

REFUGEES

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After
The
War
Was
Over

DO N'T
FORGET
'93



DP/23794*2005



SERBIA: Sarajevo woman and a new life in Belgrade.

DP/24134*2005



SERBIA: Croatian family applies for Serbian citizenship.

DP/22922*2005



BOSNIA: A family of Kosovo refugees in Bosnia.

DP/21160*2005



BOSNIA: An ethnic Croat risked staying in Republika Srpska during the war.



BOSNIA: An ethnic Serb farmer went back to the Sarajevo region.

DP/21656*2005

Balkan Images 2005



BOSNIA: Widows of the Srebrenica massacre still waiting to go home.

DP/22484*2005

THE COMPLICATED MOSAIC OF



BOSNIA: A Muslim family returned home to a Serb-dominated region after the war.

DP/21074*2005



DP/22689*2005

BOSNIA: Croat returns to the Mostar

DP/20851•2005

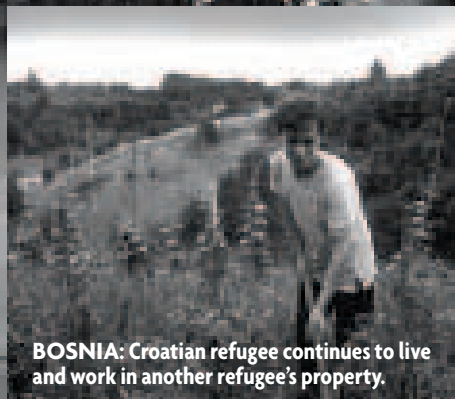


CROATIA: Croatian family who fled Serb militias in 1991 now back home.

DP/20998•2005



CROATIA: An ethnic Serb returnee still waiting to reclaim her occupied home.



BOSNIA: Croatian refugee continues to live and work in another refugee's property.

DP/21396•2005



CROATIA: An ethnic Croat family from Bosnia resettled in Croatia.

POSTWAR LIFE



DP/22784•2005



BOSNIA: An ethnic Serb family living in a Muslim-dominated region of Bosnia.

DP/20991•2005

DP/23392•2005

region in the Bosniak-Croat Federation.

Mostar's restored bridge.

The 'miracle' of Dayton

07/21/04-2005



-10 years later

**“THE BRIDGE, IN ALL ITS BEAUTY AND GRACE, WAS BUILT
TO OUTLIVE US. IT WAS AN ATTEMPT TO GRASP ETERNITY”**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VINCENT WINTER



The war years:
A temporary
footbridge replaces
Mostar's historical
bridge.

Bosnians held
prisoners of war by
ethnic Serb forces.

Seeking safety
from Serb snipers
in a muddy trench
and behind U.N.
armored personnel
carriers.

BY RAY WILKINSON

SULEIMAN THE MAGNIFICENT commissioned the 16th century masterpiece to reflect the caliph's own omnipotence. The mortar used to lace the dazzling stone pieces together high over the River Neretva reputedly was mixed from the finest egg whites and horse hair and in the intervening centuries scholars, global travelers and clergy revered the bridge not only for its physical beauty but also as a symbol of religious and cultural tolerance, a structure which outlasted Ottoman and Austrian empires, royalist Yugoslavs and 20th century communist cadres.

On a bitterly chill day in November 1993, Croatian General Slobodan Prljak saw the bridge at Mostar, deep in the heart of the newly declared independent country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, not as one of the world's cultural jewels but as an impediment to one of the 20th century's latest and most insidious developments—the 'ethnic cleansing'—the separation or murder of 'inferior' local peoples.

"It's just an old bridge," the Christian general said casually as he ordered his artillerymen to destroy the graceful arch and 11 other surrounding historical build-

ings to further his war aims against neighboring Bosnian Muslims.

The ancient stones crashed into snow swollen torrents below and Croatian journalist Slavenka Drakulic, who had also penned the earlier lines about the Mostar bridge, lamented: "Why do we feel more pain looking at the image of the destroyed bridge than the image of massacred people? We expect people to die. The destruction of a monument to civilization is something else. The bridge transcended our individual destiny."

As much as any other single event in an unfolding tragedy which would last for nearly four years, the Mostar bridge and its wanton destruction became another type of symbol—this time not of tolerance, but of the intolerance and depravity into which the Balkan region of Europe was mired at the start of the 1990s.

A KEY PLAYER

IT HAD ALL SEEMED SO DIFFERENT during the previous four decades. After Josip Broz Tito and his commu-





As much as any other single event, the wanton destruction of the bridge at Mostar became a symbol of the **intolerance and depravity** into which the Balkan region was mired.

UNIKER, A. HOLMANN/CS/BIH+1996

nist partisans seized power in Yugoslavia in the waning days of World War II, he welded it into a politically significant state which successfully straddled the world's major power blocs—communist, socialist, capitalist and third-world.

But when Tito died in 1980, ethnic, political, economic and religious tensions resurfaced and the façade of Yugoslav unity fell apart. After a decade of increasing regional tensions, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence from the Serb-dominated central authorities in Belgrade in 1991. War engulfed parts of Croatia. Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its own independence in 1992 and interethnic

conflict between Croats, Serbs and Muslims erupted across that country, too.

In the ensuing fighting and localized wars—within wars between 1992 and 1995, several hundred thousand persons were killed. Serb forces committed the worst single atrocity in Europe since the end of the Second World War when they massacred nearly 8,000 Muslim men and boys around an obscure town called Srebrenica. Concentration camps were established. Half of Bosnia's entire population—men, women, children, the old and the disabled—were ripped from their homes.



UNIKER, C. GALBE/CS/BIH+1995





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Digging new graves
for recently
identified victims
of the Srebrenica
massacre in 1995.

'Ethnic cleansing' became part of the international vocabulary. The bulk of Bosnia's factories, bridges, roads, schools, homes and water and electricity supplies were destroyed as were entire towns and villages in Croatia.

UNHCR became the lead humanitarian organization in the Balkans and began the most wide-ranging and complex operation in its history, spearheading a program to care for 3.5 million civilians. Central to that operation was what became the longest-running air bridge in history, a 3 1/2-year, almost daily shuttle of cargo planes which helped feed the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

Only a few years before, in 1984, this same city had been the proud host to the world at the Winter Olympic Games, but now it had been reduced to a hapless collection of traumatized civilians cowering in their darkened homes, targets in a virtual 'turkey shoot' by Serb gunners perched high in the surrounding hills.

After an increasing American and NATO intervention, the Bosnian phase of the Balkan nightmare spluttered to a halt in the most unlikely of venues when the major protagonists agreed to what became known as

the Dayton Peace Accords on November 21, 1995, at a U.S. Air Force base called Wright-Patterson in Ohio.

The guns fell silent. Bosnia was split into two almost equal parts, the so-called Republika Srpska, spiritual home to ethnic Serbs, and a Bosniak-Croat Federation. Under the terms of Annex 7 of the Dayton Accords (see story page 14), UNHCR again became the lead humanitarian agency—this time repatriating the war's civilian victims from stinking collective centers across the region, from abandoned homes and bomb-damaged buildings where they had squatted after the original owners had also fled; from as far away as refugee centers and private homes in Europe and North America—bringing them back to a shattered landscape sown with mines, with almost no physical infrastructure, few jobs and simmering ethnic hatreds.

