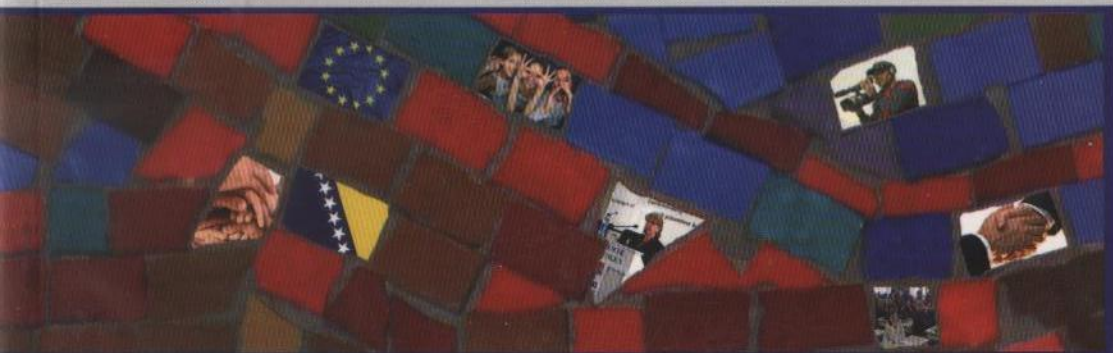


Adnan Rondić

FRIEDRICH
EBERT 
STIFTUNG

RETURN

Between Semblance and Reality



Adnan Rondić

RETURN

Between Semblance and Reality

RETURN
Between Semblance and Reality

Author of the Study: Adnan Rondić

Publisher: FOUNDATION FRIEDRICH EBERT
– Office in Sarajevo

On Behalf of Publisher: Edhem Mušikić

Methodology of the Study: Mr. sc. Lejla Turčilo

Translation into English: Senada Kreso

Proof-Reader: Azra Bakšić

Print: Kaligraf Sarajevo

Number of Copies: 500

For their selfless participation in the „Return” TV Project,
I am deeply grateful to

Edo Mušikić

Elvir Švrakić

Kenan Ćerimagić

Amina Gvozdin

Aida Karamujić

Jasmin Smajlović

Bakiu Deljković

Mirsada Suljović

The video editing team of Hayat TV

INTRODUCTION

RETURN TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: A LITMUS PAPER FOR THE REINTEGRATION AND FUTURE OF THE STATE

One hundred and eighty thousand persons displaced within Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and 400,000 citizens of this country currently living in about forty countries of the world have not exercised their right of return yet. In the period from 1992 to 1995, approximately 2,3 million people were forced out of their homes. This statistics, presented at the 1st Congress of Refugees and Displaced Persons in BiH, held on 27 June 2007, that almost a million persons have returned to BiH since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed. These are the figures produced by the Government. The people's eagerness to return home is not in decrease, if we judge it by the number of requests for registration of potential beneficiaries of assistance submitted following an open call for application announced by the Ministry for Human rights and refugees. Thus, there are more than 40,000 families, i.e. about 135,000 individuals who want to return to their pre-war homes.

Degree of realisation of the process of repossession of property and tenancy right is also very high: up to 99,7%. According to official indicators, out of almost 445,000 of totally destroyed or damaged housing units, close to 260,000, or 45 % have been reconstructed or repaired so far.

Thus speaks the statistics.

Situation on the ground, however, is telling a somewhat different story. There are no accurate figures of the property that has been sold or exchanged after being repossessed by original owners or holders of tenancy right. There are quite many returnees

who are the so-called “paper returnees”. Some of them only visit their pre-war places of residence during summer vacation, others share their time between their pre-war and the post-war homes in both BiH entities, in almost different portions.

What is the present position of returnees in BiH, irrespective of their ethnicity? Could one make some general assessment of the process that is in fact vital for the reintegration of BiH?

Government reports, most often produced by relevant ministries, provide prevalingly optimistic picture, but fail to detect some problems, both objective and subjective in nature, related to the process of return.

Thus, Safet Halilović, the Minister for Human Rights and Refugees in the Council of Ministers of BiH stated that *«Recently, we, in the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, have done scores of interviews with representatives of different institutions and organisations trying to motivate them to help returnees, since the funds envisaged in the budgets at all levels of government of our country are insufficient for the realisation of return. We have warned public at large about this problem on several occasions. We have made a detailed analysis of the return-related situation, with financial estimates for every municipality done. We are aware that in the next two to three years we have to invest maximum efforts to help every person who want to return, to finally return home. We are also aware of the fact that this would not be an easy task. I want to remind you that we have adopted the Strategy for Realisation of Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement, as one of the key documents both for our Ministry and for the Council of Ministers.»*

Furthermore, Minister Halilović cites the statistical data on the process of return, and states that, *«The poorest results within the overall process of return and reintegration are achieved in this area. In the complex constitutional and legal situation of division of competencies and financial resource that we have in our country today, it is very difficult to make any progressive steps that would lead towards a systemic solution to the issues such as right to healthcare, education, social protection, employment, de-mining and so on - all vital elements of sustainable return.»*¹

James Lynch, the UNHCR Representative in BiH pointed out that a lot has been achieved in the domain of sustainable return in BiH, yet further efforts are needed, particularly in terms of providing permanent housing for the people now living in collective shelters.

On the other hand, the report issued by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in BiH, whose significant activities are focused on the return process in BiH, offers a rather different picture:

«In 2006, there were almost no minority returns. Although nobody provides for a comprehensive analysis of figures of repossessed property that was then sold or the property that was exchanged once it had been re-possessed, when visiting returnee settlements and towns, one finds that more than 50% of repossessed apartments, houses and land have changed hands by some kind of contracts – either on exchange or on sale – and that

¹ <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org>

at least 30 % are currently being on sale, or used only occasionally, mainly during the weekends. Some houses that have just been repaired or rebuilt thanks to the returnee aid funds, are now subject to sale.

Poor results in the implementation of Annex VII in 2006 were additionally burdened by the fact that there are a lot of those who returned a year or more ago only to decide that, due to the fact that their return has proven unsustainable, they need to go elsewhere to be able to provide themselves with mere survival, if not better living.

The assessment made by the Helsinki Committee corresponds to the data provided by the Association of Refugees and DPs in BiH. On the other hand, official sources – the state and entity Ministries for Human Rights and Refugees, as well as UNHCR, evidently having applied a rather strange methodology, stick to their assertion that the number of returnees exceeds one million.

