

## **PART III**

### **REPATRIATING REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS**

## CHAPTER 7

### RETURNING HOME - MAJORITY AND MINORITY RETURNS

In the 1991 census map of Bosnia-Herzegovina [See Map 1: ETHNIC MAJORITY Census 1991], BiH can be viewed as a right-handed triangle with one tip in the north-east, one tip in the north-west and one tip in the south-east with the hypotenuse of the triangle extending from north-west to south-east and with the straight sides on the north and east borders. Croats formed the majority along the central section of the hypotenuse adjacent to present-day Croatia. They also occupied two little pockets in the north in Odzak and Orasje again next to Croatia which borders both the hypotenuse and the northern border of BiH. Bosniacs (the Muslims of BiH) made up a majority in the north-western angle and in the central region stretching to the eastern border with Serbia or what is now the rump state of Yugoslavia. The Serbs were concentrated in a number of areas - in the south-east angle, in the north-east angle, in the central portion of a line joining those two angles, and in a heavy concentration between the Bosniac majority in the north-western tip between the hypotenuse running along the Croatian border up to the northern border. In between these majoritarian pockets were other smaller pockets with majorities of Croats and Bosniacs, Bosniacs and Serbs, and Croats and Serbs. And if this patchwork map were refined to the village level, the degree of mixing of the populations would be even much greater than majoritarian ethnic maps can reveal.

The war radically altered the population distribution of BiH. (Cf. Map 2: ETHNIC MAJORITY 1997) The Croatian majority stretched much further in both directions along the hypotenuse of BiH, replacing the Serbs as the majority occupants in Kupres, Glamoc, Bosansko Grahovo and in Drvar towards the north and in Ravno on the south while holding onto their two small enclaves in the north. The Serbs were further displaced by the Bosniacs as the majority in western Bosanski Petrovac, as well as expanding the Bosniac size of the angle in the north-west to include the north-west of Kijuc and virtually all of Sanski Most. Most shifted from a mixed majoritarian Bosniac/Serb area to a majoritarian Bosniac area. On the other hand, in the rest of Kijuc and in Prijedor in the north-west, the reverse pattern occurred; Serbs became the clear majority in a formerly mixed Bosniac/Serb area as well as in Doboje and Modrica in the central northern part of the country. But, of course, the most dramatic changes were in the eastern part of the country in Foca/Srbinje, Rogatica, Visegrad, Srebrenica, Bratunac, Vlasenica and Zvornik where the Bosniac majority were swept out in the ethnic cleansing by the Serbs.

The tragedy was even greater on the micro level. Thus, the population of Bosniacs and Croats were divided within the City of Mostar, with the Croats west of the river and the Bosniacs on the east. The difficulty of return was indicated in an interview with an administrative official in charge of reconstructing the famous Mostar covered bridge which had been destroyed. He owned an apartment in the west, but had not seen it since the Croat-Bosniac war began even though the peace agreement was now two years old. Nevertheless, he boasted that the situation had improved even though he could not return to his home in West Mostar. Why? Because last week he had gone to a restaurant there and he had not been harassed.

It is not surprising then that 93% of returns until 1997 were to majority rather than minority areas, with only 10,000 minority returns to the end of 1997 according to one source. (RRTP 1998, 2) It is, of course, understandable that in the aftermath of the end of the war the first phase of returns would be the easy ones - displaced persons and refugees returning to their homes in areas where they are the majority. But, based on these natural propensities from both the displaced community and the international community facing overwhelming problems, the unintended consequence was that returning refugees and the permanent settlement of displaced persons have been reinforcing the overall pattern of separate Croat, Serb and Bosniac areas in BiH.

