

For many Croats, the notion that those who had recently rebelled against Croatia, driven Croats from their homes, carried out atrocities against Croats and bombarded Croatian cities (including Vukovar, which was reduced to rubble by the JNA before surrendering in November 1991) should be welcomed back after they had fled, seemed obnoxious. There was little appreciation of the notion that individuals should be held individually responsible for individual deeds, and not a whole national group; for many Croats, the Serbs' flight simply reflected their guilt. Thus international insistence that Serbs who had not committed war crimes be amnestied for their part in the rebellion, and that they be allowed freely to return to their homes and enjoy full rights as Croatian citizens elicited little sympathy among most Croats, and resistance from the Croatian authorities.

Although the Croatian authorities have paid lip service to the principle of the return of all refugees, the negative attitude to Serb returns has been obvious in commentaries in pro-government media. Thus, for example, articles by Maja Freundlich, a columnist with the daily *Vjesnik*, frequently amounted to little more than hate-filled, anti-Serb rants. In an article in October 1995 Freundlich referred to "the madness which they [the Serbs] have shown, the Nazism which they have worn, the cowardice which flowed from them, the hypocrisy which adorned them in every key moment of the war or of politics, the lies for which they pride themselves, the blood-thirstiness in which they glory even in their literature".⁴ Referring to Serb refugees as "fugitives" (*bjegunci*) she went on to state that their return would be a "real Trojan Horse" because "among them would certainly want to come to Croatia, without check, the worst kind of Serb terrorists, or soldiers, or secret agents..." Freundlich continued her efforts to whip up fear of and ill-will towards Serbs in an article in December 1995, in which she asked: "Why is that return of bandits (*razbojnici*) so important?"⁵ In tones bordering on hysteria she suggested that the alleged favouritism in placing Serbs in important positions in Croatia under communism, and even in supposedly accommodating them in flats in strategic places, was part of a perfidious plan, and that the Serbs in Croatia had been prepared for their "position as a Trojan Horse, for the task of a military fifth column -- for the decisive, foreseen moment of the conquest of Croatia". She went on to say that to allow the return of Serbs would mean enabling the terrorists to recover the ground that they had lost in military defeat.

The suggestion that Croats too were in some instances guilty of crimes, and that Serbs were sometimes victims, has not, on the whole, been taken well. According to research carried out by Amnesty International, more than 200 murders were carried out by Croats in the aftermath of the 1995 lightning strikes. Amnesty International has also noted the slowness of the judicial authorities to initiate cases against Croats for murders of Serbs, even though many are well-documented. The human rights' group's chief investigator for Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia, Johana Bjorken, considers the statement of the President of Croatia's Supreme Court, Milan Vukovic, that a Croat could not have committed a war crime, because he was defending the motherland, as indicative of the official attitude.⁶

⁴ Article by Maja Freundlich in *Vjesnik*, 25 October 1995.

⁵ Article by Maja Freundlich in *Vjesnik*, 27 December 1995.

⁶ Interview with Johana Bjorken of Amnesty International, *Jutarnji list*, 6 August 1998, regarding an Amnesty International report on Croatia published on 4 August 1998.