

Various problems have arisen in this procedure. At the meeting in Topusko discussed above, a number of questions were raised by local officials about practical difficulties, to which the representatives of the central government did not, in every case, have ready answers.⁴⁰ Having on 20 July 1998 ordered the establishment of housing commissions in areas of return by the end of the month, the government in August 1998 issued "Instructions" regarding the activities of the commissions.⁴¹ However, in reports in September 1998 and October 1998 the OSCE pointed out that the commissions have frequently not carried out their functions satisfactorily. Not all were established within the deadline, and some local authorities refused to establish them.

There have been repeated complaints that there has been insufficient direction of the implementation of the programme by the central authorities, and that the instructions to the commissions have been insufficiently precise. The OSCE spokesman, Mark Thompson, observed in August 1998 that while the returns conference in Baske Ostarije appeared to show a determination on the part of the authorities to carry out the programme, it also highlighted the lack of concrete operating instructions as to how to implement it.⁴² The President of the Serb National Council, Milorad Pupovac, has said that unless the housing commissions began to function effectively, there was little prospect of the returns programme being implemented.⁴³

While the OSCE has noted that only a few commissions are operating effectively, there are exceptions to the general picture, and Pupovac has pointed with approval at the performance of the commission in Petrinja, while criticising those in Okucani, Knin and Kostajnica. The head of the OSCE regional office in Knin, Andreas Kohlschuetter, has pointed to positive examples in Udbina and Otocac, but said that the OSCE has witnessed cases of violence against returnees in villages near Knin.⁴⁴ In Daruvar, on 24 September 1998, a Serb family was prevented from returning to its home by a group of about 20 Croat DPs; the local police failed to take action.⁴⁵

A lack of clear direction from the centre is only part of the problem. As with every stage of the implementation of the programme, the success of the housing commissions in enabling Serb returnees to recover their property depends on good will among those responsible. The programme leaves it to the local housing commissions to set deadlines for properties to be vacated by temporary occupants, many of them Croat DPs from Bosnia. Experience to date indicates that commissions are extremely reluctant to evict temporary Croat occupants from Serb-owned houses. Members of some commissions have complained of a lack of resources and have insisted on adequate remuneration for their services before they begin to carry out their tasks. There has been pressure from Bosnian Croat DPs who have resisted eviction, arguing that they had earlier been given the impression that they could settle in the former Serb homes permanently.

⁴⁰ Information from OSCE official who was present.

⁴¹ *Instructions for the Work of Housing Commissions and the Application of Forms for the Implementation of the "Programme of Return and Providing Care for Exiled Persons, Refugees and Displaced Persons*, 10 August 1998.

⁴² OSCE and UNHCR press conference, HINA, 19 August 1998.

⁴³ HINA, 24 September 1998.

⁴⁴ HINA, 29 September 1998.

⁴⁵ Case cited by Mark Thompson of the OSCE, HINA, 7 October 1998.