On the eve of the 10th anniversary of the Dayton agreement in November, the bridge at Mostar today again provides a dramatic backdrop against which to highlight developments in the last decade—an easy reference point to measure the progress or lack of it—in trying to patch together again Europe's battered south-east corner.

UNHCR again became the lead humanitarian agency—
back to a **shattered landscape** sown

A brief **history** of the BALKANS

1878

The Congress of Berlin redraws the map of the Balkans and despite ignoring the wishes of local populations creates **three new countries**, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania.

June 28, 1914

Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, is **assassinated** by a Serb gunman during a visit to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, precipitating World War I and the subsequent collapse of the Austrian and Ottoman empires. Yugoslavia, the '**Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes**' is created from the debris in 1918.

October 24, 1944

In the dying days of World War II, Josip Broz Tito's partisans liberate the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade and establish a **communist regime** which will last for nearly a half century.

June 25, 1991

Following Tito's death, internal differences begin to surface. Croatia and Slovenia declare **independence**, but the Serb-dominated federal Yugoslav army overruns **30 percent of Croatian territory**. Later in the year, UNHCR is declared the lead humanitarian organization in the crisis.

March 3, 1992

Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaims **independence**, but ethnic **Serb forces seize 70 percent of the country** and lay siege to the capital, Sarajevo. UNHCR begins a 3 1/2-year airlift to feed the city, the longest humanitarian air bridge in history.

1991-95

In four years of warfare, **several hundred thousand people are killed**; the term "ethnic cleansing" enters the international vocabulary as aid agencies struggle to feed and protect some 3.5 million civilians. Bosnia's physical infrastructure, in particular, is virtually **destroyed**.

July 11, 1995

Serb forces perpetrate the worst single atrocity in Europe since World War II when

they overrun the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica and **massacre nearly 8,000 men and boys**. The catastrophe hastens the intervention of U.S. and NATO forces.

August 12, 1995

As the tide of war turns decisively against Serb forces, Croatia launches **Operation Storm** to retake Serb-held territory. Some 250,000 ethnic Serbs flee Croatia during the war.

November 21, 1995

The Dayton Peace Accords end hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. NATO-led implementation forces deploy and UNHCR is designated as the **lead humanitarian agency** to oversee the repatriation, feeding and rehousing of the region's uprooted peoples.

January 15, 1998

Croatia peacefully reintegrates the last of its lands seized by Serb forces in the east of the country, assuming **full sovereignty** for the first time over its entire territory.

March 24, 1999

As the rest of the former Yugoslav Republic attempts to recover from war, a new crisis has been simmering in its southern Kosovo province between the majority ethnic Albanians and Serbs. When peace talks collapse in France, NATO launches a **78-day air war** against Serbian forces. Within days the first of nearly **900,000 ethnic Albanians flee** or are forced out of the province into Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro.

June 12, 1999

After acceptance of a peace plan, NATO and Russian forces enter Kosovo, closely followed in later weeks by virtually the **entire ethnic Albanian population** which had fled only months earlier. It became one of the fastest refugee exodus and returns in history. However, fearing reprisals from the Albanians some 230,000 Kosovo Serbs, Roma and other minorities flee in the opposite direction, into Serbia and Montenegro. A U.N. civil administration, UNMIK, is established to run Kosovo.

December 11, 1999

Political change begins to sweep the Balkans. Croatian strongman Franjo Tudjman dies and a **democratic system** is established. In October the following year, Slobodan Milosevic concedes defeat in presidential elections in Belgrade and on June 28, 2001, is handed over to the **International Tribunal** in The Hague to face war crimes.

February 2001

Conflict breaks out in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and more than **150,000 people flee**, principally to neighboring Kosovo. In August, the country's two opposing sides sign a peace agreement and civilians begin to return to the country.

February 4, 2003

The parliamentary endorsement in Belgrade of the Constitutional Charter of a new country—the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro—also marks the **formal demise** of the earlier Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which collapsed during the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

July 2004

Bosnia passes an important milestone in its rebirth when the **one millionth person displaced** during the war returns home.

January 2005

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro helped by UNHCR, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) agree to resolve all outstanding refugee and internal displacement issues by the **end of 2006**.

September 2005

An estimated 2.5 million uprooted persons have returned home in all areas of the Balkans since the mid-1990s. However, some **620,000 civilians are still waiting to go back**, the major problem area being the return of ethnic Serbs and other minorities to Kosovo. UNHCR spent around \$500 million on assistance in the decade-long Dayton process, but after being the lead humanitarian agency during both war and peace, has been phasing out its operations in the region for the last few years.

this time **repatriating** the war's civilian victims with mines, few jobs and simmering **ethnic hatreds**.



DP/21234•2005 DP/23026•2005

Throughout the Balkans, around 2.5 million people

People have been returning to so-called minority areas all across the Balkans in recent years.

An ethnic Croat farmer in Bosnia's Republika Srpska.

An extended Bosnian family, half of them now living permanently in the United States, at their rebuilt home in the former Croat stronghold of Stolac near Mostar.

The bridge and surrounding buildings have been lovingly restored in a multi-million dollar international rescue project. Original stonework was saved from the river far below and new pieces mined from the original quarry. A temporary footbridge which provided access between the two divided parts of the town, itself a symbol of war and division, has been dismantled.

Terraced restaurants with brightly colored parasols serve local meat specialties such as *cevapi* (sausage), *jagnjetina* (lamb), *silovane paprike* (stuffed peppers) and fiery brandies, as locals and an increasing number of tourists mix easily. Children swim in the Neretva to escape the cloying summer temperatures. Laughter and music waft across the gorge.

Few people these days stop to inspect at one end of the bridge a small memorial slab, topped by the tail fin of an exploded rocket propelled grenade (RPG) with the simple inscription in English "DON'T FORGET '93."

And just several streets away there is an even starker reminder of the conflict—rows of ghostly and shrapnel splattered buildings, too gutted and expensive to rebuild and maybe not enough political will among the country's leaders to do so.

Like the contrasts in Mostar itself, optimists and pessimists both have plenty of ammunition to bolster their respective views of what has happened in the region in the last 10 years.

THE GOOD NEWS

THROUGHOUT THE BALKANS, around 2.5 million people returned home in the last few years. As many as 650,000 refugees permanently settled overseas and dropped off the monitoring screens of agencies such as UNHCR.

In Bosnia, following the signing of the Dayton Accords, more than one million civilians went back, almost half of them to areas where they are now ethnic minorities—the most difficult and sensitive part of the entire repatriation project.

Five billion dollars in aid poured into the country in the early peace years. Around half of Bosnia's 500,000 destroyed homes were rebuilt or replaced. Some 200,000 property disputes were resolved peacefully.

Like the bridge at Mostar, Sarajevo enjoyed a rebirth, flourishing once more with the snappy street life, smart boutiques and restaurants of an earlier era, even though the overgrown shells of some downtown buildings are a constant reminder of the more recent past.

