

The reintegration process, nevertheless, left much to be desired. An agreement on two-way returns of Croats to the region and Serbs from the region to other parts of Croatia was reached in April 1997.<sup>11</sup> However, returns to and from the region have been disappointing. Concerning figures for the return of Croats, the head of the Croatian government's Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees (ODPR), Lovre Pejkovic, estimated in October 1998 that 21,340 Croat DPs had returned to eastern Slavonia,<sup>12</sup> out of around 84,000 who were displaced from the region during the war. The OSCE, by contrast, estimated that only some 10,000 Croat returnees had taken up full-time residence in the region in a September 1998 report.

As for Serbs returning from eastern Slavonia to other parts of Croatia, a UN survey in the region in August 1996 estimated that there were some 46,000 Serb DPs there. In October 1998, Pejkovic said that 23,343 Serb DPs had returned from eastern Slavonia to other parts of Croatia. The OSCE mission is sceptical of the ODPR figures, and in its September 1998 report estimated the number of returns from eastern Slavonia at between 10,000 and 15,000. The situation appears even bleaker when the exodus of Serbs from eastern Slavonia into Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro, that is the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or FRY) is taken into consideration.<sup>13</sup> According to UNHCR and OSCE estimates in September 1998, this exodus of Serb DPs from the region has amounted to around 28,000. While most left before the end of UNTAES in January 1998, the OSCE has observed a continued haemorrhage of an average six Serb families per week since then, while the ODPR has recently estimated that around 5,800 Serb DPs remain in the region. In addition to the exodus of Serb DPs, the UNHCR estimates that around 16,000 of the 67,000 Serbs who resided in the region before the war left the country between August 1996 and July 1998, mostly to the FRY.

Thus, despite all the efforts to ensure a peaceful reintegration of eastern Slavonia into Croatia, the reintegration of the Serb and Croat communities there has failed to take place, and many Serbs continue to see little future for themselves in Croatia. Reasons for this disappointing record include the following:

#### A. Security Problems

A secure environment, free from violence or intimidation is critical. The Erdut Agreement attempted to address this matter with the formation of a transitional police force which was created in July 1996. While the force was initially made up mainly of Serbs, its composition changed over time. Of a current total of some 1,500-1,600 officers, around 850 are Croats and 650 Serbs, a ratio which more closely reflects the region's pre-war ethnic composition. Under UNTAES, the UN Civilian Police Support Group (UNPSG) monitored the performance of the local police, a role it continued to perform after the region passed to complete Croatian control in January 1998 at the request of the Croatian government.

In the initial period following the reintegration of the region, there were numerous incidents of threats and violent acts against Serbs, which the UNPSG divided into two categories: property-related and ethnic-related. Such incidents have since declined

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<sup>11</sup> *Agreement of the Joint Working Group on Operational Procedures of Return*, signed on 23 April 1997, by the Croatian government, the UNHCR and UNTAES.

<sup>12</sup> BETA, 22 October 1998.

<sup>13</sup> The UN Security Council on 2 July 1998 expressed its concern at the large number of Serbs who have left eastern Slavonia since the end of 1996, and at the continued occurrence of ethnically-motivated incidents in the region.