If we take into account that during the recent war about 2,2 million citizens of BiH were moved from their homes, and if we compare this figure with the data based on precise statistics that was made public at the 3rd Congress of the World Association of Diaspora, held in BiH in 2006, that about 1,3 million Bosnians and Herzegovinians live in 110 countries of world, and add to this figure the number of internally displaced persons in BiH estimated to 180,000, and at least double that number of those who have lost their status by way of re-registration, because they could not, and did not, return – then the above figure proves to be very objective.

The Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, however, deems that outside of BiH there are presently about half a million

people who had left the country between 1992 and 1995, and who were registered as BiH refugees.

The first comprehensive official registration of displaced persons in BiH was conducted by the end of 2000, when the total of 183,355 displaced families, i.e. 556,214 persons were registered. According to latest family applications for revision of status, 180,000 persons displaced in BiH are still seeking permanent residence. According to data provided by the Union of Associations of Refugees and DPs, there are still about 7,000 people living in extremely inadequate collective shelters across BiH. In the village Mihatovići near Tuzla alone there are 825 persons, while in Karakaj near Zvornik, there are 77 families accommodated in such shelters. Those who have lost their refugee status in the last re-registration claim that there are many more people accommodated in collective shelters, yet they have never been registered. Only occasionally they are referred to as “vulnerable group”.

According to the data provided by the Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons of Republika Srpska, in the territory of this entity alone, there were 26,990 displaced and about 2,000 refugee families registered in 2006. This Ministry also refers to more than 6,300 persons who are still using alternative accommodation in that entity. The Commission for Refugees and DPs of BiH states that in BiH there are still about 150,000 displaced persons.

There are no aggregate data, and particularly those on the number of people who returned in 2006 to their pre-war homes. It is the case even locally, as the members of a Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Mission discovered when they visited several municipalities in Bosnian and Herzegovina – from Ilidža and Hadžići, to Mostar, Drvar, Bosanski Petrovac and Bugojno, Pale,

Sokolac, Foča Goražde, Ilijaš and District Brčko. Since the Government does not show any intent to initiate at least some preparations for the Population Census (the last was conducted in 1991), we are dealing with rough estimates, often used to “fit” into the needs, interest and parameters of those using them, a phenomenon that gives rise to huge doctoring of the statistics and manipulation with the funds earmarked for return and reconstruction. Our guess is that only about 2,500 persons returned to their home in 2006.

The consequence of the relocation of population that occurred in BiH is that today we have ethically clean or almost clean regions; so, in the urban part of Višegrad there is only one Bosniak, in Foča there is none, just like there are none in Vlasenica and Sokolac, while in the primary school at Pale, out of 1,800 students, only one is of Bosnian ethnicity. Similarly, only one Croat returned to the village Bukovice near Dobojo, although before the war there were 1,250 Croats living in that village.

A STUDY OF RETURN TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

This Study has actually resulted from several year-long TV project realised jointly by NTV Hayat and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation between 1997 and 2007.

Reports contained in the Study and efforts invested into its preparation arise from the belief that return in BiH needs to have a “human face”. Namely, as it is evident in the above-mentioned statements and data, the information accessible from governmental sources, NGO sector and the media are in great many cases not only based on statistics and numerical indicators, but that is where they end up. This is why we have given much less space in the Study to statistical data that dominate other reports, but have rather opted for the presentation of individual examples of returnees and their everyday life.

There is a mistake that is routinely committed, almost out of inertia, in the analyses and interpretations of return based on the assumption that the story of return ends the moment people resettles the area of their pre-war residence. However, it is when the story of return only begins... That is why returnees need to be re-visited and the goal of our “Return” TV series was to revisit them. The series of TV programmes produced and broadcast by NTV Hayat, just like this Study, analysed the situation with return in several specific areas of BiH, where it was monitored from the beginning of the 1990s, so that in the spring and summer of 2007, we made a remake of the material recorded on our cameras ten, nine or eight years before.

Although standard methodology was applied in the process of developing this Study, there are certain variations that are

reflected primarily in the freedom taken by its authors to emphasise the particularities of situation in the returnee areas that illustrate best the specific features of the given area itself, as well as of return and returnees there.

In addition, the (in)accessibility and (in)transparency of information and statistics caused some variations in the structuring of statistical sample; thus, some areas may look at the first sight as less representative (in terms of statistics) than others; yet, they have been selected for the Study as paradigms of more or less successful renewal of life of their returnee population. In this context of statistical data, we also need to mention that numerous statistical data reflect the situation as it was in 1991, or the situation in 2006 and earlier than that. Given that the phenomenon of return is a very dynamic one, some data in this Study would have changed inevitably by the time of the Study gets published. Nevertheless, it would not have any major impact on the models on which the return and the life in the returnee areas, described in our reports for specific towns offered in this Study, are functioning.

The *Survey's subject* was the phenomenon of return in six areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina (mentioned in the sample) and the way of life of the returnees in those areas. The *Task* of this survey was to analyse models of return in those six selected areas, their similarities and differences, and to draw some general conclusions on the issue of return in Bosnia and Herzegovina by putting certain specific features of return in these areas in mutual relation (i.e. by applying the method of induction).

The *Sample* on which this analysis of return in Bosnia and Herzegovina is done covers six geographic areas where the return of population to its pre-war homes was particularly evident. When

defining the sample, we took into account the fact that the returnee population also reflects the existence of three constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that towns that were analysed were chosen on the basis of general hypothesis that the situation in those towns resembles in some crucial aspects, and that there is certain pattern applicable to all returns, so that, as such, they can be subjected to similar methods and techniques of survey, whereas, on the other hand, the sample is still sufficient to draw certain induction-type conclusions about the return to Bosnia and Herzegovina in general. The Study, therefore, contains reports on the following areas:

- Area 1: Srebrenica, Zvornik, and Bratunac
- Area 2: Travnik and Novi Travnik
- Area 3: Bihać and Bosanski Petrovac
- Area 4: Mostar, Stolac, Gacko, and Bileća
- Area 5: Odžak and Modriča
- Area 6: Sarajevo

During the TV series the key *data gathering technique* for TV programs were interviews done with returnees and with the representatives of local governance and NGO sector in the areas covered by the Study. This technique was a combination of the so-called free interviews, whereby the order of questions and the manner of running interview was determined by interviewer's own sense of the course of discussion, as well as of structured interviews, based on a precisely prepared set of questions asked so that ones control the others, all aimed at getting from interviewees the most precise answers possible. For the needs of the Study, however, the *survey methods* were expanded so that each of the selected areas was taken as Case Study; each of them resulted in a separate report. In the conclusions of the Study, we have drawn, using individual cases and applying the method of induction,

some general observations about the state and the processes of return in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Besides the technique of interview, the analysis of situation in selected areas is based on the method of external observation of the processes and phenomena observed in returnee areas, conducted so that the author, being an “outsider” did his own subjective observation of return as seen in its original ambiance and without any interventions. The method of observation was «upgraded» by description so that reports on each of the towns inevitably included descriptions of everyday life there. For this subjective personal perception in this process of observation and description, the author accepts a degree of responsibility, since his personality and his own position was inevitable, no matter it does seem to be less scientific. As stated already, return is not just a social phenomenon, but very much related to the life of individuals; as such, it requires an approach that would give it a “human face”.