The number of international peacekeeping troops in Bosnia dropped from a high of 69,000 to 7,000 in the absence of any major security incidents.

The Croatian government in 1998 reintegrated the last of its lands seized by federal Yugoslav forces in the early days of the war, bringing to a peaceful conclusion the conflict between those two countries.



have returned home in the last few years.

The Zagreb government, accused by many critics of dragging its feet over ethnic Serb returns, nevertheless said it had welcomed back more than 130,000 refugees in the last decade. Another 240,000 persons internally displaced during the war had gone back to their towns and villages.

In Yugoslavia, which later formally changed its name to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the number of refugees dropped since 1996 by more than two-thirds to some 150,000 today. More than 100,000 civilians returned to Croatia and Bosnia and in a major development in the last few years, 116,000 other refugees responded positively to Belgrade's invitation to settle there permanently and become citizens.

The international community welcomed Belgrade's new flexibility by approving an early \$1.3 billion aid package to help that country's battered economy.

Across the three countries, these major returns did lead to Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks (Muslims) living side by side again and working together in many areas.

(In the southern Balkans, separate ethnic conflicts had erupted in 1998 in Serbia's Kosovo province and in 2001 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) after the guns had already fallen silent further north. There were additional massive displacements of civilians during those conflicts, but more than one mil-



A young ethnic Serb girl near Knin after her return from Serbia.

lion people in that region quickly repatriated. See separate story page 26).

Authoritarian regimes in Belgrade and Zagreb were replaced by democratic governments and Yugoslavia's former leader, Slobodan Milosevic was sent to The Hague, where he remains today, answering war crimes charges.



For these three women from Croatia and Bosnia, their only future is in an old folks home near the Serbian capital of Belgrade.

In January, the governments of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro, together with UNHCR, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said they would fit the final piece to the refugee jigsaw in their respective countries. They signed a Sarajevo Agreement or “3 x 3 Initiative” in which they agreed to resolve all outstanding regional displacement problems by the end of 2006.

That would effectively complete UNHCR’s steward-

ship of the Dayton Accords’ humanitarian objectives during which the agency spent \$500 million on protection and assistance projects. It would also bring to a close an extraordinary era both for the organization and the region.

Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative of the international community in Bosnia, an unabashed realist-optimist, called ‘The Decade of Dayton nothing less than a “miracle.”



There are an estimated **620,000** refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the Balkans still waiting to go home but some of them have **nothing to go back to.**

deaths. Nothing else mattered.”

THE BAD NEWS

IN AN OLD FOLKS HOME on the outskirts of Belgrade, three ladies in their 70s share a tiny bedroom, each with an iron bedstead and one side table. Two are from the Knin region of Croatia and the third from Gorazde in Bosnia. All were driven from their homes by the war and, as ethnic Serbs, they sought temporary safety in Serbia. In the intervening years of exile they successively lost their husbands, relatives, and worldly possessions.

Seventy-eight-year-old Draginja Matijas expected to return to her farmhouse after only a few days when she fled in panic in 1995 but now “all I have in the world is this,”

she explains clutching a black handbag. “This is all,” she repeats in tears. “I’m too old except to die here.” Her two companions nod in agreement that that will probably be their fate, too.

There are an estimated 620,000 refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the Balkans still waiting to go home but some of them like the three ladies in Belgrade—the forgotten detritus of any war—have nothing to go back to.

The former British Liberal politician said recently: “The miracle in Bosnia is how much has been done in 10 years. [Remember] a sixteenth of the population was killed, more than in France during World War II and half the population made homeless...”

A local aid worker who survived the siege of Sarajevo was equally emphatic about the results of the Accords: “We would have signed an agreement with the devil to end the war, all the suffering and all the



An ethnic Serb woman who continues to live in exile

Leading the **return** home

THE DAYTON PEACE

ACCORDS ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. **They were initialed by** the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, on November 21, 1995, and signed in Paris on December 14 of that year.

Under the terms of the treaty, the parties agreed to **respect each others' sovereignty, maintain a cease-fire** in Bosnia, **withdraw military forces** to agreed lines of separation, approve a **new constitution** and hold presidential and legislative **elections**.

The capital of **Sarajevo** was **reunified**, a central government was established, but in one of the most controversial points, **two separate entities were also recognized** within the country

reflecting its ethnic reality, the so-called Bosnian Serb Republic (Republika Srpska) and the Bosniak-Croat Federation.

At the start of the Balkan wars, the U.N. Secretary-General in 1991 had designated UNHCR to be the lead humanitarian agency during the developing emergency. Under Dayton, **the refugee agency was again asked to spearhead efforts to help millions of people** uprooted by the fighting to return to their homes.

Though the agreement was specific to Bosnia and Herzegovina, its political, military and humanitarian impact was widespread throughout the entire Balkan region.

The humanitarian challenge was spelled out in **Annex 7** of the Dayton Accords and its main points included:

■ *UNHCR, as the lead agency, was entrusted “with the role of coordinating among all agencies assisting with the repatriation” and developing “a plan that will allow for an early, peaceful, orderly and phased return of refugees and displaced persons.”*

■ *“All refugees and displaced persons have the right freely to return to their homes of origin. They shall have the right to have restored to them property of which they were deprived in the course of hostilities since 1991 and to be compensated for any property that cannot be restored to them.”*

■ *Returnees could go back “without risk of harassment, intimidation, persecution or discrimination, particularly on account of their*

ethnic origin, religious belief or political opinion.”

■ *All parties agreed to repeal “domestic legislation and administrative practices with discriminatory intent”; prevent incitement through the media or other channels “of ethnic or religious hostility or hate”; protect ethnic minorities and their easy access to humanitarian organizations; and prosecute, dismiss or transfer any official violating the rights of minorities.*

■ *The parties agreed to create “political, economic and social conditions” to encourage return and reintegration and, vitally important, a Commission for Displaced Persons and Refugees was established to adjudicate potentially hundreds of thousands of property disputes and claims.*



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said Dayton “was a catastrophe that had to happen.”

Others remain caught in the crosscurrents of regional politics. When ethnic Albanians flooded back into Kosovo in 1999 in the wake of retreating Serb military and police units, tens of thousands of Serb civilians and other minorities panicked and went along with the troops, fearful of potential reprisals by the Albanians.

A small trickle of people has returned in the intervening years, but while the international community, Serbia and the Albanians wrangle over the province's future—outright independence for the majority Albanians or autonomy within Serbia?—a quarter of a million civilians remain stranded in legal limbo as displaced persons in Serbia proper, unsure and unwilling to gamble their futures by returning to Kosovo.

There are other formidable problems shared across all the countries in the Balkans. Foreign aid has been sharply reduced and regional economies face two overwhelming obstacles, trying both to recover from a devastating war and to retool obsolete socialist-communist economies with more flexible systems.

Unemployment is routinely 30 percent and as high as 80 percent in some regions. Fifty percent of Bosnia's population is on or below the poverty line, 50 percent has no health care and 18 percent no electricity. Bosnia's bloated bureaucracy—five presidents, two prime ministers, 13 education ministers to service the various power structures—swallows 60 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

If the most obvious forms of discrimination have been eliminated, there is still widespread 'silent' or 'vel-

vet' discrimination practiced in trying to obtain jobs, health care or a school place.