Clearly, this was contrary to the overall policy as articulated in the May 1997 PIC, Sintra Declaration: "Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain as a united and sovereign country, consisting of two multi-ethnic Entities." (3) The failure to succeed with that policy was seen as rewarding ethnic cleansing and allowing three relatively homogeneous political entities to emerge. "If one of the central goals of the DPA is to maintain Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single state, then minority return is the only way this promise can be kept. Otherwise the centrifugal dynamics of three 'ethnically cleansed' territories already endowed with many attributes of a state, will prove impossible to resist. Eventually three separate statelets will be created, economically unviable and with territorial claims on the others. If the country is partitioned, enduring peace and stability will be an unlikely outcome." (ICG April 1997,33)

But there was more than abstract political goals behind this overall goal. There was the principle of the integrity of states which could not be divided except by the consent of the parties within the states; any other policy was viewed as a recipe for instability. Secondly, the moral and ideological commitments of the international community was to multiculturalism and adamantly opposed to the 'irrational' force of ethnic nationalism. Further, President Clinton had pledged not to let ethnic cleansing emerge victorious and to reverse the process. Finally, and on a much more grounded politics, for the Bosniacs, the whole program of reversing ethnic cleansing through a pincer strategy of utilizing elections on the one hand in areas in which Bosniacs were once majorities, to capture political control, and to use minority returns as a method of reversing the facts on the ground to win back through the peace process what had been lost in the war. What was lost in the war could perhaps be reversed in the peace process.

Now some of these general political principles became reified into absolutes without any qualifiers. Thus, the integrity of states as the post WWII doctrine, which was qualified to allow for disintegration through the consent of the population, as occurred in Czechoslovakia, was reified into a general principle that states could not be dissolved, especially small ones, or their successors would become unviable and/or sources of regional instability. The International Crisis Group articulated this perspective. "The premise of this paper is that the division of Bosnia into ethnic ghettos will never provide stability." (ICG "Changing the Logic of Bosnian Politics," March 1998)

It is not surprising that the initial phase of majority returns became an active second stage promoting minority returns. 1998 was declared the year of minority returns. As some observers and participants saw the situation, the choice was simple: "either major breakthroughs in minority returns take place in early 1998, allowing refugees and displaced persons to return to their pre-war dwellings, or the space will be filled by re-locating persons, property legislation notwithstanding...It is also of paramount importance that

host countries must act responsibly by pressuring openings for return instead of accepting and inducing relocation.” (RRTF, December 1997, Annex 6)

The policy was not only minority return, but the discouragement of any incentives which reinforced relocation and, in effect, the reification of ethnic divisions.

We have already indicated in an earlier chapter the results of that program. However, a brief review might be helpful. UNHCR estimated that the total of registered DP returnees to minority areas by the end of April 1998 has been about 44,000 registered returnees, with a possible estimated larger returnee population of an additional 20,000. These figures are considerably larger than the ones offered in the RRTF report cited above, but even if these larger figures are taken as accurate and do not simply represent a large number of day trippers who return to lay legal claim to their properties and begin restoring them without taking up residence, of these, less than 10% returned to RS. Almost half of the remaining 90% returned to Sarajevo and another one quarter to the Tuzla area, both Bosniac dominated regions with the least threat to the other minorities. [Cf. Chart 3: Registered and Estimated Return of Displaced Persons within Bosnia and Herzegovina.] That means that of 225,000 DP total returnees, **a maximum** of less than 30% returned to minority areas. Since the vast majority of those returning to minority areas went to the Federation, then over one third of returnees to BiH represent returnees to minority areas. Except 75% of these went to Sarajevo and Tuzla.

Whereas one quarter of the DPs went to RS, the overwhelming number of the refugees returned to the Federation rather than RS, but only a quarter rather than one-half to Sarajevo and less than 10% to the Tuzla area. In contrast to refugees, an estimated one-third of whom are not registered, almost half of the estimated total of DP returnees have been spontaneous or unregistered returnees. The refugee returnees in total has been about the same as the DP return (estimated 216,000) but, as indicated above, the vast majority (90%) of these have returned to BiH. Further, there has been a decline in the rate of return from 250,000 in 1996 to 178,000 in 1997<sup>1</sup> and a projected return of less than 50,000 in 1998 if present trends continue.