As stated above, in the processes of defining the sample and method of survey, we have taken, as our points of departure, two general assumptions, i.e. *hypotheses* that are in the very foundations of the Study. The first points at the fact that, despite all the differences evident in different areas of return, there are similarities that related to the status of returnees once they return to their pre-war homes. The causes of similarities we encountered in the lives of returnees living in different areas are treated here as factors of sustainability of return. Thus we arrive to the second assumption: the sustainability of return depends on minimum six factors used in our survey as *indicators* that helped us draw certain conclusions. These indicators are:

- Safety and security of returnees
- Economic status of the returnee population
- Social protection and healthcare available to the returnee population
- Possibility of education in returnee areas
- Right and possibility of participation in the bodies of local self-governance and public companies
- Right to cultural particularities of the returnee population

The main *Goal of the Study* was to give a comprehensive account of the situation and the problems confronting the returnee population, and the prospects of emancipation of the life in the areas of their return in future, i.e., the conclusions about sustainability of return as one of the prerequisites for re-integration and normal functioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Study's target audience is the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina, its diaspora and all those in the outside world who are interested in the issues of return and of post-war life in different areas of BiH. We hope that it will be particularly useful for journalists as an orientation paper that offers numerous inputs about the areas they would eventually be covering in their reporting. The representatives of NGO sector, as well as political decision-makers whose decisions affect the life of returnees in particular, may find in this Study a specific perspective or dimension of return that we have chosen to illuminate: the everyday life of returnees. Also, the Study may be of use for researchers who are developing in—depth analyses and researches of the covered areas, no matter which aspect of social science they deal with. We hope that reports provided here would motivate the researchers and academia to show a deeper scientific interest in the issue of return of refugees.

AREA 1:

SREBRENICA, ZVORNIK, BRATUNAC

SREBRENICA

The issue of return to Srebrenica, particularly in the context of genocide that was committed against the Bosniaks who lived in this town and the DPs from the whole region of Bosnian Podrinje who had found refuge and happened to be here in July 1995, is the issue which may serve as litmus test when it comes to the respect of one of fundamental human rights. How many returnees live in Srebrenica today? It is difficult to an answer to this question. Estimates, the most optimistic ones, go up to 7,000, yet the real number of returnees is somewhere around 4,000. According to the 1991 Census, Srebrenica had the population of 36,666, out of which 27,572 were Bosniaks (75,2 %), 8,315 Serbs (22,7 %), and 741 Others (2 %).

The issue of safety in the region of Srebrenica may be defined as satisfactory. However, a person's subjective sense and experience of security and safety varies from one person to another and from one situation to another. Recent incident with the individuals wearing the Chetnik Ravna Gora insignia that occurred on 12th July 2007, nearby the site of the main Srebrenica mosque that had been destroyed during the war, was experienced by the people of Srebrenica as an attack on their security. There were no reports on the cases of attacks on returnees and their property last year, except for the physical assault on returnees in the village of Ljeskovik that the RS Police qualified as false alarm. Furthermore, the returnees to Srebrenica experience their security as problematic because, as they allege, those who were directly or indirectly implicated in the July 1995 genocide are still holding the position of civil servants, either in the police or in local administration. These allegations have been confirmed by the recent actions taken by the new High Representative, Mr Miroslav Lajčak, who has suspended – inter alia – the 35 policemen whose

names are on the list of 800 of individuals who were potentially involved in the perpetration of the Srebrenica massacre.

However, the key problem of returnees to Srebrenica, like in most the other areas in BiH, is that of sustainability. A small number of returnees have returned to their pre-war jobs, either because industry has been greatly devastated, or because the domicile Serbs and those who had moved to the town from other parts of BiH are employed in the companies which “survived” the war or were renewed in the post-war years. Here, we mean primarily the “Sase Mines”, the local utility companies and local schools. E.g., in the Secondary School Centre in Srebrenica, only two Bosniaks (both women) are employed at the moment, professors Fija Avdić and Senija Purković. It is only in several villages, that a number of Bosniak returnees are employed, mainly in small four-grade primary schools. Recently, several newly established factories (CIMOS, a fruit-processing firm and an agricultural cooperative) employ a couple of dozens of Bosniaks. It is only in the police that, due to the international community’s pressure, that some ethnic balance has been reached. Similarly, the municipal administration employees close to 40 % Bosniaks, mainly young people with university degree.

The rural population of Srebrenica is mainly employed in farming and cattle-breeding. What is lacking there is agricultural machinery to cultivate land, as well as better chances of selling their surplus produce. Still, we need to mention the «Milky Way» Project, initiated, with the help of the international community, by the Tuzla Dairy Factory, thanks to which a significant amount of dairy products is purchased regularly from the farmers of this region. We should not forget the catering firms and the service sector that provide living approximately one hundred Bosniaks , if we count the owners’ family members and employees.

The issue of healthcare, primarily relating the returnees whose personal identity documents were issued in the Federation of BiH (i.e., beneficiaries of social benefits, mainly family pensions and disability benefit included in the healthcare system of that entity), is of crucial significance for the returnees to Srebrenica. They are actually mainly the demobilised soldiers of the Army of BiH, and families of the victims of genocide. Agreements between the two entities that would solve this problem have not been reached, although there was a point in time when it seemed that compromise would be possible, so that those who receive their benefits from FBiH would be eligible the healthcare in Republika Srpska without the burden of full payment for the services they receive. The problem of education of returnee children has been resolved only recently in a systemic manner; we see now that the rights of Bosniak children to be taught in their, Bosniak, language and the so-called “national” group of subjects are now observed, particularly in dominantly Bosniak neighbourhoods and villages (e.g., Sućeska), even though it is still only symbolically.