Many civilians, particularly returnees, are forced to eke out a living by subsistence farming where a single cow or a patch of vegetables may be the only source of support. When an international field worker was recently asked how these people managed, she shrugged and replied “They're all magicians. We don't understand how they even survive week by week.”

Security may have improved immeasurably, but there are still at least 10,000 known war criminals at large from Bosnia alone, among them Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, the alleged architects of the massacre at Srebrenica and other atrocities.

Even when minorities have returned, generally only around half their prewar populations have gone back to their original homes. And while these returnees do live side by side with their former neighbors, and latterly their enemy in the recent wars, they rarely live together as they once did.

“I went back to see my house in Mostar one time,” a woman who now lives on the outskirts of Belgrade said. “My old neighbor saw me and said ‘What are you doing here? For me you don't exist.’ That is why I am never going back again.”

Former High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers warned UNHCR's Executive Committee in 2004 that all of the loose ends in the Balkans will probably never be neatly tied back together again. “While continuing returns for all those who aspire to it, we should abandon the artifi-

Life is extremely tough for families returning to destroyed villages in central Bosnia.

Navenka Bodirola, originally from Sarajevo, has decided to stay in Serbia.



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The flight from Knin in 1995.

cial and counterproductive ambition to return all remaining uprooted peoples,” he said.

Some critics blame Dayton for the ills besetting Bosnia and its neighbors. One Sarajevo university professor described it as a “Frankenstein agreement” because it had legally solidified the war’s ethnic cleansing policy by dividing the country neatly into two entities—the Serb dominated Republika Srpska and the Bosniak-Croat Federation.

Navenka Bodirolga fled Sarajevo at the start of the war when she was many months pregnant and now helps to support her family by sewing small items in her apartment in the town of Sabac near Belgrade. She cries when she remembers Sarajevo where she was born. “I am so very homesick,” she said. But she decided recently to accept Serb citizenship and stay where she is.

“Dayton,” she said, “was a catastrophe that had to happen.” It may have stopped the killing, but for Serbs like herself it was a long-term disaster leading to permanent exile.

HOPES AND FEARS

A RECENT JOURNEY through Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia highlighted all of the region’s post-Dayton contradictions—the hopes and concerns for return, the struggle for survival, renewed friendships and ongoing wartime animosities and the fears about a still very uncertain future.

In Croatia’s Krajina region, locals believe the scrub hills and deep valleys surrounding the principal town of Knin were the original birthplace for the series of wars which ripped the former Yugoslavia apart.



Ethnic Serb returnees in Knin in 2005.



DP/20747*2005

“I began to cry the moment I came back. I am still crying. I cannot believe everything.”

—An ethnic Serb who returned to Croatia, a newly rebuilt home and a new grandson.

DP/20795*2005

Croats still remember with a shudder one particular meeting as early as 1989 when priests and other speakers at a nearby orthodox church called St. Lazar, whipped an estimated 60,000 crowd into a frenzy of Serb nationalism. “We knew then war was inevitable,” one farmer said recently.

At the time, the Krajina was the heartland of Croatia’s ethnic Serb population which went on to declare its own Republika Krajina (*Krajina means borderland*) in 1991.

Unsurprisingly, a first mass exodus of civilians began. With Serb soldiers and militias winning the ground conflict at the time, some 500,000 Croats and other non-Serbs fled Krajina and other parts of the country. As the fortunes of war changed, a resurgent Croatian army in 1995 launched Operation Storm and

in turn forced some 250,000 Serbs into exile as part of an ongoing and confusing mass movement of different local populations throughout the Balkans.

An estimated 40,000 out of 120,000 ethnic Serbs have since returned to the Knin region, but today they comprise only 10 percent of the population compared with 90 percent prewar. Nationally, Croatia’s Serb population fell from 600,000 to less than half that figure.

The reversal in ethnic composition and the modest number of returnees to regions where they now live as a minority of the population is part of a similar postwar pattern of change in many towns and villages across the Balkans with still unforeseen future consequences.

And the personal stories of Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs here reflect both the successes and ongoing problems of the region as a whole.



“After the war, we dared to say who we were, Croats. Now, we feel we are minorities again.”

—A Croat in the Knin region of that country grumbling about continued Serb domination.

A Croat family which fled Knin in 1991 began a successful small-scale vegetable business after their return home.

When Sava and Nevenka Stojanovic fled to Serbia in 1995 their house was totally destroyed by Croat soldiers. They returned two years later and though they lived in an adjoining stable for three years, abundant assistance was available at the time to help them rebuild their ancestral village home—help which is no longer around in today’s more difficult economic times.

Boris Petko’s home was also destroyed, but it is one of an estimated 120,000 properties the government has been rebuilding since the war. Though his wife came back several years ago, Petko, an ethnic Serb fearful of possible harassment by the majority Croats, returned permanently from exile only recently. He was greeted not only with a new home, but also a grandson born a few hours after his return. The family survives, barely, on the sale of milk from four cows, but Petko is ecstatic and told a visitor: “I began to cry the moment I came back. I am still crying. I cannot believe everything. It is beautiful.”

Dusanka Jolic was not so lucky. Since her return, the ethnic Serb has lived for five years in a small basement while only a few hundred meters away, an ethnic Croat refugee from Bosnia has continued to occupy her three-storey family home in the village of Kovacic. The Croat had already dismantled part of the house for building materials and every time Mrs. Jolic demanded the property back, he threatened to totally destroy it. “I applied to get my house back first in 1998,” she said. “I am still waiting.” Croat authorities refused to intervene.

Perisa Mijakovac has neither a job, like the majority of workers in Krajina, or a home. Under the pre-

war communist system, he was guaranteed a government apartment, but tens of thousands of people lost that privilege during the ensuing chaos. Trying to provide people like Mijakovac with new, alternative accommodation is perhaps the biggest problem facing Zagreb today, though some critics charged the government had persistently undermined the process. Until the problem is resolved, Mijakovac continues to commute between his mother-in-law’s home in the village of Ridjane and his home in exile, unsure whether to commit his future to Croatia or Serbia.

Robert Konforta faces a different dilemma. As a Croat, he fled in 1991, but returned in 1995 when his Serbian neighbors boarded their tractors and trailers and headed off into exile. Though he is now a member of the ethnic Croat majority, Konforta’s particular local municipality bizarrely is headed by a non-resident ethnic Serb whom Konforta blames for blocking the expansion of his small vegetable business.

“After the war we dared to say who we were for the first time—Croats,” Konforta said. “Now, we feel we are like minorities again” – a potentially ominous undercurrent with the memories of war still so raw.

And when the 10th anniversary of Operation Storm was commemorated recently, it again underscored the ambivalence, anger and the wide divide that continues to separate so many communities.

Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader termed the operation “a glorious liberation action, a turning point in Croatian history,” but at the same time he

A Remarkable **Success** — But More Work to be Done

Bosnia's High Representative assesses 10 years of peace

BY PADDY ASHDOWN

IN JULY, I ATTENDED THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY of the massacre at Srebrenica. The killings perpetrated there taint the soul of Europe still. But Srebrenica also inspires hope as well as fear and sorrow.