How are we to interpret these numbers? The vast majority of the DPs remaining (about 750,000) are from minority areas. Of the 600,000 refugees remaining in Europe, the largest single number are in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and are assumed to be Serbs who would be very unwelcome in either Croat or Bosniac areas. Some of those in Europe are also Serbs. Similarly, the 13% of the refugees in Croatia are assumed to be Croats where they would be minorities if they returned to their areas from which they originated. Over 80% of the refugees in Europe are Bosniacs. If they are inhibited in returning to areas in which they would be the minority, and if the pressure is on for these refugees to return in the immediate future, the majority of refugees abroad are being pushed to return to areas in which they would belong to the majority ethnic groups and to places where they did not originate. In sum, the push factor reinforces ethnic separation.

On the other hand, official international humanitarian policy working on the receiving end have stressed minority returns, that is, the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes where they would be in the minority. The internally displaced, and the municipalities from which they came, are being

given incentives to return (and, for municipalities, to encourage returns) to minority areas.

Since the overwhelming pressure for return is on the Bosniacs in Germany, and since they are most likely to return to the Federation and majority Bosniac areas rather than to their homes in minority areas, additional pressure will be placed on the housing crisis in the Federation. The increased pressure on housing will counteract the incentives for minority areas to repatriate. The policy of push of overseas refugees and of pull for the internally displaced seems to be at odds.

Refugees returning are faced with two forces - a push from the countries in which they received temporary asylum and another repellent force operating in the reverse direction from most home areas. The German and Swiss governments, for example, provide incentive packages and assistance to repatriate. Of registered returnees by the end of May 1998, over 80,000 were from Germany, almost 6,000 were from Switzerland and 11,000 were from Croatia making up the vast majority of the over 114,000 refugees repatriated to date. [Cf. "SUMMARY OF ORGANISED/ASSISTED REPATRIATION BY HOST COUNTRIES, UNHCR, Sarajevo, May 1998.]

There are a number of programs to reduce the repulsion factor from minority areas upon return. The most significant of these is the "Open Cities Initiative" which has large financial and moral support from the US government (\$13m), the Swiss, the Holy See, and ECHO, the European Community Humanitarian Office, making up a large part of UNHCR repatriation expenditures for a total of \$60 USD committed or disbursed by 30 April 1998. [Cf. Map 3: UNHCR OPEN CITIES INITIATIVE: RECOGNISED AND POTENTIAL OPEN CITIES] The goal is to encourage cities and municipalities where reconciliation is possible, to openly declare their willingness to receive and repatriate minorities. (UNHCR, April 1998). The carrot is increased international assistance for the rehabilitation of the municipality. Public declarations of openness are necessary but insufficient to earn those carrots. According to UNHCR policy, the will to accept returnees must be genuine and consistent and be reinforced by a media campaign. The municipalities must show that minorities have actually returned, that the minorities are not subject to intimidation or abuse, and have equal access to services.

By 30 April 1998, UNHCR estimated that only 5,500 minorities had returned to their homes of origin in the eleven recognised Open Cities. (Open Cities Status Report, 30 April 1998, p. 1) The story is in the details. I will use only examples of municipalities which have been registered the longest as Open Cities.

In the Canton of Herzegovina-Neretva, Konjic, north of Mostar and on the way to Sarajevo, which I visited, is in a majoritarian Bosniac area, generally more receptive to minorities. Konjic was a declared Open City and recognised as such by 1 July 1997. By 30 April 1998, 12 Croats and 9 Serbs had *registered* (my italics) to return. (Cf. Table 5, REGISTERED MINORITY RETURNS FROM 01/01/98 TO 30/04/98). Previously, 620 were recorded as returning since the end of the war, the vast majority *before* the Open Cities initiative was announced. US\$60m. has been spent in the town on reconstruction projects. Yet, the municipality has not signed the contracts for the three minority employees. Of the 100 residences noted as doubly occupied (that is, the residence belonged to a minority and was occupied by a member of the majority who already had another house), only one eviction notice was issued and

enforced.