Let us go back, for a moment, to the joint project realised by NTV Hayat and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. TV stories produced within this project were the stories of individuals representing either average returnees, or, in certain case, those returnees who have succeeded to survive in the places of their return. This we did also in the case of Srebrenica. Its key protagonists are the two brothers, Elvis and Nermis Lemeš, who had returned, several years ago, to their village Gladovići, some 30 kilometres from Srebrenica. Their father had gone missing during the fall of Srebrenica and, after the war, their mother remarried. Following the death of their grandmother who had taken care of them, they were put into the Children's Village orphanage in Puračić near Lukavac. We have visited them several times, from the moment of their return to a humble cottage with

mattresses on the floor, to the moment they have built and equipped their own house, having their own cattle, sheep mainly, and their own basic agricultural machinery. We have also recorded the elder brother's wedding. He now lives with his 17-year-old wife Izudina, who is expecting a baby. The younger brother, Nermis, completed his vocational training at the EUFOR base in Rajlovac near Sarajevo and is now a qualified house-painter; thus he can contribute considerably to their joint household budget. This story has such a positive ending thanks to the engagement of individuals from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, including its diaspora. It certainly is a very little achievement vis à vis the whole process of return, yet it represents one good example of how one can contribute individually to something that is of fundamental importance for refugees: SUSTAINABILITY!

The cultural life in Srebrenica is progressing significantly, not only in terms of numerous book launches and exhibitions organised in the town, particularly during the days commemorating the genocide. There is also a nice library in Srebrenica, a radio station that produces only an hour of program entitled "The Journal of Srebrenica" - a multi-ethnic report on the major events in the region - which is then broadcast by the Tuzla Canton Radio, while the Bosniak cultural association «Preporod» has also been established in Srebrenica. There are also frequent sporting activities; the Tourism Association of Srebrenica has been formed; local NGOs are active in various fields; there are often concerts organised in the town. All of this is a sign of recovery of Srebrenica, however insufficient and far below the pre-war level it may be, it is still extremely useful because it gives possibility for contacts, particularly among young people of different ethnicity, which is the only way that could eventually bring about better future to this region.

A part of the Study dedicated to Srebrenica is the longest one. It is because, as we have stated above, almost all the dilemmas and temptations facing all the returnees in Bosnia and Herzegovina are reflected in this town in their full acuteness.

BRATUNAC

The return of Bratunac has not be so much exposed in the media as it was the case of Srebrenica, although almost 7,500 of the pre-war Bosniak citizens of this town have returned home. However, a significant number of citizens of Bratunac, who had sought refuge in the enclave of Srebrenica, lost their lives in the genocide committed on 11 July 1995.

Ethnic structure of the municipality of Bratunac, according to the 1991 Census was as follows:

- Bosniaks 21,535 (64,05%)
- Serbs 11,475 (34,13%)
- Croats 40 (0,11%)
- Yugoslavs 223 (0,66%)

The return into the town of Bratunac has not been particularly high (unlike Srebrenica, where quite a number of Bosniaks have returned to its urban zone). The Bosniaks of Bratunac have mainly returned to rural areas, e.g. the villages of Cerska, Konjević Polje and Glogova. The problem facing these returnees are similar to those experienced by the Bosniaks of Srebrenica. This is an area that was, for quite a while, rather insecure for returnees. Eight years ago, a 17-year-old returnee Mediha Durić was killed in this town. Furthermore, attacks on returnees and their property were frequent, particularly in the town of Bratunac. In the past several

years, the incidents have almost ceased. However, tensions in this municipality were heightened by two recent developments: the decision taken by municipal authorities to allow the Bosniak victims of the war to be buried in the courtyard of the newly rebuilt mosque in the heart of town, and the world-known case of Fata Orlović, on whose land the Serbs have build an Orthodox church. All this has had an impact on the security and the lack of confidence of the local Bosniaks in the possibility of having a safe life in this region. The ousting of the Speaker of the Municipal Council of Bratunac, Refik Begić has complicated further the political situation and inter-ethnic relations between the Serbs and the Bosniaks of Bratunac.

The Bosniaks of Bratunac are faced with the same problems as the returnees to Srebrenica. The situation with employment in public administration is somewhat worse there than in Srebrenica. The returnees in Bratunac are mainly employed in the farming and cattle-breeding. However, the problem of marketing of their surplus produce is much more acute in Bratunac than it is in Srebrenica. It is worth mentioning that the cultivation of some new agricultural products, primarily raspberries, has been initiated and that it has already provided dozens of families in the region of Bratunac with decent living.

Just like it was the case of Srebrenica, the Study includes an example. A young man, Eniz from the village Avdagina Njiva, who, when we first met him, some seven years ago, was a 17-year-old boy, full of bitterness and with no clear plans for his future: However, with strong desire to remain in the village of his birth, he is today a young man who owns a shop, who is married and has a one-year old son, and who works in his shop together with his wife and his brother. He has a clear vision of his future and that of his child, and considers himself to be a happy man.

ZVORNIK

Almost 20,000 people returned to Zvornik, which makes this town the place with the highest return rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of this number, almost 9,000 are the refugees with personal documents issued by the RS authorities.

According to the 1991 Census, Zvornik had the population of 81,295. Its ethnic structure is as follows:

- Bosniaks 48,102 (59,16%)
- Serbs 30,863 (37,96%)
- Croats 122 (0,15%)
- Yugoslavs 1,248 (1,53%)

The returnees in the municipality of Zvornik are mainly re-settling in its rural areas and in the two bigger neighbourhoods, Divič i Kozluk, close to the urban area.

The particular feature of this region is that the first return here was registered as early as in the summer of 1996 - to the villages of Mahala and Jusići. This was a pioneer endeavour that occurred half a year after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. It encountered great obstruction aimed at intimidating of returnees, not only in this area, but throughout Republika Srpska. Today, the security in Zvornik is satisfactory. Solid representation of Bosniaks in the local police contributes significantly to it. The pioneer of return to this area is Fadil Banjanović, aka Bracika, a native of Kozluk, who never stopped, together with his neighbours, sending the message that people should not sell their houses and lands nor exchange their property. This message has had an effect and it can particularly be seen in the local community of Kozluk, which today has 1,350 houses that were previously housed with the Serbs displaced from 18 different

municipalities. Houses were mainly undamaged which additionally accelerated the return of Bosniaks to this part of the Municipality of Zvornik. Another specific feature of the activities of Fadil Banjanović is reflected in his very pragmatic attitude towards the authorities of Republika Srpska . In April 2007, the visit of the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik to Kozluk attracted great media attention. Fadil Banjanović was criticised by the BiH public that objected his warm reception of the RS Prime Minister. However, this visit brought to this village almost 250,000 KM that were invested into the reconstruction of infrastructure, primarily roads. The plan for this autumn is to rebuild and equip local Healthcare Centre, also using the RS budgetary funds. The fact that almost 2,000 inhabitants of this area live abroad also helps the improvement of material situation of the returnees. Nevertheless, the returnee population here is faced with the problems that are present all across Republika Srpska: health-care as well as the employment in public administration, and in the pre-war companies are not easily accessible to returnees.