Every single man, woman and child who has returned to live in that town give daily testimony to the fact that, in time, evil does not triumph. Those returnees are asserting a right that has never before been achieved in Europe: the right of refugees to return, not only to Srebrenica but to their homes across Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire Balkan region.

In 1945, there were five million displaced people in Europe. Almost none returned to their pre-World War II homes.

In 1995, at the time of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, there were more than two million refugees and displaced persons from the Bosnian war. Since then, more than one million people have returned home, a degree of success that was unthinkable during or immediately after the conflict.

At that time, the main obstacles to return were the trauma of those who had been evicted and the continuing intimidation of those who had evicted them. In a climate of lawlessness and administrative chaos, local institutions—police, municipalities, social services—were politically indisposed to support return, or were administratively incapable of creating an environment conducive to return.

Through a slow process of improvement, including the removal of obstructionist police and municipal officers, the climate was systematically altered. Annual return figures increased from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of people at the start of the new millennium, though the trend has again slowed down recently.

We have entered a new phase where the biggest obstacle to going home is no longer political or administrative, but a lack of economic opportunity.

Recently, I spoke at the opening of a metal processing factory in Srebrenica, noting this was an intensely practical event, something that would put food on the table. I noted, too, that the foreign investor hadn't injected capital here for reasons of altruism, but had made a hardheaded business decision based

on the long-standing tradition of metal working that is characteristic of this part of the country.

The company was investing because of a combination of skilled labor, competitive wage rates, a stable currency, abundant resources and proximity to markets. I pointed out that more and more investors are likely to respond positively to this combination.

JOBS ARE KEY

MORE INVESTMENT will mean more jobs which, in turn, will mean higher living standards and this paradigm is at the core of sustained refugee return in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are not engaged in charity; we are engaged in maximizing economic potential so that it can underpin the return process. Jobs are the building blocks of prosperity and they are also the building blocks of the ongoing return.

UNHCR continues to play a vital part in this story. The agency set the pace of refugee return following the Dayton agreement and has ensured that the evolution of a modern democratic society is predicated on the reintegration of communities—not on their permanent division.

The agency has demonstrated an impressive ability to modify its programs and strategy in constantly changing circumstances. From providing physical shelter, it has moved through stages of removing legal and administrative obstacles to sustainable return, including the establishment of legal aid and information centers which have already helped several hundred thousand people.

THE STORY IS NOT YET OVER

THE PRIORITY is to breathe economic life into returnee communities to make sure that the process is irreversible. Social breakdown and political mischief have had to be overcome, but this struggle, too, continues today in many places.

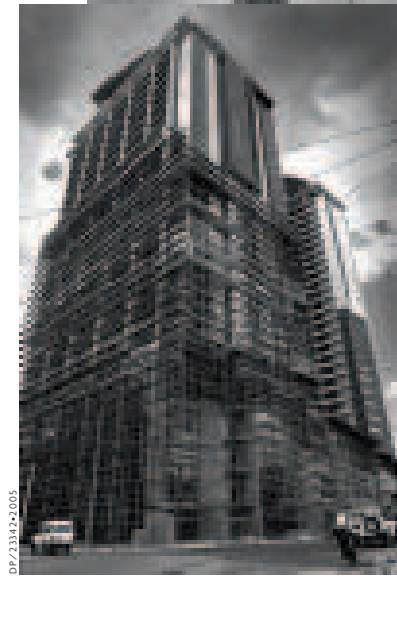
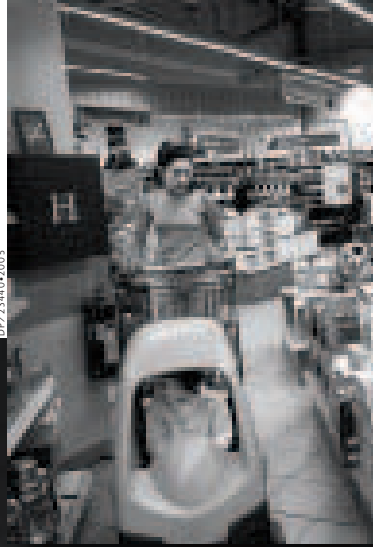
Yet in how many other countries have so many victims of war been able to reclaim their property on a scale that has been witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

By any standards, the return process has been a remarkable success, but it will not be complete until every single person who wants to return has had the opportunity to do so.

DP/23318*2005



DP/23440*2005



DP/23342*2005



DP/23387*2005



DP/23371*2005



Sarajevo Today

THE REBIRTH OF A CITY

Supermarkets, billboards,
new high-rise buildings,
and a vibrant street life.

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DP/23594*2005

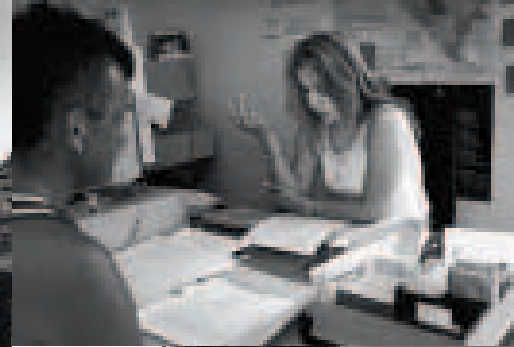


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Rebuilding in Republika Srpska.

Lawyers from
Vasa Prava
helping the needy
throughout Bosnia.

held out a conciliatory hand to ethnic Serbs by insisting “We must separate it (the liberation) from the shameful acts that followed against Serbs.”

At the same time, Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica said, “The column of the exiled, from Knin to Belgrade, was the site of a horrible unseen crime, the biggest ethnic cleansing after World War II. Even ten years later, there is neither justice nor acknowledgment of the truth.”

BOSNIA’S SERB HEARTLAND

ACROSS THE BORDER IN BOSNIA, Serbian forces totally ‘cleansed’ the Muslim population from the town of Kozarac and other nearby villages in 1992. They wanted to create a ‘pure’ heartland for their Republika Srpska centered on the nearby city of Banja Luka.

Thousands of local men were incarcerated in infamous and murderous wartime concentration camps at Omarska and Keraterm. Others were murdered and their bodies dumped into the shafts of nearby mines, from which some are still being recovered. Houses and mosques were systematically destroyed.

When REFUGEES visited Kozarac in 1999, it appeared that efforts to encourage Bosniaks to return were doomed to failure because of the blatant resistance of local Serb zealots.

“Kozarac looks like a snapshot from the worst bombing excesses of World War II,” the magazine said at the time. “Virtually everything has been destroyed. Wild vegetation threatens to overwhelm the ruins of this ghost town. Before the conflict, 16,500 relatively wealthy Bosniaks lived there. Five families have returned.”

Today, the picture is far brighter. Ninety percent of the region’s housing has been rebuilt and some 7,000

Bosniaks have returned. If that overall figure is still disappointing, the Muslims who have gone back felt confident enough about the future, they have reclaimed the bodies of several hundred of their fellow Bosniaks from mass graves and mine shafts and reburied them in a local cemetery.

