

III. EASTERN SLAVONIA⁷

Following the Croatian military offensives which returned the larger part of the Serb-controlled regions of the country to Croatian authority, international negotiations got under way over the peaceful reintegration of the remaining Serb-controlled area, in eastern Slavonia. This led to the Erdut Agreement,⁸ which established a transitional period of UN administration in the region, the so-called UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia or UNTAES, before it reverted to Zagreb's full control. Under the terms of the accord, all who had left the region had the right to return, and all who had come to the region from other parts of Croatia had the right to live there in security. In addition, all had the right to recover property, or to receive compensation for property that could not be recovered. Reconstruction assistance was to be equally available to all, without regard to ethnicity. The Transitional Administration was to form and train a multi-ethnic police force, to ensure respect for human rights and to help build confidence among the different communities.

In order to demonstrate an interest in promoting reconciliation, the government initiated a programme on the re-establishment of trust, which was intended to apply to all of the war-affected areas of the country, although initially committees to oversee the programme were set up only in eastern Slavonia.⁹ This programme emphasised the need to build a climate of "forgiveness, tolerance, coexistence and equal rights" and to restore trust among all citizens. It acknowledged that while many Croatian Serbs participated in an armed rebellion and aggression against Croatia, during which numerous criminal acts were committed, on the other side "emotional and inappropriate language was used in the private and public area so as to generalise guilt and strengthen feelings of hate and division". In order to carry out the programme's goal of restoring trust, a National Committee was formed to monitor progress, which included prominent members of the Serb community in Croatia. A Joint Council of Municipalities was also established, as a focus for links between representatives of the Serb community in the region and the government.

According to the Erdut Agreement, UNTAES was to last for 12 months, and for another 12 months if so requested by one of the parties. In the event, the transfer of full control finally took place only in January 1998, as the international community had earlier objected that Croatia had not done enough to fulfil its obligations towards the region's Serbs.¹⁰ During this interim period, the region was gradually reintegrated into Croatia, and Serbs living there were able to apply for Croatian documents, confirming that they were citizens of Croatia. Many of them did so, both Serbs whose homes were in the region and Serb IDPs from other parts of Croatia.

⁷ Eastern Slavonia is generally referred to in Croatia as Hrvatsko Podunavlje, that is the Croatian Danube region.

⁸ The *Basic Agreement on the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium* was signed on 12 November 1995. It followed agreement on *Guiding Basic Principles for Negotiations on a Settlement of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium*, which was signed on 3 October 1995.

⁹ *Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia on the Establishment of Trust, Accelerated Return and Normalisation of Living Conditions in the War-Affected Regions of the Republic of Croatia*, adopted on 2 October 1997.

¹⁰ As late as October 1997 the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, reported that conditions had not yet been met for the region's full reintegration into Croatia.