In Vogosca, another Bosniac area just east of Sarajevo, recognized as an Open City on 3 July 1997, 103 minorities were said to have returned since the city was declared an Open City, but, in fact, it was discovered that the 103 had never left. Further, after months of efforts and negotiations, 2 Bosnian Serb *heads* of families returned to homes in which the authorities stalled and delayed the eviction of the temporary occupants. Further, Bosnian Serbs have not been reinstated in their jobs and Bosnian Serbs are being overcharged for utilities.

In another Bosniac area, in the town of Bihac, in the west of the country on the border with Croatia and recognised as an Open City on 21 August 1997, a number of minority returns were pending the freeing of their homes by the temporary occupants in spite of large expenditures of money in the municipality on rehabilitation of houses which had been reoccupied by Bosniacs.

One could go on. The SFOR spokesman for the region specified that Gorazde would be a “hot spot” even though the municipal authorities were repealing the discriminatory high fees for documents charged to potential returnees.

I have taken mostly Bosniac regions and towns, because there the intimidation has been the least, mostly consisting of bureaucratic procrastination and obfuscation. In contrast, according to a officer serving as a spokesperson for the Southern Command of SFOR, in May and June of 1998, 30-40 houses were blown up in Stolac alone, a Bosnian Croat area. Various possible explanations were offered for the destruction of the houses: the prevention of return, the opportunity to demand compensation by those not wanting to return, the action of criminals who had not received bribes, etc. But whatever the truth, drastic measures were at work undermining minority returns. In Drvar, the Serb mayor of the town, who had led a large unregistered return to a non-Serb area, was badly beaten in April of 1998; the large numbers who had followed him fled once again in fear.

The case of Croat controlled Jajce (in 1991, 38.8% Bosniac, 35.1% Croat and 19.3% Serb with a total population of almost 45,000) in the center of BiH has been studied in detail by ICG. (3 June 1998). 5,000 Bosniacs have returned to Jajce to raise the population from 15,000 Croats and 1,000 Bosniacs to 21,000, that is an overall population of almost 25% Bosniac. Even though Jajce is only listed as a potential Open City, almost the same number that have returned to all the areas in the entire Open Cities Initiative Program have returned to Jajce. Jajce would appear to be a positive ideal for the minority return program.

However, the UNHCR Open Cities Initiative Report of 30 April 1998 complains that, “The non-compliant attitude of the Jajce authorities towards implementation of the federal instruction regarding the MRO demonstrates once again, unfortunately, the very limited commitment of this municipality towards sustainable minority returns.” (p. 6) But the disagreement, according to the UNHCR’s own document, seemed to be based on the resistance of the Mayor to complying with an imposed MRO plan and his insistence that his own operation be accepted as a legitimate MRO.

What is behind this apparent discrepancy between actual minority returns and the UNHCR

criticisms? The first item to note is that the Croat extremist HDZ holds the majority of seats in the municipality. Nevertheless, pilot projects pledged at Dayton in 1995 were fulfilled by 1996 and 200 Bosniac families returned to Jajce. On the other hand, the return was followed by a series of house burnings in March and April of 1997. Further, “orchestrated violence greeted hundreds of Bosniacs who sought to return to Jajce in August 1997.” (IGC, June 1998, i) Firm action by NATO SFOR forces and an investigation by the IPTF helped stiffen the resolve to remain of the Bosniac returnees. The IPTF enquiry pointed to the Police Chief, if not orchestrating the demonstration, passively allowing it to take place. This led to the Police Chief, Marko Lucic, being fired, and gave backbone to the displaced persons initiative for return. On the other hand, the Mayor, Jozo Lucic, and the local President of the HDZ, Ivo Simunovic, retained their positions.

