unknown man in a green T-shirt, who started shouting at the young men who were seated. He was joined by Sibinčić and Čakmak. Sibinčić slapped Mirko Kalac in the face several times and while the others took hold of him, cursed him: "Motherfucker, I'll cut your throat!" The owner of the bar came with two guards and they kicked him out. They (Sibinčić's group) then headed towards the other young men. Ostoja Sibinčić shouted "Ustasha!" at Majk, and he and the others began hitting him in the head and body (they cut his ear), and eventually threw him out of the bar. The last was Saša Feketa, who received punches from a dozen people; they also beat him with a chair, which was why later he felt acute pain, and found bruises around his kidneys. He also fainted, and they cut his lip. The locals Vladimir Tović and Slobodan Nešković approached and brought away the young man, who was still being beaten by the attackers. The police had followed the event from the beginning, neither responding when Mirko Kalac asked them to intervene, nor at the moment when it was obvious that a larger group of refugees, led by Ostoja Sibinčić, were using force on the young men. The same evening, the police arrested Majk Rendić and held him in Ruma all night. The next morning, the police picked up and took the other young men who had been attacked in a police car, to the police station in Ruma to give statements. They had looked for them the same evening they took Majk, but did not find them at their homes, because they did not sleep in their homes, out of fear. The police held them for four hours. Later that day in Hrtkovci, they saw the same inspectors having lunch with Ostoja Sibinčić in a tavern. According to the young man's observation, Bora Đorđević pretended that he didn't see anything.

Other young men from mixed families also have problems, Anđelko, who came from Macedonia with his mother Vencislava, was beaten by the police. His mother worked in the Military Post Office in Macedonia with Ostoja Sibinčić, and she knows that he was prosecuted, and eventually dismissed from military service. On one occasion, Anđelko was beaten by the police only because, when asked what his ethnicity was, he had replied that he was a Croat, to which they responded, "So what are you doing here?" He works in the Local Community Office; but on 3 August, Ostoja Sibinčić told him that he was giving him four days to get lost. He did not receive a salary for two months. His father, incidentally, an officer of the Yugoslav Army, died in Slavonia.

According to Mirko Kalac, Ostoja Sibinčić told Zlatko Klobučar that Franjo Kalac, Mirko's father, was first on the list for liquidation.

Around 30 July, an explosive device was also thrown beside the house of the Obrovac family. This was preceded by a visit from unknown people who had inquired about exchanging the house. After the explosion, the Obrovac family was visited by another group of unknown people, who said that the first explosion was a warning to them, and that they should not wait for three bombs.

On 2 August, Ostoja Sibinčić changed the sign-board with the name “Hrtkovci” on it. Wearing a šubara (traditional conical winter hat) which sported a cockade, he passed through the village in a carriage and personally placed a sign with the inscription "Srbislavci" at the entrance to the village.

During the visit to the eyewitnesses of the event, two families of refugees from Croatia were interviewed.

In a conversation with Nenad Veselinović and his wife from Slavonski Brod, who came to Hrtkovci at the beginning of January, the refugees stated that they used to live in a street that was unofficially called “Serbian Street”, and that a different life started when the HDZ came to power. Their son had a bar, but sold it and went to Germany. He sold the bar to a Croat, who did not pay him all the money, threatening him with a weapon if he continued to demand the sum agreed upon. Nenad says that it is true that the SDS distributed weapons to the Serbs, but that previously the Croats received weapons from the authorities and the Croatian army. He points out that many Serbs from this street were not members of the SDS and that they did not have weapons. On 14 July 1991, the street was blocked for the handing over of weapons. On that occasion, everyone was harassed, regardless of whether or not they had weapons. Since then, Serbs have started leaving Slavonski Brod. The houses of many of the richer Serbs were blown up. In constant fear that something might happen to them, they had lived with their suitcases packed. They decided to leave. They got an empty house in Hrtkovci.

Lazo Puača and his wife from Kula, near Slavenska Požega, exchanged a house with Josip Močilac from Hrtkovci. They came in late June. Although Kula was not affected by the war operations, shootings and explosions started taking over the village, which is entirely Serbian. During the war, he had been in Canada at his daughter’s residence, and when he returned, on 15 March this year, the government took his passport for verification. They started questioning him about what he had been doing there, and claimed they had evidence that he had been collecting money for the Chetniks. When asked if he had been harassed, he said that he hadn’t been harassed physically, but that they had questioned him about the journey and had confiscated his travel document. With the help of Močilac from Hrtkovci, who was already in Kula, he eventually got his passport back. By the way, the Puača family have a daughter in Osijek with whom they had contact while they were in Kula, and they say that she and her husband have no problems.

Talking with the locals, you can notice their fears regarding their children. They believe that Ostoja Sibinčić and those whose tasks he is carrying out will increase the pressure for moving out by intimidating children. As an example, they take the young Steve, who decided to flee from the village after the attack in the bar. The prevailing belief among the locals is that everything is over - that the government is not ready to really protect the non-Serbian locals, and that soon they will be leaving this village.

These days, threats to the Bagi family and to those parents who filed reports regarding the beating of children in the bar have become frequent. Everyone is being threatened by telephone that if they do not withdraw the lawsuits, they and the children will bear the consequences. Behind the night calls, there are always voices presenting themselves as CHEDA (diminutive for Chetnik). Shootings in Golubinci have become more frequent - today (10 August 1992) refugees fired shots in the centre provoked by the fraudulence of the Serbian authorities regarding the war in Croatia.

Alarmingly, the local and district authorities treat any civic engagement regarding the violation of the rights of Croats and Hungarians with suspicion. After the rally in Golubinci, the State Security Service

asked the secretary of the Local Community Office for a list of the people who organised the meeting from Belgrade.

On the night of 10 and 11 August, a bomb was thrown into the yard of Miroslav Maletić in Ruma. Five minutes before the explosion, he had left the yard and luckily avoided being hit by the bomb.

Belgrade is also reacting in its own way to the Croat emigration. At the beginning of Knez Mihajlova Street, a tape of a song is being played every day, beginning with the words: "Move out Croatian men and women, better voluntarily than by force...".

Nataša Kandić