The flow of returnees has dropped again in the past couple of years and the enormity of the task to rebuild Bosnia may best be judged in a cramped lawyers office in nearby Prijedor, the regional headquarters for a group called Vasa Prava (*Your Rights*).

Established as a country-wide network with the help of UNHCR, the rights agency has helped at least 300,000 persons, for free, to solve problems ranging from property repossession to repatriation to Croatia, from divorce to obtaining a work permit.

“I may see 20 to 30 persons a day here,” says lawyer Snjezana Cepic. “And our workload is increasing. Unfortunately, our services will be needed for years to come.”

UNHCR’s recent Representative in Bosnia, Udo Janz, said the establishment of Vasa Prava was one of the best and most important projects the refugee agency had undertaken during its Balkan operations. “Vasa Prava has been indispensable to our efforts to bring hundreds of thousands of people home,” he said. “It has been an outstanding success.”

THE HORROR. THE HORROR.

THE RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MADNESS that became Srebrenica begins many miles from that benighted place. At a village crossroads leading into the Srebrenica valley, religious zealots built a small orthodox church in the front garden of a Muslim woman’s home in the waning days of the war, apparently as a deliber-

Religious zealots built an orthodox church in front of a
The woman is trying to get the church removed, but



DP/21420•2005

ate provocation. The woman is trying to get the church removed; but now she has been accused of fanning religious and ethnic hatred.

It was at this same crossroads that Serb forces would separate Bosniak men and women, leading the males away for execution in 1995.

Further into the valley, workers recently rushed to finish a seven-meter high concrete cross to commemorate the murder of 49 ethnic Serbs by Bosniak militias on January 7, 1993, the Orthodox Christmas day.

“No one remembers the Serb victims,” one worker said bitterly in obvious reference to services planned the following day to mark the massacre of nearly 8,000 Muslim men and boys from Srebrenica, a few miles up the road.

And while the destruction of the bridge at Mostar became an immediate and convenient rallying point to denounce the atrocities of war, it was not really until this year—a decade later—that either the Serbian leadership or the international community at large really came to grips with the

enormity of the crime at Srebrenica and publicly bowed their heads in shame for their roles in it.

Tens of thousands of persons, statesmen, diplomats, the President of Serbia and the relatives of victims, converged on the memorial site, opposite a disused battery factory where the males were sorted from the females under the hapless gaze of a handful of U.N. soldiers and sent to their deaths.

More than six hundred victims were buried during the ceremony as the world watched, joining 1,326 others who had already been interred. Many other bodies remain unidentified or undiscovered.

In the name of religion:

Reburying the Muslim dead in Kozarac.

A disputed orthodox church.

Honoring the Serb dead near Srebrenica.



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Muslim woman’s home, apparently as a provocation, is now accused of fanning religious and ethnic hatred.



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**Hafiza Hodlic
remembers
a massacre.**

A marble obelisk at the memorial site speaks to the hopes such a massacre will never happen again:

*May grievance become hope
May revenge become justice
May mothers' tears become prayers
That Srebrenica
Never happens again
To no one nowhere*

Many people are not so sure. Only around 4,000 Muslims out of a prewar population of nearly 28,000 Bosniaks have returned.

"For months I washed my face in tears," said 58-year-old Hafiza Hodlic whose husband and two sons were taken away during the town's fall and have never been seen again. "I don't have any more tears left. But I still hope that one day I will see my husband and sons come walking back from somewhere."

Her daughter, Merima Mustafic watched a recently released video which showed Serb forces killing six

captured Srebrenica men, the first visual evidence of the atrocity. The family's menfolk were not in the video, but the experience was still too much for Merima who was rushed to hospital for sedation. Weeks later she is still in shock.

"I just want to remember the life we once had here," her mother said after another abortive visit to the local municipal office to try to get help to rebuild her house which remains gutted. "I have nothing else to live for."

Women and their children at the nearby Jezevac collective center have been a little luckier than Hafiza Hodlic. They have been able to recover and identify the bodies of their 'disappeared' menfolk.

"At least we know where their bones are," one woman said. "It's better this way."

But could they live comfortably with their Serb neighbors again? "Never. Never. Never," was an instant chorus from all of them. "We don't trust them and they don't trust us," one woman said. "How do you think our young people will act when they know their

Looking ahead, 'sustainability'



fathers were killed by the neighbors? They will always remember.”

SARAJEVO AND SUSTAINABILITY

IN SARAJEVO, DILAPIDATED TRAMS once more rattle along the central boulevard which, during the siege, became known as Sniper’s Alley and could only be used by armored cars. A stinking barracks for refugees has been rehabilitated as a sparkingly clean Coca Cola factory.

At night, thousands of families, tourists and lovers crowd the cobbled walkways, restaurants and gold shops in the old Turkish and Austrian sectors of the city or attend fashionable photo exhibits at the world famous city library whose interior remains gutted.

Newly built hypermarkets are full, but a small eternal flame at one busy walk-through reminds Sarajevans of the city’s darkest moment when a shell smashed into a group of shoppers in February 1994, killing 68 of them and wounding 200 others.

In the surrounding hills, the Jewish cemetery, which was part of the wartime front lines, is again quiet. Some repairs have been undertaken, but distressingly, the carnage is not quite over. Some grave sites have been desecrated by peacetime hooligans.

Sarajevo was once a vibrant multi-ethnic city. Some Serbs have returned to outlying suburbs, but many others who owned downtown houses and shops prefer to remain commuters, living in Serbia or further afield, but visiting their old homes on occasion.

Indeed, as travel restrictions have eased in most of the Balkan region, tens of thousands of people who remain uprooted, return briefly to see family, friends and home and maintain a link with their past—a hopeful sign for the future, too.

Looking into that future, ‘sustainability’ has become the new Balkan buzz word, underlining the need to strengthen and consolidate the progress already made in the last 10 years and to resolve outstanding refugee issues in most of the Balkans—Kosovo is an exception—by the end of 2006.

“A couple of years ago the overriding issue was security, security, security,” UNHCR’s Udo Janz said. “Today, it is the economy, stupid.”

Despite the massive rebuilding program across the region, it remains scarred with the rusting industrial



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Sarajevo’s restored synagogue, once the front line during the siege of the city.

dinosaurs of the prewar era: the mines, power plants and brick factories which employed the bulk of the prewar workforce.

A few new industries have opened and agencies like UNHCR have promoted many small-scale self-help projects. But the uprooted civilians who have already returned and those still deciding their future were virtually unanimous that employment or the lack of it was now *the* key to the region’s future success.

Seventy-one-year-old Franjo Majijevic, a Croat, returned to his old home in Republika Srpska in 1998 and though there are no security problems for minorities he worried that, “When we talk about jobs, the future is bleak. The coal mines are closed. The smelting factory has gone. This is a dying community.”

Across the country, 69-year-old Vidak Dujkovic, an ethnic Serb, went back to his village near the town of Tuzla, but the fields he once farmed are cut off by minefields, there is no telephone to the outside world and running water is available only every second day.

“Can we survive here?” he asked rhetorically. “Well, there are no jobs and we cannot eat the walls and roof of our house.”