But this is only part of the story of an apparent successful minority return program. In spite of concerted efforts to overcome understandable resistance, only 700 of the 5,000 returnees have registered; most returnees to minority areas know that it is dangerous to one’s person and property if the “authorities” and/or the other side, know about your return. You and/or your home can be targeted. Non-registration carries with it severe handicaps so that fear of registering must be far greater than the incentives for doing so. The 4300 returnees who remain without status, lack the medical security that status brings. Some Bosniac municipal employees have been returned to their jobs, but they are given little to do. The undercutting of the program continues unabated in spite of the concerted efforts on the political, military, police, IGO and NGO levels, and driven by the courageous initiative of the minorities themselves. Further, minority return has not meant integration. Rather the pattern of Mostar has been followed with parallel educational and political structures rather than an institutionally integrated community.

In the Bosniac town of Trajnik (in 1991, 45.3% Bosniac, 36.9% Croat and 11% Serb with a total population of just over 70,000), the situation has been no better even when the municipality seems to be trying and joint Croat/Bosniac police patrols are in place. The Bosniac population increased by 50% to almost 46,000. The Croat population declined to 20% of its pre-war total. In fact, the situation is somewhat worse. For there have been a string of violent incidents, including murders. And the town remains thoroughly divided even if there have been significant numbers of Croat returnees.

Thus, the number that have been returned to areas in which they would belong to the minority has been small. Of the 90,000 target for the end of May of 1998, just over a quarter has been achieved (Table 3), lower than half the target achieved in 1997. The gap between target and achievement seems to be increasing. More significantly, there seems little incentive for municipalities to comply beyond rhetorical assent. “The initiative has failed to increase minority returns or to channel significant assistance to municipalities deemed ‘open’ as compared to those not included in the initiative.” (ICG, 14 May 1998, ii) Bureaucratic procrastination in the face of lack of staffing to adequately monitor the situation combined with the determined efforts of temporary occupiers and double occupants to retain their hold on the residences, combined with ideologically committed and possibly economically motivated vigilantes, especially in the face of a severe housing shortage in BiH given the vast physical destruction perpetrated deliberately against the residential sector, then the limited degree of return is understandable. Vigilante action adds to bureaucratic obstruction to inhibit returns. But even more telling, where there have been significant returnees, those returns are not to integrated municipalities but more commonly to segregated ones. In fact,

sometimes the return program seems to have exacerbated divided cultural relations rather than enhanced multicultural cooperation. Certainly, the continuation of the use of the media, particularly television, even if on a reduced scale, to propagate hatred targeting other ethnic groups certainly enhanced the problem. (RRTF Action Plan, 1998, 19)

What we seem to be witnessing is relatively small minority returns and where there have been returns, it has been overwhelmingly without reintegration. As the RRTP March 1998 report bluntly stated it, "Minority returns remain at a very low level in both Entities (about 6 percent of the total returns)." (p. 3) Success, to the degree there has been any, has been attributed to a combination of the primary importance of displaced persons initiatives and group rather than individual returns, concerted robust, timely and effective action by international security forces, political initiatives and financial conditionality have all worked together to foster success. In many cases, only the elderly have returned. In spite of strenuous and well intended efforts the results remain relatively small, and the problems of the vast majority of refugees and displaced persons persist.

### **Reality versus Policy**

"The ethnic reintegration of BiH through the return of displaced persons and refugees to their pre-war homes continues to be the foundational principle of the peace process, both as an overwhelming moral imperative in the face of ethnic cleansing, and as a political requisite for peace and stability in the region. At the same time, such stability as BiH now enjoys has been achieved through the division of its territory and almost every aspect of civic life along ethnic lines." (CRPC 1997, 22)

"Keeping the status quo in terms of ethnic separation is the path of least resistance." (ICG May 1998, 30)

"Such stability as Bosnia and Herzegovina now enjoys has been achieved through the division of territory and almost every aspect of civil life along ethnic lines." ("Returns, Relocation and property rights" and without relocations, "normalisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina may be held hostage indefinitely to an unattainable agenda." 22-3)