Chances are seen in the development of agriculture, since along the Drina River land is exceptionally fertile and favourable for the cultivation of various agricultural products.

Here, again, we must say that most of the returnees live of farming and cattle-breeding, mainly to meet their own needs, while there are only few employed in commercial and catering firms.

AREA 2:

TRAVNIK AND NOVI TRAVNIK

TRAVNIK

According to the 1991 Census, there were 70,747 inhabitants in the Municipality of Travnik. Their ethnic structure is as follows:

- Bosniaks 31,813 (44,96%)
- Croats 26,118 (36,91%)
- Serbs 7,777 (10,99%)
- Yugoslavs 3,743(5,29%)

In 1992, the majority of Serb population left Travnik, and, once the conflict began between the Army of BiH and HVO in 1993, most of the Croats left their homes. The area that was the focus of this TV project is Guča Gora, inhabited almost solely by the Croats. The return to this part of the Municipality of Travnik began in 1998, first individually; today, almost 70 % of the pre-war population has returned to Guča Gora, either permanently or periodically.

Security is deemed to be exceptionally good by returnees themselves. Healthcare is relatively well organised, but some inhabitants of Guča Gora still go to the hospital in Nova Bila, located in the area that was controlled by HVO during the war.

People live on pensions, farming and cattle-breeding, mainly for their own needs. Only a few of inhabitants is employed, most often in grey economy.

We have already mentioned that this Study resulted from the TV project. When it comes to Guča Gora, we will mention the example of the late Manda Šoko, the first returnee to her village. Her story, recorded on camera in 1999, attracted great attention of

BiH public, due to her enormous enthusiasm. This time, unfortunately, we did not find her alive so we interviewed her son Mladen Šoko instead. He, his wife and his two children make their living on his “moonlighting” occasional jobs. They also have a goat. Mladen, nevertheless, intends to continue living in Guča Gora, not because he is so much attached to the place of his birth, but rather for pragmatic reason: he believes that the situation there is good enough for him to stay and see his own future and that of his family in Guča Gora.

NOVI TRAVNIK

In the municipality of Novi Travnik, according to the 1991 Census, there was the total of 70,747 inhabitants. Their structure was as follows:

- Bosniaks 31,813 (44,96%)
- Croats 26,118 (36,91%)
- Serbs 7,777 (10,99%)
- Yugoslavs 3,743 (5,29%)

Here, the war has brought about the situation similar to that of Travnik. Today, unfortunately, Novi Travnik is still a divided town. Although the local public administration is joint, the two parts of the town have two different systems, starting from postal and utility services, to schools and outpatient clinics. It is not rare to see Bosniaks and Croats exchanging their houses and apartments, having decided to live in the part of town where their ethnic groups is in absolute majority, even though their new home is only at 500 meters distance from the old one. However, security is good, while everyone in Novi Travnik shares the same concerns, primarily existential. Situation in rural areas is somewhat different. This process of return has been quite

successful in all the rural areas of the Municipality of Novi Travnik, while the sample we had chosen for this Study is the village Mehmedovići, wherefrom Bosniaks were expelled in 1993. More than 80 % of the population that had lived there until 1993, returned to the village. Work in grey economy, farming and cattle-breeding are main sources of income for these villages, yet they do emphasise that at least security-wise they are quite well off. Safeta Mehmedović, an old woman, has returned together with her two sons and a daughter. Like Manda Šoko, she also won the sympathy of the TV viewers eight years ago, when she was interviewed for our TV programme. Although formally and by definition she is an illiterate old woman, as a highly intelligent woman she was able to detect very precisely all the problems of Bosnian-Herzegovinian society, noticing that the false pre-election promises made to the returnees by political candidates are in most cases nothing but the way to win their votes. Safeta also offered some concrete proposals how to improve the economic situation in the country. Thus, she considers that a revision of privatisation process should be given priority and that young people should get assistance, though credits in order for them to be able to start small family businesses that would help them support their families. Like in the case of Croat returnees, the Bosniaks of the Municipality of Novi Travnik, tends to seek healthcare services in the Bosniak majority part of the town, where their children also go to school.

AREA 3:

BIHAĆ AND BOSANSKI PETROVAC

BIHAĆ (MARTIN BROD)

In the area of Bihać, we have chosen to survey the municipality of Martin Brod, until 1995 inhabited almost exclusively by the Serbs until 1995. This is a local community that is, due to its geographic position, rather isolated from the rest of the Municipality of Bihać, which represents objective difficulty in terms of communication with this regional centre and its administrative structures. Out of 500 Serb families that used to live in this area, almost 80 % have returned: a good result in comparison to the rest of the country. Still, those 20 % that have not returned yet are the most productive part of the pre-war population of Martin Brod. The problems of returnees are the same as elsewhere in BiH: unemployment, social and health protection and education. Living in this area is secured prevailingly through farming; only a handful of returnees are employed in local fish-farm.

BOSANSKI PETROVAC

Only a half of the pre-war population now lives in Bosanski Petrovac. The population of this municipality is made of 4,500 Serbs (compared to the 12,000, who lived there before the war), about 2,200 domicile Bosniaks, and about 350 Bosniak DPs.

Although Serbs already make 60 % of population, we see the situation here similar to that of Martin Brod: the most productive segment of population has not come back, so that over 50 % of returnees are older than 45. Until recently, security in Bosanski Petrovac was deemed to be good. However, recent attack on the Orthodox bishop of Bihać-Petrovac region upset the Serbs of this region. Economically, they mostly live on pensions and farming

sufficient to cover their own needs. Radojka Erceg, whom we first visited almost eight years ago, is a returnee to the village Krnjeuša near Bosanski Petrovac that was one of the most developed and infrastructurally most equipped villages in BiH prior to the war. Today, Radojka lives here with her husband Dane, while their younger son, who works with the local police, lives in their neighbourhood. Radojka, a retired teacher and her husband, also a pensioner, say that they live a good, solid life. They have one more son, who used to work for a while in the Bihać police and then left his post to move with his family to Banja Luka. They consider themselves as a typical and average returnee family in Petrovac, emphasising their active engagement in local community which is something that Serb returnees in this area are doing often, obviously to the benefit of both their community and their own.

