# Human Rights Watch

# Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

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# Annual reports

**Human Rights Watch World Report 1998**

## Human Rights Developments

The Helsinki region comprises the fifty-three countries of Europe and North America that are signatories to the 1975 Helsinki accords. Here we cover twenty-three of those countries (For discussion of the United States, *see* separate section, below), as well as a thematic section on asylum policies in the European Union.

The changing and expanding role of regional institutions-the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe-has been a dominant theme in the Helsinki region in recent years, with potentially significant implications for human rights. During 1997, this process culminated in the decision by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the quintessential post-World War II security institution, to invite three former members of the Warsaw Pact-the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland-to join the organization in its first round of expansion. From a human rights perspective, NATO enlargement and the anticipated parallel expansion of the European Union (E.U.), as well as the growing involvement in human rights monitoring by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, offered a unique opportunity for these institutions to emphasize their common principles of democracy, rule of law and human rights, and to insist that these principles be the minimum criteria for membership. But in 1997, as in previous years, regional bodies were too often willing to compromise their core values, dispensing with human rights principles for short-term gains. As the debate raged in Russia, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Turkey about the criteria for "entering Europe," it was increasingly unclear which minimum human rights standards these institutions and their member states were willing to uphold.

Although for NATO, security concerns remained paramount, during 1997 the alliance's leadership explicitly acknowledged that regional security was intrinsically linked to the rule of law and respect for human rights. The carrot of possible E.U. and NATO membership has contributed to the resolution of tensions among several states: Poland and Romania finally signed friendship treaties with neighboring states that addressed minority rights issues. Both organizations also took the opportunity to raise human rights concerns that would, if unresolved, be obstacles to future admission. However, critics noted that NATO had a double standard, tolerating oppressive minority policies, the systematic use of torture, and other serious human rights abuses among some of its current members, most notably Greece and Turkey.

While NATO pressed for human rights improvements in the context of its expansion, in Bosnia over 30,000 NATO-led troops were all but paralyzed by U.S. fears of casualties. After British Special Air Service troops' efforts to arrest two indicted war criminals in Prijedor in July, there was reason to hope that NATO finally understood the important role it could play in establishing individual accountability for genocide and war crimes as an essential component of any lasting peace. Unfortunately, as of this writing, no further arrests have been made.

During the year, the E.U. identified specific human rights concerns in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Slovakia that would be obstacles to ultimate membership, and resolutely condemned Slovakia's human rights record. Although the E.U. continued to express concern about Turkey's human rights record, it undermined this legitimate expression of concern during 1997 when the Dutch foreign minister, in his capacity as E.U.-term president, questioned whether a Muslim country such as Turkey had any place in Europe. The E.U. later stated that Turkey would be judgedby the same criteria as other potential members.

In Bosnia, the OSCE-dominated as it was by the U.S. government's determination to define the Bosnia mission as a success-continued to downplay human rights abuses in order to further its primary goal of municipal elections. It refused to publicize some human rights abuses for fear of offending abusive officials and violated its own electoral regulations prohibiting the participation of political parties in the municipal elections if they maintain indicted persons in a party position or function. However, some OSCE field staff-often under difficult and even dangerous conditions-actively monitored human rights abuses and pressed local authorities to address human rights concerns, sometimes despite pressure from the regional or national OSCE leadership. In countries such as Belarus, the OSCE was more willing to condemn human rights violations.

In recent years, the Council of Europe has admitted several new members without first insisting that they meet the council's own human rights standards. The benefits of constructive engagement appeared speculative, at best, on the first anniversary of Russia's admission to the council in February, when incontrovertible evidence was presented that Russia's human rights record had deteriorated in the intervening year. Similarly, the council was unable to wrest any significant human rights improvements from the Croatian government in the year following its November 1996 admission. However, in the Caucasus-with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia being the only countries currently under consideration for admission-the council appeared to be taking a more principled stand, and it suspended Belarus' guest status in January because of that country's human rights record.

The devastating consequences of ignoring human rights abuses to achieve strategic goals were abundantly clear in the case of Albania, where

the international community had offered unconditional support and substantial economic aid to the government of Sali Berisha despite mounting evidence of human rights violations. Sparked by the collapse of high-interest-bearing investment companies in early 1997, but fomented by Berisha's complete disregard for human rights, angry protests became violent, and anarchy gradually spread throughout the country. A state of emergency was declared on March 3, the OSCE helped to broker a government of national reconciliation in March, international peacekeeping troops were sent to the country in April, and early elections in July resulted in Berisha's ouster.