"It is clear that there has been no lack of innovative programs implemented by UNHCR and many other organisations to encourage return. These have included shelter programs, employment creation, micro-credit and community development, special return procedures in the Zone of Separation and the Brčko Arbitration Award area, pilot return projects within the Federation, organised assessment visits, bus services and freedom of movement initiatives, human rights programs, lobbying for reform of property laws, blacklisting of municipalities and economic conditionality, and most recently the UNHCR Open Cities initiative...they have not singly or collectively achieved the essential goal of promoting self-sustaining minority return." (CRPC December 1997, 7)

continuation of the ethnic cleansing after the cease-fire (e.g. 60,000 Serb nationals from Sarajevo moved in February and March of 1996)



“Despite the shift in priorities towards minority returns, four months into the year there is the distinct possibility that 1998 will become a ‘year of mass relocation’.” (ICG, “Minority Returns or Mass relocation?” May 1998, 1)

“That appointment of Milorad Dodik as prime Minister of Republika Srpska has transformed conditions for return there, and that increased Western aid to Republika Srpska would make minority returns immediately possible - are based on mistaken assumptions.” (ICG May 1998, 11-12) Why? 1. Politics are locally dictated, and radicals control many municipal areas; 2. Housing stock occupied by Serbs from Croatia; 3. Basic laws necessary for return have not yet been passed, such as property laws and amnesty for draft dodgers and deserters; 4. Too politically risky for the Dodik government; 5. Unemployment rates of about 30%; 6. Average income one half of that of the Federation.

“An analysis of actual results may indicate substantial flaws in the [Open Cities] initiative’s implementation. The Open City initiative has not made significant progress in achieving its main objectives. It has not resulted in increased minority returns; and those Open Cities that have received significantly increased reconstruction assistance have not experienced a proportionate increase in minority returns. Indeed, in some cases the number of minority returns has declined after recognition.” (ICG May 1998, 13)

“The total number of minority returns to these Open Cities before recognition was 1,208 and after recognition, 582. In total, there were 1,790 returns.” (ICG May 1998, 14)

In the statistical tables, there are 35 minority returnees listed for Vagosca, of whom 11 are said to be Serbs. But according to DISS, “only one Serb returned home in Vagosca during the entire post-war period. DISS also claims that a dozen families remained in Vagosca after reintegration but were evicted from their homes and are now displaced within the municipality.” (ICG, May 1998, 14) And although 24 Croats are listed as having returned to Vagosca in the same post-recognition phase, HDZ claims no Croat refugees or DPs have returned.

ICG question how Vagosca and Gorazde retained their status as Open Cities but other cities like Sarajevo (2,300 minority returnees), Travnik (2,500 returnees), Jajce (1,800 returnees) and Drvar (800 returnees) have not. (ICG, May 1998, 15)

“Open Cities did not reap significant material benefits from recognition as compared to some none-Open Cities.” (ICG, May 1998, 15)

“Open Cities have not been more successful in attracting donors than other areas.” (ICG, May 1998, 15)

ICG criticisms of open Cities: re implementation only - a) no specific obligations accompany recognition; b) inadequate monitoring; c) reports lack analysis; d) no impact on double occupancy and other property rights violations. (ICG, May 1998, 17-18)

“The Open Cities initiative is unlikely to contribute substantially to minority returns in 1998 without fundamental reform.” (ICG, May 1998, 18)

## MINORITY RETURNS - CONDITIONS

“First, the key actors in making minority returns successful are not local authorities or international organisations, but the displaced persons themselves...Second, successful minority return is in general the return of groups, not of isolated individuals. Third, in all cases of successful minority return security risks could not be eliminated but could be obtained...Fourth, an inter-agency approach — modelled on the work of the North-West RRTF — is essential.” (ICG, “Minority Return or Mass Relocation?” May 1998, iii)

James K. Boyce in an oral presentation to the Post-conflict symposium of the World Bank in Dubrovnik, 3-5 June 1998:

Peace conditionality = making access to external assistance conditional, through formal performance criteria or informal policy dialogue, on steps to implement peace accords and consolidate peace processes.” For peace conditionality to work, there are two requirements: the acceptance of the aid-for-peace offer and enforcement. In Croatia and BiH, there had been rhetorical acceptance but not a substantive one, and there has been no real and sustained enforcement. IFI’s are reluctant to accept peace-conditionality because of the conflict between economic and political factors, once the tap is turned on, it is difficult to turn it off, the loan-push factor and the political will of the principles.”

