

Finding alternative housing for temporary occupants is a genuine problem. Nevertheless, it is notable that commissions have shown considerably more will when it has been a matter of evicting Serb DPs from Croat homes in eastern Slavonia. Kohlschuetter has complained that the commissions have failed to make sufficient effort to find alternative accommodation. He has also pointed out that, as in Bosnia, multiple occupancy is a problem, with some Croat refugee families occupying several houses and flats; despite this, commissions have failed to resolve the matter. The OSCE in its October 1998 report stressed the need for better horizontal communication and co-operation among commissions, as well as better vertical communication from the central authorities to the commissions, so that information on availability of alternative accommodation could be shared more effectively.

Concerns have also been expressed about the conditions to which many returnees are going back. Often houses deemed habitable nevertheless lack many necessities, including windows, doors and heating. With winter approaching, international officials have expressed concern that some returnees (most of them elderly) may be at severe risk. The authorities are obliged to meet the immediate needs of returnees, who, for six months, are supposed to have special returnee status, entitling them to material and financial assistance. The experience of many has been of significant delays in confirming their returnee status, which should not be necessary given that their status has already been agreed before their return to the country.

## 5. Returns to Damaged Properties

The programme promises equal treatment of returning refugees whose properties have been damaged with all other Croatian citizens, according to the *Law on Reconstruction*. The reconstruction process is well under way, and in October 1998 Radic estimated that 80,000 out of 143,000 destroyed or damaged houses had been restored.<sup>46</sup> In an interview in July 1998 Radic said that he expected that 110,000-120,000 would finally be restored, reflecting the fact that not everyone would return.<sup>47</sup>

In the same interview Radic said that the reconstruction plan which was being prepared would serve in part as an invitation to the international community to participate in the postponed reconstruction conference, with a view to their providing some financial support. Radic also acknowledged that the international community would want to see in the reconstruction plan that all returnees (i.e. regardless of ethnicity) would be equally treated in the disbursement of funds for reconstruction. The planned reconstruction conference was put off several times during 1998. The international community insisted on seeing a complete reconstruction plan for the year, including provision for reconstruction in Serb villages, before it would agree to participate in the conference.

Although the conference is being organised by the government, it would have little meaning without international participation. This therefore gives the international community some leverage in pressing for the equitable distribution of reconstruction funding and for the implementation of the returns programme in general. The linkage between these conditions and participation in the

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<sup>46</sup> HINA, 13 October 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Jure Radic in *Vecernji list*, 9 July 1998.