In 1997, fewer areas in the Helsinki region were plagued by armed conflict than in previous years. Over 30,000 NATO troops kept the peace in Bosnia, and cease-fires negotiated in previous years continued to hold in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan), and Moldova. There was progress even in some of the region's most entrenched conflicts: in June, the inter-Tajik talks brought a formal albeit extremely fragile end to the five-year civil war in Tajikistan. The new Labour government in Britain was able to reinvigorate the Northern Ireland peace process in the second half of 1997, facilitated by a renewed cease-fire by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in July. Despite these gains, however, the need to address human rights concerns and issues of accountability in order to create a stable, longterm peace in many former areas of conflict remained an unanswered challenge.

Persons responsible for abuses during armed conflicts continued to exert political and economic control in Bosnia, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), Georgia, Tajikistan, and Chechnya, and their ongoing influence hampered efforts to return displaced persons to their homes, as well as to create state institutions to protect human rights. British SAS troops arrested one indicted person and killed another who resisted arrest in Prijedor in July, and because of intense international pressure, ten Bosnian Croats turned themselves over to the International CriminalTribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in October.

Although there appeared to be a lower level of fighting in the thirteen-year conflict in southeastern Turkey, security forces continued to commit serious human rights abuses especially against the Kurdish minority. The Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK) continued to commit extrajudicial killings, kidnapping, extortion, and destruction of property. The IRA continued to carry out acts of violence against civilians and police until it renewed its cease-fire in July. Non-state actors attempting to influence politics and post-war settlements in Chechnya and Tajikistan continued to commit humanitarian law violations, including summary executions, hostage-taking, and torture.

Torture and other inhumane treatment remained common practice in Armenia, Azerbaijan, FRY, Georgia, Russia, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Little progress was made in eradicating torture, in large part because torturers were rarely punished and confessions extracted under torture were frequently admitted into evidence by national courts. Such practices were all the more troubling in those countries that continued to enforce the death penalty, such as Kazakstan and Turkmenistan.

Police brutality and violations of due process continued to be a chronic problem. During 1997, police used excessive force to break up peaceful demonstrations in Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, FRY, Georgia, and Macedonia, and deaths due to ill-treatment in custody were reported in Bulgaria and FRY. Police harassment and brutality were often directed at the region's most vulnerable groups, such as ethnic and racial minorities, the homeless, refugees and homosexuals. Before Moscow's 850th anniversary celebration, for example, police violence and predatory behavior increased noticeably against Caucasians, Central Asians, refugees from poorer countries, and the homeless. Roma continued to suffer pervasive mistreatment by the police and racially motivated attacks by private individuals with state complicity, as well as discrimination in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, FRY and Slovakia.

Overcrowding and substandard facilities, as well as poorly trained staff, contributed to abysmal prison conditions. Ill-treatment and the excessive use of force by prison officials were also reported in many countries, including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In one of the worst cases of 1997, security forces in Tajkistan quelled a prison riot in the northern city of Khojand, killing at least twenty-four prisoners and wounding thirty-five others.

In recent years, there has been an escalation in reports of racial and ethnic intolerance and discrimination in the region, as citizens and governments alike have sought scapegoats for the social and economic ills produced by the transition from communism-in the countries of the former Soviet Union and of Eastern and Central Europe-and by the growing number of legal and/or illegal migrants and asylum seekers, especially in the countries of Western Europe. In addition to rampant persecution of ethnic and racial minorities throughout the region, discrimination and police abuse against homosexuals was reported in Bulgaria and Romania, and women faced widespread discrimination and were routinely denied the equal protection of the law. Women victims of crime, such as domestic violence, rape, and forced prostitution, faced obstacles in trying to obtain justice for the crimes against them. Women also faced severe abuses in conflict and post-conflict situations. Refugees and asylum seekers often existed in a bureaucratic limbo without a concrete legal status, making them more vulnerable to police abuse, harassment, and discrimination in host countries. In Russia, for example, police refused to register refugees from outside the Confederation of Independent States, exposing them to routine beatings, extortion and eviction by police. E.U. member states continued to enforce ever more restrictive asylum policies, leading, in some cases,to *refoulement*, in contravention of international law.

Religious persecution was increasingly frequent, as so-called "traditional" religions attempted to protect their privileged position from the influx of "new" religious groups. A disturbingly vague and discriminatory law was signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, revoking almost all rights from "minority" religious groups existing in Russia for less than fifteen years. In Bulgaria and Greece, the government refused officially to register certain religious groups, who, in some cases, reported discrimination and attacks by police.

