

Jorge Fuentes Monzonis-Vilallonga, Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, during his first visit to Zadar County conveyed a message to returnees:

“By the end of 2006 all reconstruction problems will be resolved”

By Nives Rogoznica

ZADAR - “Be a little more patient. This time things are really changing in the Government,” is the most frequent message which the Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, Jorge Fuentes Monzonis-Vilallonga, conveyed to the returnees in villages in the Zadar hinterland who are still waiting for their houses to be reconstructed.

Yesterday Ambassador Fuentes made his first visit to Zadar County since he was appointed to this post. He visited some returnee families in villages of the Zadar hinterland following closed-door meetings with Zadar Mayor Dr. Zivko Kolega and his deputies, Dr. Drazen Grgurovic and Dr. Rade Skarica, as well as with County Court President Antun Klismanic and Monsignor Ivan Prendja.

Fuentes: “Government’s promises are serious”

Fuentes said he will inform the Mayor and County Prefect about the situation he discovered in the field - the problems the returnees face when returning to their reconstructed houses or those who returned under forced circumstances despite not as yet receiving decisions for reconstruction. He will request them to in the shortest reasonable timeframe enable the returnees to live in their houses. The representative of the Administration for Multilateral and International Co-operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Marin Veic, accompanied Ambassador Fuentes and the Head of the regional OSCE Office for Zadar and Sibenik-Knin counties, Renate Herrmanns. Fuentes highlighted to his hosts in Smokovic and Biljane Donje that the arrival of Veic was one indicator that the Croatian Government had serious plans to solve the problems of reconstruction and the return of refugees.

“I recently spoke with your Prime Minister and was given an insight into the plan for the reconstruction of houses, which would solve this problem 100 percent. The implementation of this plan, for which I have strong promises from the Government, will start already in a few weeks and will be completed within 1.5 years. By the end of 2006, all problems of reconstruction, return, and repossession of property will be solved. It is understandable that you are impatient and that you have been waiting for a long time to have your houses reconstructed, to get electricity and water, but this time the promises of the Government are serious and the situation is different; also because the Croatian

Government is aware that if it does not solve these problems it will not be received in the EU which is a basic goal of Croatia,” stated the Head of OSCE Mission in Smokovic and Biljane Donje.

Lack of electricity and water supplier

Fuentes also promised upon his return to Zagreb on Friday that he will warn Zadar Mayor Zivko Kolega and Zadar County Prefect Ivo Grbic about the lack of electricity and water supply in these two villages and about the specific problems of certain returnees. For example, the problems of 65-year-old Danica Pavic from Smokovic, who, together with her 71-year-old husband Vladimir, returned four months ago despite the fact that until yesterday did not possess a decision for the reconstruction of her devastated family house. Fuentes promised that he would intercede with the local governance, regardless of the reconstruction schedule, for them to have a roof over their heads by the time winter comes. The hosts of the OSCE leadership in Smokovic were Milica and Milan Prostran, who returned to their reconstructed house a year ago, precisely on, as Prostran outlined, “Friday 13 August 2004”.

The OSCE representatives visited the family house of Sofija Skoric in Biljane Donje.

“We did not have any major problems, except one night, when a rock was thrown at our house. It was not an easy night for us. We dared to check the hole made by the rock only in the morning,” said Sofija Skoric. Fuentes continues his visit to Zadar County today when he will visit Ostrovica village, which, at the beginning of the week, was the scene of a cruel incident where several persons of Serb nationality were stoned.

Fire on Sonja Kranjc’s property - set alight intentionally?

During their visit to Biljane Donje, members of the OSCE Mission were astounded by a fire that started across from the house of their host, Sofija Skoric. According to the gathered villagers, the fire on the property of Sofija’s neighbour, Sonja Kranjc, started at around two o’clock in the afternoon. Sofija told how the owner of the property had lunch with her and about ten minutes after going home came back running in panic, claiming that “someone had thrown something that caused a fire”. We did not see Sonja Kranjc, while the fire brigade came to the scene two hours after the fire started. Sonja Kranjc lives in the ruins of her unreconstructed family house.

The representatives of the OSCE were stupefied with an inappropriate comment given by a police officer, who also came to the scene with a two hour delay saying that “Serb villages are nicely burning”. On the account of our journalist and photographer, a police officer and fireman gave a not less inappropriate comment: “Are you recording this for Belgrade newspapers?”