

Human Rights Report 14-15 March 97

Freedom Of Movement

Movement of Minorities Hindered in "Anvil" Area UN IPTF received several complaints from minority motorists that RS police in the northwest of the country stopped and fined them without issuing receipts. A Croat man told UN IPTF he was stopped and fined by police in Mrkonjic Grad (RS), Previle (RS), and Majdan (RS) in the course of a single journey on 12 March. He was also allegedly assaulted by police after he was stopped in Previle. A Bosniak man told UN IPTF that he was fined 100 DM on the same day by a RS police officer in Previle for not having a "Serb" driving licence. UN IPTF received a complaint on 13 March from a Croat man who said he was fined 20 DM by police near Jezero (RS) for not having a tow rope in his vehicle, but was issued a receipt for only 10 DM.

Freedom Of Thought / Expression / Association

Minorities and Opposition Party Members Fear Job Dismissals OSCE reports that 10 high school teachers in Cazin (Fed) have expressed concern that they may soon lose their jobs because they were not "invited" to take an upcoming certification exam, a requirement for continued employment. Two of these teachers are the only remaining minority staff at the school, and a number of the others are supporters of opposition political parties. The Office of the Federation Ombudsmen and OSCE human rights monitors have been investigating these cases, which follow a pattern of harassment and discrimination against opposition party supporters, and to a lesser extent, minorities, in the Cazin area.

Other Human Rights Issues

Serb Man Acquitted in Sarajevo In the first verdict of its kind rendered since the signing of the Peace Agreement, on March 6 the Sarajevo High Court acquitted Momir Covic, a Serb man facing war crimes charges in a Federation court, of all charges. The presiding judge ruled that the acquittal was required due to lack of evidence. Covic had been held in Sarajevo Centar prison since his arrest in the Sarajevo suburbs following the transfer of authority on 29 March 1996. International observers, present throughout the trial, welcomed the objectivity and impartiality of the court in reaching its decision, especially given concerns raised over Covic's inability to call witnesses on his behalf. Human rights monitors note that Covic's acquittal is an important step toward diminishing concerns over whether local courts are able to provide fair trials to defendants regardless of their ethnicity and toward restoring confidence in the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. In its press statement of 6 March, the HRCC welcomed this development and urged both entities to build upon this decision by strengthening their efforts to ensure fair trials for all defendants. The HRCC also called upon the media in both entities to report on Covic's trial impartially and with proper regard for the importance of the proceedings.

Institutional And Policy Developments

New RS Human Rights Groups Established International and domestic human rights organisations working in Prnjavor (RS) and Teslic (RS) have formed inter-agency working groups to exchange information and collaborate on responses to issues of concern in these areas. The two new groups,

like similar initiatives in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Banja Luka, Mostar and Bihac, will meet weekly to discuss developments in their regions, and will also coordinate monitoring tasks, including of the local courts. The working groups have also been involved in identifying reconstruction and reconciliation projects for funding by NGOs and other sources. The HRCC is examining ways to support the efforts of these working groups and to strengthen links between Sarajevo-based human rights monitors with monitors working in the field.

NOTE: *The HR Report is based on the most recent information available to the OHR from inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations. Questions on specific items should be directed to the reporting organisation or to the HRCC. Please send information for inclusion in the report to 387-71-447-420, attention Leah Melnick or by e-mail to leah.melnick@ohr.int.*

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