In other countries in the region, governments took steps to counter the perceived threat of Islamic "fundamentalism." In Turkey, the civilian government, under severe pressure from the military, sought to close controversial state-supported religious schools and took steps to ban the Islamist Welfare Party (Refah).

The independent media were the targets of systematic government harassment. Pressure from various governments amounted to a tacit acknowledgment of the growing power of independent media which, bolstered by advanced technology, are increasingly difficult to silence. Journalists were harassed, ill-treated by the police, and sometimes arrested, in Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, FRY, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Strict libel laws were often used to intimidate government critics, the politically motivated misuse of criminal statutes was also common. State-controlled media not only denied citizens access to diverse views, but were sometimes used by governments to incite violence and ethnic hatred. State control over the broadcast media also had negative implications during elections in Bosnia, Croatia, and FRY, where opposition candidates were at an overwhelming disadvantage in getting their message out to the electorate.

**The Right to Monitor**

In many countries in the Helsinki region, human rights organizations-both domestic and international-were able to work without

governmental interference. More importantly, in much of the region, the vibrant community of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly represented a check on official conduct. During 1997, NGOs formed coalitions to ban anti-personnel landmines, to call for an international criminal court, to insist that indicted persons from the former Yugoslavia be arrested, as well as to raise other human rights concerns. In several countries, local human rights organizations became increasingly expert at using international mechanisms to pursue remedies for human rights abuses.

However, in several countries, human rights activists continued to face governmental repression. Although Turkey has a dedicated and vocal human rights community, human rights activists were arrested during the year and human rights publications were banned. The leaders of two of Turkey's most prominent human rights groups faced criminal prosecution during 1997. Local authorities in the Russian provinces carried out a wave of repression against human rights activists during late 1996 and 1997; at least four activists were arrested, and the charges against them were believed to be motivated solely by local officials' desires to silence their most forceful critics. In countries such as Albania, Bosnia, FRY, Greece and Uzbekistan, human rights monitors were subjected to police surveillance and various forms of official harassment. In the ethnic Albanian region of Kosovo, FRY, human rights activists were often detained and occasionally ill-treated. The conditions in Turkmenistan remained so repressive that no groups or even individuals were able to monitor human rights violations. The precarious security situation in Tajikistan created severe obstacles for both domestic and international human rights monitors.

Human Rights Watch honored Fatos Lubonja, a co-founder and member of the Albanian Helsinki Committee who had been imprisoned from 1974 to 1991 for his writings, at our annual human rights monitors event in November.

## The Role of the

## International Community

There was ample proof during 1997 that investments of financial, human and military resources were no substitute for a clearly articulated human rights policy and the political will to back it up. NATO's refusal to order the arrests of persons indicted for war crimes in Bosnia, continued to impede most other efforts to obtain civilian compliance with the Dayton agreement. By year's end, economic aid and human resources that had been poured into Bosnia had achieved only modest compliance with the Dayton agreement. International leaders were determined to call the Bosnian peace effort successful-often narrowly defined as the completion of elections and the maintenance of a cease-fire-and therefore were often reluctant to take any concrete action that might affect the perception of a foreign policy success. Human rights in Albania deteriorated dramatically in early 1997, despite the enormous political and financial support given to the Berisha government from 1992-1996.

### United Nations

United Nations peacekeepers and military monitors continued to play an important role in maintaining security and, to a lesser extent, monitoring human rights in the region. The very presence of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES) was widely recognized as having prevented a massive exodus of ethnic Serbs from the region during the year. UNTAES continued to take an active role in monitoring human rights, and its troops carried out the first arrests of indicted war crimes suspects by international forces in the former Yugoslavia. In Georgia, the U.N. Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMiG) was largely unsuccessful in fostering the return of refugees and displaced persons from Abkhazia, although it continued to monitor the peace settlement in that region. Although the U.N. Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) in Macedonia contributed to short-term regional and domestic security concerns, but gave little attention to the human rights developments in the country that present a risk to long-term stability. The U.N. Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) and the office of the U.N. secretary-general played an important role in the conclusion of a peace accord ending the five-year civil war. However, UNMOT's reduced presence in Tajikistan during the year precluded it from actively deterring abuses.

In Bosnia, the U.N. International Police Task Force (IPTF) achieved only modest results in restructuring the local police forces in the federation; in the RS, it did not even obtain the agreement of the local authorities to carry out its restructuring mandate until late September. Although in late 1996 the IPTF was given an expanded mandate to investigate human rights violations by local police, its 120-member human rights investigative unit was not fully operational as of October 1997. Follow-up in serious cases of human rights abuses remained inconsistent, and the results of independent investigations were often delayed or never reported publicly. The IPTF did conduct thorough investigations in a few prominent cases, but generally failed to take full advantage of its new powers.