AREA 4:

MOSTAR, STOLAC, BILEĆA AND GACKO

MOSTAR

Due to the structure of local self-governance in Mostar, its evolution that have resulted - at least formally - in reunification of the city, it is very difficult to speak about the return process in the area of Mostar in general terms. One should know that, after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the city was divided into six urban zones and that Mostar is the seat of the canton where the constitution of government bodies is regularly delayed, giving rise to arguments that the process of return to this city, as it is the case with Sarajevo and Banja Luka, is a complicated one and that it deserves to be the subject of special study. This is why we will rely on our TV series, where we have primarily dealt with Serb return to the valley of Bijelo Polje, more specifically, the settlement of Ortiješ.

Before we do that, we will offer some statistics that could indicate the changes that occurred in this city that has been the centre of Herzegovina since 1992.

In 1991 the Municipality of Mostar had 126,628 inhabitants. The population comprised 43,037 Croats, 23,846 Serbs, 43,856 Bosniaks, 12,768 Yugoslavs and 3,121 Others. Estimates indicate that, at the moment, the Municipality of Mostar has almost the same population as before the war, yet ethnic structure has been greatly changed: today there are close to 80,000 Croats, more than 40,000 Bosniaks and close to 6,000 Serbs living there.

Serbs, who had left Mostar in 1992, moved mainly to Bileća, Gacko, Nevesinje and Trebinje in East Herzegovina, while some of them moved to the neighbouring Serbia.

At least for two reasons the post-war return has been mainly registered among those who had fled to East Herzegovina.

Under-development of East Herzegovina did not offer any real chances for their lasting existence, and, on the other hand, the fertile valley of the Neretva River, attracted most of the Serb DPs to return. The possibility of farming and favourable climate were motives that brought the Serbs of Mostar back to their pre-war homes. Pioneer among Serb returnees was Vujadin Berberović, who worked very hard to bring together a critical mass of his people and persuaded them to return, mainly thanks to good prospects offered by agriculture there and the help of the international community, as well as the authorities of Herzegovina - Neretva Canton and the Government of the Federation of BiH. They have achieved what we call sustainable return. Plantations of apricots, vineyards, and vegetables, as well as cattle-breeding secure regular income for a good number of Serb returnees to the Neretva Valley. The security situation is satisfactory; solid material basis is there, yet, constant political crises in Mostar do not leave Serb population aside. They are actually very often used for “political bargaining and trade-offs” in political clashes and antagonisms that occur between two dominant political forces: Croat and, to a lesser extent, Bosniak, although Serbs themselves are almost excluded from the political life of Mostar. The issues of health and social protection is not too acute, despite some still unsolved problems. Returnee children go to schools where teaching process is based either on Croat or BiH curricula, depending on the part of Municipality of Mostar they have returned to.

It is important to mention that Mostar is one of the main centres of culture of BiH Serbs, who have greatly contributed to the literature, arts, architecture and spiritual life of the region. Reconstruction of the Serb Orthodox Monastery in Žitomislići,

activities of the Serb Cultural Association «Prosvjeta», and, particularly, the work of the Serb Civil Council have seen considerable progress.

STOLAC

Stolac, the problematic town! This is how international and local media define this beautiful town in Herzegovina known for its rich cultural heritage.

This town was briefly left first by the Bosniaks and Croats, and then, once the legitimate segments of the Armed Forces of BiH regained control over it, the conflict occurred between Croats and Bosniaks, in which most Bosniaks were expelled from their homes, with a considerable number of them being captured and taken to the HVO-held detention camps.

However, the Bosniak return to this town, at least in terms of their number, is not neglectable, particularly to the town of Stolac itself, where they are now in relative majority. Nevertheless, real political power is still in the hands of the HDZ, while Bosniak returnees succeeded only to bring the number of positions in local police to the level that closely resembles the population structure recorded in the 1991 Census.

According to the 1991 Census, there were 43,3 % Bosniaks, 20,9 % Serbs and 33,12 % Croats living in Stolac. Now, percentage-wise, there are 78 % Croats, 20 % Bosniaks and only 2 % Serbs left.

Bosniaks and Croats now practically live next to each other. “Two schools under one roof” is still the reality of Stolac. Security situation may be assessed as satisfactory, yet constant

political tensions generate the sense of insecurity that, as of recently, fortunately, has not resulted in incidents.

Economic situation of returnees is extremely difficult, particularly among urban returnees who do not have any real opportunity to be employed in agriculture as it is the case with their rural counterparts. Catering services, small shops, and remittances they are still receiving from their relatives aboard, provide for the living of quite a number of returnees.

Cultural life in this town used to be exceptionally alive. Today, cultural event »Slovo Gorčina« tries to bring back the old glory of the cultural centre of southern Herzegovina and the first results are already seen. There is still a struggle over the preservation of the greatest BiH medieval necropolis (the so-called *stećci of Radimlje*, in whose immediate vicinity an industrial zone is being built at the decision taken by local authorities.

GACKO AND BILEĆA

Gacko and Bileća are the examples of places where, practically, there has been no return of refugees and DPs. In the Municipality of Gacko, mainly in the village of Fazlagića Kula, there are only about 70 persons living, while in the town of Gacko there is not a single Bosniak returnee. Actually, the only Bosniaks in this town are local imam, his wife and their 8-month old daughter. They moved to this place from Bugojno. In Bileća there is only one old Bosniak woman returnee, and in the two nearby villages there are eight Bosniak returnees. It is hard to speak about return to these two towns. Not a single returnee is employed, they live either on pensions, or on farming and cattle-breeding and remittances from their relatives. The youngest returnee to the Municipality of Bileća is a 45-year old man.

AREA 5:

ODŽAK AND MODRIČA

ODŽAK AND MODRIČA

The Municipality of Odžak, or rather its biggest part was assigned to the Federation of BiH after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed.

Due to that fact, most of Bosniaks DPs and refugees returned to their homes. It was expected from Croats to do the same, particularly given that, according to the 1991 Census, they were in majority in this municipality. However, it did not happen, at least not to the expected degree because most of them have settled in the neighbouring Croatia that apparently provides them and their children better life opportunities.