Marjana Andzic and her family moved ten times after fleeing their Bosnian home and recently bought a house in Croatia’s Knin area. Would she like to eventually go home? “Of course,” she replied immediately. “But there are no jobs for us and there will be no jobs for our children. We cannot go back.”

If Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative in Bosnia, believes that that country has already achieved a “miracle” he is still realistic enough to know that particularly in the current tough economic climate which could undermine much good work already achieved, there is a long way to go.

“We have lost touch with how long it takes” to patch war-ravaged societies together again, he said recently. “Healing is always measured in decades.” ■

has become the new key **Balkan buzz word.**

KOSOVO A Progress Report

THE TROUBLED PROVINCE FACES A DIFFICULT FUTURE

THE BEWILDERMENT AND bitterness are still very raw emotions.

"We had much hope and now we have lost all hope," says 37-year-old Dragisa Petkovic. "We thought we would go back home in two or three days. But now we think maybe we will never go back."

Danijela Stanojevic shivers. "Just thinking about being back there brings a big fear into me," the young mother says. But glancing around the one tiny room she shares with her husband and two children, she insists, "We need a lot of courage, nerves and patience to live like this. Sometimes we feel like animals."

A 21-year-old neighbor in the same collective center expresses her longtime anger and frustration: "People come here all the time. They ask questions. We fill in forms. They promise help. But what do we get? We are still here six years later and we have nothing." Her plight and that of her neighbors, she said, "is all the fault of NATO. NATO is to blame for everything that has happened to us."

In early 1999, after a year of mounting civil unrest, nearly one million ethnic Albanians fled in panic or were forcibly thrown out of Yugoslavia's (since renamed Serbia and Montenegro) southernmost province of Kosovo by troops and police.

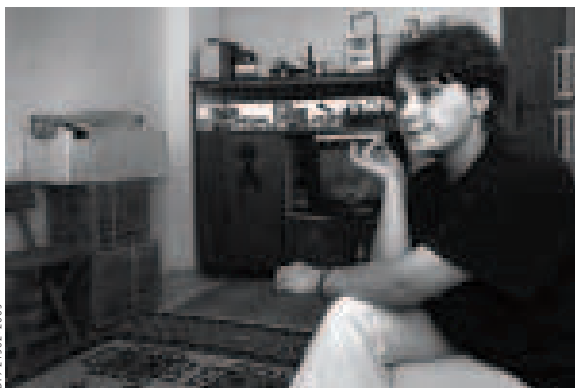
The international community intervened and within three months, in a stunning reversal of fortune, NATO forces entered Kosovo, closely followed by the majority of the displaced Albanians.

Serbian forces withdrew from the province under the provisions of a peace

plan, but fearful of retaliatory attacks by vengeful returning Albanians, it was the turn of more than 200,000 ethnic Serbs and minorities such as the Roma (*see page 29*) to flee the province.

A United Nations administration (UNMIK) was established to run Kosovo as elections were staged, administrative and political institutions were set up and the recently displaced civilians urged to return home prior to a decision on the province's long-term future.

Thus far, however, Dragisa Petkovic and his family, Danijela Stanojevic and



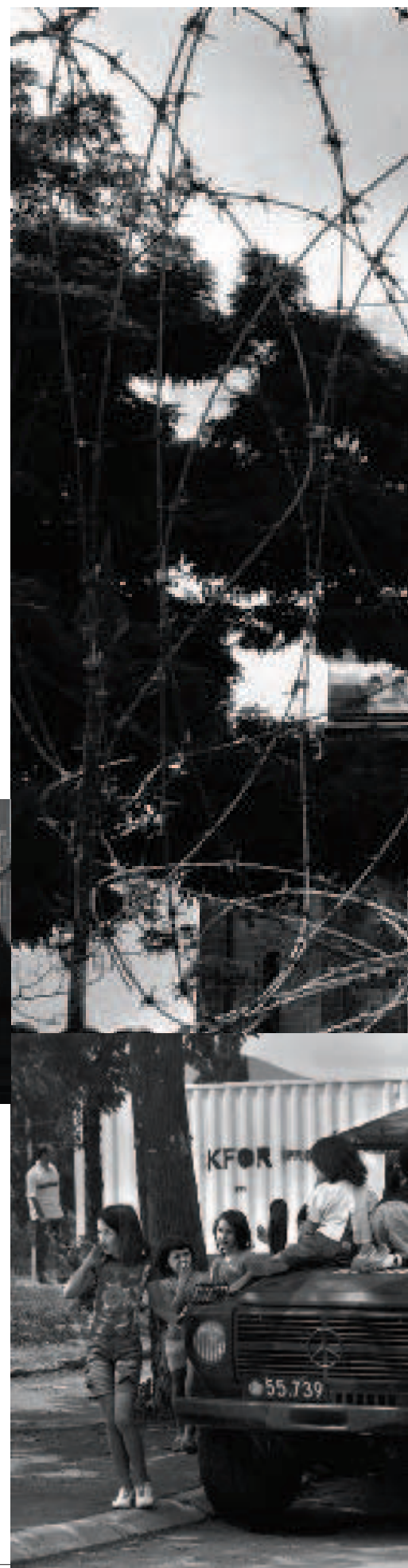
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the great majority of Kosovo's uprooted civilians—an estimated 226,000 people—continue to live in a kind of legal limbo in Serbia and Montenegro, unconvinced they can safely return to an uncertain future in Kosovo, but with few current alternatives to begin life afresh anywhere else.

"I have been back for a visit," Danijela Stanojevic says. "But everytime I cross the border into Kosovo, I lose my legs. I am so afraid."

GOING HOME

SOME 13,000 SERBS AND OTHER





Mitrovica's Serb cathedral (above). Danijela Stanojevic contemplates an uncertain future (left). Kosovo's children of war and their KFOR protectors (below).



"We thought we would go back home in two or three days. But now we think maybe we will **never go back.**"

minorities have returned, but the political, economic and social landscape is daunting.

Like much of the Balkan region, Kosovo is mired in economic stagnation and widespread unemployment.

The province's ethnic mix and distribution has changed dramatically.

Albanians comprise 90 percent of the population and, with the exception of Mitrovica, the Serbs have largely abandoned urban centers.

The nascent 'return home' project suffered a severe setback in March 2004 when an estimated 50,000 Albanians rioted across the province. At least 19



What does the future hold for these young ethnic Serb returnees?

Some 13,000 Serbs and other minorities have returned to Kosovo, but the political, economic and social landscape is daunting.

persons were killed, thousands of Serbs were driven from their homes and hundreds of buildings and churches were destroyed.

The region is still feeling the effects of the uprising. Marauders attacked the northern village of Svinjare from three directions. Nearby international KFOR troops rescued hundreds of civilians, but the attackers burned down 135 Serb houses in the ethnically mixed township.

The government quickly rebuilt most of the main structures, but only around one third of the Serbs have returned and there is an uneasy truce between them and the Albanians. "Our neighbors helped the attackers loot and destroy our homes," one farmer insisted recently after going back to his property. His family is still too afraid to stay overnight in the house, and should the KFOR soldiers leave "life would be very, very difficult for us," the farmer said. Another insisted, however, "I will never leave here again, whatever happens."