U.N. human rights bodies, including the Human Rights Committee, the Committee Against Torture, the Committee on Elimination of Religious Discrimination, and the special rapporteur onthe independence of lawyers and judges, were active in the Helsinki region during 1997, highlighting serious human rights abuses in several countries, including in Bulgaria, Georgia, the U.K. (Northern Ireland), and Russia.

### European Union

The European Union's human rights record was mixed during 1997. On the one hand, it was critical of Croatia's failure to cooperate with the ICTY and to comply with its human rights obligations, and threatened trade sanctions for 1998 if the situation did not improve. However, in April, the E.U. granted FRY preferential trade status despite President Milosevic's attempts to annul the Serbian opposition's electoral victory and ongoing human rights violations in FRY. It later announced that the preferential trade status would be revoked if the FRY did not improve its human rights record by the end of the year and sent a delegation to the country in October to assess progress in this regard. The E.U. did criticize ongoing human rights violations against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

European institutions and governments remained content, during 1997, to allow U.S. interests to dominate Bosnia policy. In one commendable step, British special forces carried out an arrest effort-the only one to date-in the Bosnian Serb town of Prijedor, arresting one indicted person and killing another during a shoot out. But U.S. pressure prevented other such initiatives. Instead, Europe concentrated on providing financial incentives for compliance with the Dayton agreement. Even this policy was ambiguous, however, despite the E.U.'s professed commitment to conditionality of aid, the E.U. neglected to create mechanisms to help distribute aid at the micro-level, opting instead to suspend all non-humanitarian aid to the Republika Srpska.

During 1997, the E.U. was a vocal critic of the Belarusian government's human rights record. During its review of potential candidates for future E.U. membership, it raised concern about specific human rights abuses in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. The E.U. continued to insist on provisions relating to human rights and democratization in its partnership and cooperation agreements (PCAs) with non-member states. But it undercut these positive standards in some cases. For example, although the E.U. had not

yet ratified PCAs with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan because of human rights concerns, interim agreements with these countries lessened its leverage for obtaining human rights improvements. The European Parliament was more consistent: it continued to block payment of adjustment fees related to its 1995 customs union agreement with Turkey on human rights grounds and issued a strongly worded resolution condemning, among other things, torture, ill-treatment and prison conditions in Russia.

**Organization for Security and**

**Cooperation in Europe**

In recent years the OSCE has expanded its human rights monitoring efforts in several countries in the region, devoting large numbers of staff and resources especially in Bosnia. While the OSCE's increasingly active role could have been a positive development, to date its work has often been compromised by the political interests and goals of the OSCE and its most powerful member states. In Bosnia, the OSCE refused to publicize some human rights abuses, defended its own performance, and sometimes tried to undermine the credibility of independent monitors, often to the dismay of its own human rights staff. Given this record, there was little reason to celebrate the organization's decision to send 250 human rights monitors to Eastern Slavonia. The OSCE also failed to exploit key opportunities to raise human rights concerns in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

By contrast, in Belarus, the OSCE forcefully condemned the human rights record of PresidentAleksandr Lukashenka's government and initiated negotiations to open a permanent OSCE office in Minsk, while in Tajikistan its field offices played a significant role in monitoring human rights abuses. In Albania, the OSCE helped broker a deal between the government of then president Sali Berisha and the opposition to form a reconciliation government until new elections could be held in June. The OSCE helped organize and monitor the elections, which went off relatively peacefully. The OSCE planned to establish permanent representatives in Belarus and Georgia (Abkhazia), and its representative in Chechnya criticized human rights developments during the year. In response to large-scale demonstrations to protest election violations in FRY, the OSCE sent a mission, which confirmed massive electoral fraud and pressed the government to accept the electoral results.

**Council of Europe**

Consistent with its previous decisions to admit countries that clearly did not comply with the organization's most basic human rights tenets, the Council of Europe admitted Croatia as a member in November 1996. The council monitored respect for human rights in Russia during the year, but its assessment remained confidential. In 1997, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were being considered for membership. However, the council accurately concluded that Armenia did not yet meet its human rights standards, and an assessment of human rights in Azerbaijan was pending as of this writing. It also suspended Belarus' guest status in January, reflecting the widespread violations of human rights in that country. The council ended it special monitoring of Romania in April, but warned that such monitoring would resume if the government did not address certain human rights concerns.