According to the 1991 Census, there were 30,056 people living in Odžak Municipality. Their ethnic composition was as follows:

- Serbs 5,667 (18,85%)
- Bosniaks 6,220 (20,69%)
- Croats 16,338 (54,35%)
- Yugoslavs 1,147 (3,81%)
- Others 684 (2,27%)

Security situation in this part of the country is excellent. What the people there like to point out are very good inter-ethnic relations, particularly between Croats and Bosniaks, who used to be allies in the recent war fought in this region. Healthcare and social protection systems function as in other parts of the Federation of BiH, while one of the rare remaining unresolved issues is education of Bosniak children. Regardless of the fact that Bosniak children make almost one half of all the school children in this municipality, their education is conducted on Croat

curricula due to the fact that the canton this municipality belongs to – the Posavina Canton - is defined as the canton with Croat majority.

In comparison with the rest of BiH, economic situation in Odžak is satisfactory. It is due to the fact that Odžak is situated in the most fertile part of BiH – the Posavina region. Intensive agriculture provides good living for the people of Odžak, while strong private entrepreneurship in manufacturing is also noticeable.

According to the 1991 Census, there were 35,613 people living in Modriča. Their ethnic composition was as follows:

- Serbs 12,534 (35,19%)
- Bosniaks 10,375 (29,13%)
- Croats 9,805 (27,53%)
- Yugoslavs 1,851 (5,19%)

According to the official statistics, 3,600 Bosniaks and only several hundred Croats have returned to Modriča. However, demographic structure has been greatly changed, given that almost 18,000 Serbs from about 30 municipalities all over BiH have been settled here.

In addition, a new municipality (Vukosavlje) has been established out of parts of former Modriča and Odžak municipalities. It has Bosniak majority, almost all of them returnees. This municipality is one of the two municipalities in Republika Srpska – the other is Srebrenica – with Bosniak as mayors.

Geographic position of Modriča offer the possibility of good agricultural production, while security situation could be assessed as satisfactory. Employment of returnees in local self-governance bodies and public enterprises has only started and the first Bosniak teachers have been employed, particularly in the primary schools in the town of Modriča itself.

AREA 6 :

SARAJEVO

SARAJEVO

Sarajevo, as the capital of BiH, should have been the subject of a special study. Sarajevo was not included in our TV project, yet it would be inappropriate not to give at least basic statistical indicators of the process of return to this city. A special report has been issued recently by the Ombudsmen of the Federation of BiH on proportional representation of constituent peoples in the governmental bodies of the Federation of BiH in 2006 and 2007. We would quote here a segment of this report that relates to the Canton of Sarajevo, as interpreted by Vera Jovanović, one of the three ombudsmen:

“In the Municipality of Stari Grad (Old Town) before the war there were 76 % of Bosniaks, while today the municipal bodies employ 95,4 % Bosniaks. Before the war, in Stari Grad there were 10,15 % Serbs, therefore, this percentage needs to be reflected in the employee structure of municipal administrative bodies. However, there are now only 2,9 % of them working there. There were 2,2 % Croats before the war, now there are only 1,6 %. Prior to the war there were many Yugoslavs and quite a high percentage of Others (3,2 %), registered there; now there are only about 0,2 % of Others. 17 schools in Stari Grad have 58 members of management and supervisory boards, yet only 4 of them are not Bosniaks. In the Centre Municipality, there were 50 % Muslims, as Bosniak were called then, now there are also 50 % of them, while Others make 18,3 % and there are still 19,74 % of those defined as undeclared. However, both in the Centre and in Stari Grad municipalities, people declare themselves both as Bosniaks and as Muslims, as well as Muslim-Bosniaks, but those who do not expressly declare themselves as Bosniaks are counted as “Undeclared”- that is why we have such a high share of Others in this municipality. It is one’s human right, of course, to declare

oneself in whatever way one wants; however, when it comes to employment, this human right enjoyed by one person can not be enjoyed at the expense of another. Therefore, people may declare themselves they wish, yet care should be taken of the members of other ethnic groups. In 1991, in the Centre Municipality there were 20 % Serbs; now they make only 4,7 %. There were 6,8 % Croats and now they make about the same percentage – app. 6 %. In the Municipality of Centre, in 20 schools and three cultural public institutions, management and supervisory boards count 93 members in total, but 16 of them are not Bosniaks. Before the war in the Municipality of Novo Sarajevo (New Sarajevo), there were 35,6 % Muslims, while Serbs made 34 %, Croats 9,0 %, and Yugoslavs 15 %. We could not get the data on ethnic structure of municipal employees since the mayor there replied to our request stating that they do not keep separate record indicating the ethnic structure of municipal administration employees. Now, Bosniaks make 86,7 % of the population in this municipality today. This figure was not provided to us by the Municipal Council, so we tried to come to it by detecting people's ethnicity from their names in order to make some calculation. Of course, this is a dangerous method, since the percentage may be either higher or lower and never exactly the same. What we wanted to get was some picture of situation in this part of the city. The mayor, however, refused to give us the data so we were forced to get them in another way and doing what we did, we came to the figure of 86,7 % Bosniaks. In the Municipality of Novi Grad, in 1991 Muslims made 50,8 % of overall population; now there are 86,7 %. Serbs made 27 %, and now 3,4 % of the population. Croats made 6,5 %, while now they make 3,8 %. In 20 schools, there are 13 management and supervisory boards, only 9 members are not Bosniaks. In the Municipality of Ilidža, according to the 1991 Census, there were 43 % Bosniaks, while now there are 87,8 %. There were 36,8 % Serbs; now only 4,7 %. There were 10 % Croats; now 6 %.

Similar situation is to be found in the Municipality of Vogošća and the Municipality of Ilijaš. In Hadžići, according to the 1991 Census, there were 63 % Bosniaks and 26 % Croats; now there are 98,8 % Bosniaks and only 1,2 % of Others. Hadžići is practically ethnically clean. The truth is that the situation is not better in other cantons and other towns.”²

And assessment of situation across BiH is also included in this report. Ombudsman Vera Jovanović, thus says, among other things:

“In previous annual reports made by the Ombudsmen of FBiH, we pointed at the obstruction of return and breaches of law, the consequence being that many refugees decided not to return to their homes. These are, e.g., intimidation and threats, harassment, demolition of religious sites, changes of names of streets and towns, destruction of graveyards, demolition of apartments and setting people’s homes on fire, construction of great number of new churches and mosques, the placement of religious symbols in the places where ethnic composition has been drastically changed by the effects of the war, etc. Consciously and in a planned manner, three separate ethnic and religious ambiances have been created and one can easily detect the domination of one people over the others whereby the message sent to those others is that in those places there was no tolerance and coexistence, i.e., that they were not welcome there because they were of different ethnicity. No wonder that returnees, seeing such warning signs frightening them off, they decide to sell their

² Special Report of the Ombudsmen of FBiH on the key features relating returnee rights.

property and leave forever. Such a situation in essence sends out a message of ethnic and religious discrimination that is manifested primarily in the lack of access to public positions, or the breaches of the right to employment in public bodies or public companies. Similar situation can be found in other spheres of life, such as education, right to one's own culture, language, religion, healthcare and pension insurance, social protection. Even private sphere is often characterised by ethnic separation."³

³ Special Report of the Ombudsmen of FBiH on the key features relating returnee rights.