Jeff Crisp - World Bank Presentation -  
Key Determinants of Repatriation:

1. Numbers
2. Kinds of conditions of return
  - changing nature of warfare
  - persistence of ethnic conflict
  - collapsed economics and infrastructure
3. Duress for or against repatriation
4. Decline of asylum
5. Community-based versus non-refugee based approach
6. Linkage between reintegration and peacebuilding

Criminalization of the economy

Media

Elections

Criminal Prosecutions

Brcko

Military stabilization

Formation of common institutions - energy grid; road connections, flag, passports, currency

infrastructure reconstruction

economic development

“Insistence on reciprocity seeks to block all returns.” (ICG May 1998, 9)

## Kotor Varas - a case study (RIC, December 1997)

Located in what is now Republika Srpska SE of Banja Luka, before the war the municipality had a population of about 33,00 almost equally divided among Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats with Bosniacs making up the largest plurality of 12,000. On 11 June 1992, the town was attacked by Serb paramilitary units from Knin and Banja Luka. 300-500 locals were killed in the attack and the eventual death toll was estimated to be 1000. 6500 Bosniacs were put in concentration camps; 162 men detained in a school in Grabovica “disappeared”. The municipality became a Serb dominated enclave with about 1450 Bosniacs remaining, 50% of them in the 80% Bosniac town of Siprage which remained within the Federation. The other approximately 700 remained in the town of Kotor Varas. Of the remaining Bosniac population, 1000 were killed and 4-5,000 became refugees and 6,000 became DPs in the Federation. Of the original 8795 dwellings, 3866 (44%) were damaged, most between 20-40%, and 602 (6.8%) were destroyed.

As a result of a joint Croat and Bosniac offensive in Autumn 1995, Kotor Varos became a refuge for Serbs from Sipovo, Mrkonjic Grad and Ribnik, the number reduced when Serbs were able to return to the Anvil region which left 4500 displaced Serbs in Kotor Varos. So the municipality became a Serb region populated by local Serbs and displaced Serbs (7,000 at the height and then the number was reduced when Serbs were able to return to the Anvil region) from other parts of BiH with approximately 1450 Bosniac leftovers and 150-185 Croats.

In the 1996 election, with displaced people able to vote in the municipal elections, the Bosniac party (Coalition for a United and Democratic Bosnia) took 13 of the seats, the SDS 8, the Serb Radical Party 6 and HDZ 4 with 4 other seats going to minor parties. However, the victorious Bosniac dominated Coalition party and the HDZ were unable to take their 17 seats.

Slobodan Bunic of the radical SRS Serb nationalist party and the new President of the Executive Board elected by the rump legislative council, told the RIC, “if you don’t want chaos here, you (the international community) will keep the communities separated here. I speak openly and honestly for all nationalities in former Bosnia and Herzegovina.” It is not surprising then that even though Kotor Varos declared itself an Open City, though it has not even been recognized as a potential one by UNHCR, only 4 refugees and 1 displaced have returned. Moreover, others who remained behind have since left because of perceived threats to their safety and several incidents of grenade attacks on homes and harassment even though local authorities intervened in each case.

The UNHCR assessment of the situation stated that, “With substantial reconstruction assistance, return to outlying destroyed villages may take place this year, with expected resistance from the local authorities if not violent. Return to the town centre or occupied houses will pose great difficulty.” (RIC, December 1997)

1. This is the UNHCR figure (see Map 4), while the RRTP March 1998 report gives a figure of only 150,000 returnees in 1997.