In Mitrovica, Greek troops had guarded its orthodox cathedral located in the heavily Albanian southern section of the city for several years. But during the 2004

rioting, the church was totally gutted. Four years earlier Slobodanka Nojic, the wife of one of the cathedral's priests had told REFUGEES: "I am too afraid to leave the church. And if we tried to leave alone, we would be kidnapped or killed. To be sure, we would never return to this house."

Her fears were justified. Today, all of the priests and their families have fled and the church is locked and forlorn.

To gauge the pace of reintegration in another part of Kosovo, after an absence of four years a visitor recently returned to the mainly Serb enclave of Slivovo, an area of eight villages with the picture-postcard beauty of Switzerland.

While most of the villagers had left after 1999, Miro Pavic stayed on his farm growing wheat, corn and fruit and tending his cattle. He described his existence then as "life in a gilded cage. We are prisoners among our vegetables."

Slivovo was considered one of around only a dozen areas safe enough to encourage minority return at the time and Swedish troops were stationed nearby to bolster security. Pavic insisted their presence was "absolutely essential. I

couldn't think of life without them," he said.

The Swedes have gone. There have been no incidents and Pavic works in a nearby town. But only a few dozen Serbs have returned and most remain suspicious of the uneasy peace. One 75-year-old farmer said: "Life in the village is quiet and I never leave here. Outside, things are not so good."

Major strides have been made since 1999 in trying to stabilize the unruly province, but far more needs to be accomplished.

The U.N. refugee agency believes, for instance, the situation is still too unstable in many regions to allow it to actively and officially encourage displaced minorities to return.

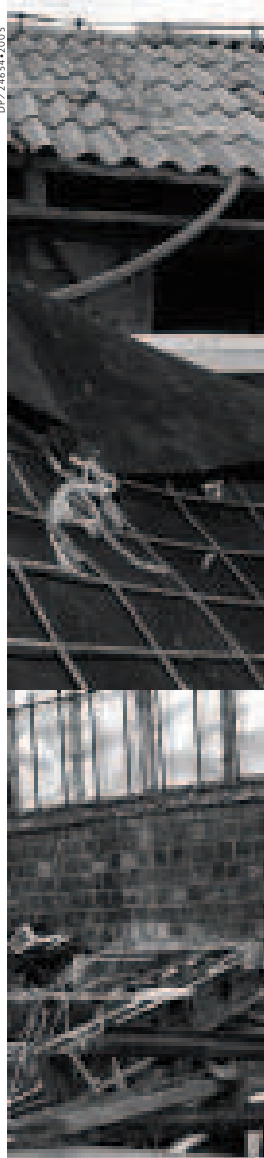
The respected International Crisis Group said in one report that government institutions had to be strengthened "otherwise Kosovo is likely to return to instability sooner rather than later and again put at risk all that has been invested in building a European future for the western Balkans."

At the core of any successful outcome is the need to overcome a seemingly impossible dilemma. After years of ethnic harassment by the central government, the majority Albanians have demanded full independence. Such an outcome would probably preclude the return of many of today's uprooted civilians and possibly spark a further exodus.

Belgrade favors what one humanitarian official described as "something more than autonomy, but not full independence"—a formula Albanians would likely reject.

Currently, there are two outlooks for the future, the official said: "A bad scenario and a worse scenario." ■

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“Why aren’t they helping us?
Why aren’t they saving our kids?”



The province's minority Romany population just waits.

UNCERTAIN TIMES FOR KOSOVO'S MINORITY ROMA

Hell could look like this. A series of squalid huts have been patched crazily together from pieces of wood, cardboard, plastic sheeting, tin and cinder block. Rusting containers serve as toilets. Children splash through fetid puddles of

sludge in the shadow of an abandoned brick factory and a toxic slag heap of lead. Dust clouds coat everything—faces, teeth, clothing, food and furniture—with a deep grey-black grime.

For years, contamination from a disused lead mine in the northern Kosovo

town of Mitrovica has leached into the surrounding soil and water, creating what international health officials describe as an environmental disaster for some 500 Roma living in nearby makeshift camps.

The Romany community and the closely related Ashkalijas and Egyptians



DP/21948+2005

Going home to Gnjilane.

have been part of the fabric of the Balkans for centuries, but during the 1999 Kosovo upheaval, thousands were forced to flee the province alongside more than 200,000 ethnic Serbs with whom they were accused of collaborating (see story page 26).

Many escaped into Serbia proper and surrounding countries, but others were given shelter in what was expected to be temporary accommodation for a few weeks. Six years later, the majority of them are still displaced and for the Mitrovica Roma it has turned literally into a deadly waiting game.

When the World Health Organization (WHO) tested Roma children in 2004 for lead poisoning, the readings were so high the equipment was unable to accurately measure them. Some children may have already died with others possibly suffering from memory loss, vomiting and convulsions. Health experts described the situation as “shameful” and

“disgraceful” and the Roma themselves were fearful and confused.

“When I look at my child I feel like dying,” one mother told newsmen at the Zitkovac camp recently. “The dust is killing her, she can hardly walk.” Habib Hajdini, the camp’s spokesman wondered aloud: “How can we believe these studies? If the results are true, why aren’t they helping us? Why aren’t they saving our kids?”

URGENT RELOCATION

UNHCR, AMONG OTHER AGENCIES, has been urging for at least a year that this group of Roma be relocated immediately. But through inertia, indifference, changing political priorities and intrigue nothing happened.

The Roma themselves were also reluctant to move to anywhere other than their original homes and for the majority that means a short trip of just a few kilometers to a section of Mitrovica called

Roma Mahalla, until 1999 one of the largest and most prosperous Romany settlements in the Balkans.

However, during ‘the troubles’ all 6,000 Mahalla residents fled and vengeful ethnic Albanians who had abandoned their own homes just a few months earlier, firebombed and destroyed the entire enclave.

Apart from the occasional scavenger, Roma Mahalla remains empty, though there are renewed plans to begin rebuilding. Optimistically,



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reconstruction could begin within months, but realistically it may take much longer than that to begin rehousing the minorities in their old neighborhood.

While the Mitrovica Roma wait, a few others have returned to their prewar homes across Kosovo. The American Refugee Committee (ARC) in late 2004 finished the first phase of a project in Gnjilane township to rehabilitate the Roma neighborhood of Abdullah Presheva and some 114 people from a prewar population of 2,500 went back.

In the village of Radivojce, one extended family of 16 people ranging in age from 1½ years-old to 74 returned in April.



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Roma Mahalla remains destroyed and deserted.



“We have been welcomed back
very warmly here. No problem.”

They are still living in a flimsy hut of wood and plastic sheeting provided by UNHCR while a new three-storey home is built nearby.

All of the family’s neighbors are ethnic Albanians, but the patriarch is optimistic and expects his work as a blacksmith to thrive in this rural community.

“We have been welcomed back very warmly here. No problem,” he said as his entire family clustered around recently. “We didn’t do anything wrong, so why shouldn’t we come back. I’m clean and it’s our home.”

That is a sentiment all of Kosovo’s Roma would like to share. ■



Displaced children kill time as best they can.

07/24492/2005



Sarajevo's eternal flame to the war dead.