CONCLUSIONS

SUSTAINABILITY OF RETURN AS KEY WORD IN THE POST-WAR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

According to official statistics, somewhat less than half of those who had left their homes in the period between 1992 and 1995 belongs today to the category of returnees. Almost 600,000 persons did not return to their pre-war homes, although they have shown their interest to do it. Due to limited number of sources, and because of variations in available data and estimates (depending on their source), it is difficult to give a general assessment of the percentage of returnees who have fully organised their lives in their pre-war homes, and how many of them belong to the returnee population only fictitiously. Still, those who have really returned to their homes, regardless of their ethnic background and geographic area in which they now live, they all share the same or similar stories and the same daily problem that are otherwise common to all the ordinary people.

We could say that, immediately after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, «return» was the key word. Today, twelve years later, it seems that this key word has been somehow extended. It is not only about return per se (in the sense of the number of those who return home) that people are talking about. Above all, people now talks about sustainability of return (in terms of the situation returnees find on the ground that either enables them, or prevents them, to stay in their homes permanently). Sustainability of return, as it has been pointed out in our introduction, is a measure of validity, or an indicator of possibility of full re-integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, consequently, it is also the indicator of its readiness for integration into the European Union. Although there are different definitions and interpretations of “sustainability of return” that stem from different sources, we have taken as the point of

departure in our Study those preconditions that are necessary for refugees and DPs to even consider their return home, i.e. the possibility for them to build their future and the future of their children there. However, only be returnees themselves could answer this question.

Having talked to returnees, as well as to the representatives of governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations that provide (or should provide) support to returnees, we have concluded that they need security in the first place, as one of the determining causes why they had left their home in the first place. In simple words, all those who were (or are still) refugees and DPs, primarily require guaranties that the area to which they want (and plan) to return is safe for them and their families, and that they would not find there the situation that had forced them to leave their homes and find refuge in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world.

Furthermore, it is not enough just to provide returnees with safe environment and housing. What they seek and try to create for themselves, once they return to their homes, is economic security either through employment and self-employment. The war and the economic transition, whereby former publicly owned companies and factories have been privatised, cause the loss of job for most of the returnees who had previously worked there before 1992. Number of new jobs is not sufficient to cover the needs of returnees while, in some cases, there is still the problem of lack of readiness of employers to employ returnees, particularly if they belong to minority ethnic group. That is why many returnees find main source of income in farming, but even in that segment of economy, they still need help (purchase of machines, cattle, and, in some areas, even in terms of de-mining their land). In the context of employment, we need to point out that for

returnees it is particularly important to get the possibility of employment in public companies. It is directly linked to their right to participate in the bodies of local self-governance. It is very important for returnees to be able to participate in political decision-making locally, and to be able to lobby for their daily political, economic and social problems to be included in the political agenda. It is difficult to give a precise answer relating the extent it is made possible for the returnees in Bosnia and Herzegovina - again due to the absence of adequate statistics - but the fact is that numerous returnee settlements are still facing the problems which the authorities deem as solved. One of these problems is certainly the issue of social protection and healthcare of returnees, as one of the basic rights that are often unavailable to the returnee population. This it is rare to see the returnees from Republika Srpska fully exercising these rights in the Federation of BiH, and vice versa). There are many returnee settlements (particularly in rural areas) without any infrastructure or services of healthcare, so that often they are periodically visited by doctors on duty in nearby towns and cities, or else, returnees themselves have to travel there to get medical help.

The issue of education and right to cultural particularity of the refugee population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, unfortunately a political issue and too often a very politicised one. Returnees encounter numerous problems when they try to provide education for their children: from the lack of infrastructure (destroyed schools, or their purpose being changed, lessons that are held only until the 4th grade of primary school upon which children have to travel to go to school elsewhere, sometimes at great distance, etc.), to the issue of curricula, non-existent or inadequate textbooks and teaching staff, and the cases of schools in the returnee settlements being closed because there are only one or two children enrolled. The issue of education is one of the key

issues of sustainable return, because it is the lack of infrastructure providing for educational and cultural needs that make returnees opt for living in bigger towns, where they had find refuge during the war, so that only elderly people decide to return. In terms of sustainability of return, it practically means that the places from which a lot of people had left would become totally deserted in the future, i.e. demographic picture of cities, towns and villages of Bosnia and Herzegovina would be drastically changed from the one registered in the 1991 census. Causes of these changes are undoubtedly all the above-mentioned factors, yet, if the return of refugees is to have any future, one of priorities should be to secure to young returnees the respect of their basic right to education: this right needs to be equally implemented for all and across the country.

In this Study, all the above-mentioned problems and unsolved issues of the returnee population are defined as indicators or factors of sustainability of return. What we are trying to suggest here is that, regardless of statistical data that sometimes offer over-optimistic perspective, these problems deserve much greater attention from the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and all thee NGOs claiming that they provide support to returnees. A more extensive and deeper engagement of entire community that implies greater sensitivity for the needs and problems of returnees, manifested by all the citizens of the country must be secured. This was, among other things, the key goal of the TV series “Return”. We also need to point at the fact that returnees live their problems on daily basis, and not only when they are visited by the media following sporadic official delegations. At the level of political decision-making, a concerted and coordinated approach is needed and avoidance of overlapped activities, base don a strategy that would secure real, and not only apparent conditions for sustainable return, as well as continuous, both by the media and

by the society at large, attention paid to the progress of return and to life in the returnee areas, instead of occasional ceremonial visits to their settlements (like the 11 July visits to Srebrenica, for example).

Although it may sound as an empty phrase, the concerns and problems of returnees must be the problems of the entire state and society of BiH and not only the problems of those who have been courageous enough, nostalgic enough and determined enough to decide to resume their lives in the areas wherefrom they were forced out by the war some fifteen years ago.

SOURCES:

- Television Project *Return* produced by Independent TV Hayat and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (1997 - 2007)
- Report of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in BiH for 2006
- Special Report of the Ombudsmen of FBiH on the key features relating returnee rights
- <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org>