**NATO**

On July 10, NATO undertook its first action to arrest indicted war crimes suspects in the former Yugoslavia. NATO's actions in Prijedor quieted any doubt that the arrest and surrender of indicted persons by international troops in Bosnia could be carried out in accordance with the current mandate of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) and that any reprisals could be contained. Disappointingly, however, no further arrests were made by SFOR. Instead, SFOR resorted to its previous and now well-worn excuses for inaction. Throughout the year, there were repeated and credible reports that SFOR troops failed even to uphold their mandate-to arrest indicted persons only when encountered-as they narrowly defined it.

**United States**

There was a noticeable contrast between the U.S. government's forceful condemnation and effective strategies against human rights abuses in some countries and its subversion of human rights concerns to strategic and economic interests in others. The U.S. remained highly engaged in Bosnia during 1997, but its policy continued to be driven by U.S. domestic political considerations. Although the Clinton administration voiced its strong support for the British SFOR arrest action in Prijedor in July and continued to insist on its firm commitment to bring war criminals to justice, the U.S. worked behind the scenes to prevent further such arrests in the follow-up to municipal elections in September. The U.S. also continued to advocate for human rights conditionality of economic aid to the region, but the administration did not create the mechanisms to ensure that aid would not enrich those indicted for war crimes or those who obstructed the Dayton agreement.

Although critical of human rights abuses in Armenia, the U.S. failed to use the significant leverage that it had-due primarily to massive, long-term U.S. aid to that country-to obtainconcrete improvements. U.S. oil interests took precedence over human rights concerns in Azerbaijan, and although the U.S. government reportedly expressed concern about the country's poor human rights record to government officials, no public condemnation was issued. Largely motivated by regional security concerns, the U.S. failed to criticize human rights abuses in Macedonia, especially those against the ethnic Albanian population. Although it did openly criticize the Turkish government's human rights record, this criticism was often tempered by its strategic interests in that country.

By contrast, the U.S. was the main force behind the maintenance of economic sanctions in FRY, forcefully condemning abuses in Kosovo, as well as violations in Serbia proper, and refusing to restore full diplomatic relations unlike the E.U. member states. Similarly, the U.S. took a leading role in raising human rights concerns in Croatia. In June, the U.S. blocked a World Bank loan to Croatia and, in September, called on the Council of Europe to suspend Croatia because of its human rights record. The Clinton administration was also a vocal critic of abuses in countries such as Belarus, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Slovakia, and Uzbekistan, and raised human rights concerns in Bulgaria and Romania as part of the debate on NATO expansion. After six years of unequivocal support, the U.S. government criticized Albanian President Sali Berisha's violent suppression of civic protest and supported new elections.

## The Work of

## Human Rights Watch/Helsinki

Convinced that the failure to arrest indicted persons would have long-term repercussions for human rights in the Balkans and beyond, Human Rights Watch continued to give top priority to the arrest of indicted war crimes suspects during 1997. Other priorities in the region

included: insisting on conditionality of aid to Croatia and FRY, challenging xenophobia and the mistreatment of migrants in Russia, building respect for human rights and democratic principles in Albania, Belarus and FRY, exposing severe abuses in Central Asia and the Caucasus to international scrutiny, opposing torture and restrictions on freedom of expression in Turkey, ensuring that human rights were a component of peace negotiations in several countries in the region, and urging the European Union not to undermine refugee protection.

Human Rights Watch employed a three-pronged strategy for its work in Bosnia: systematic documentation and exposure of human rights violations by all sides, a focus on the failure of international actors to stop abuses, and a campaign for the arrest and prosecution of persons indicted for war crimes. In an effort to highlight the continuing influence of indicted war crimes suspects, we concentrated our research on key cities and towns where abusive local officials who were responsible for atrocities during the war exert ongoing political and economic control, making an effort to investigate human rights violations by all ethnic groups. In a December 1996 report, we showed that underground Bosnian Serb paramilitary organizations led by the ruling nationalist-based Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), continued to destabilize the peace process and obstruct implementation of the Dayton agreement by IFOR and other international bodies. In a follow-up report issued in January 1997, we demonstrated that the same warlords who had "ethnically cleansed" the town of Prijedor retained total control in the post-war period over key economic, infrastructure, and humanitarian sectors of the community. Two of the individuals featuredprominently in our report were later indicted by the tribunal and were the subject of the first arrest efforts by SFOR in July. The third report in this series, issued in August, documented the systematic persecution of those who are not members of Alija Izetbegovi 's Party of Democratic Action (SDA), particularly those who fought on the Bosnian-Serb side during the war, by local authorities in the Una Sana canton. During the year, we also conducted a fact-finding mission to Croat-controlled areas in and around Mostar; investigated the human rights concerns of Bosnian women in the post-conflict period; and conducted an evaluation of the role played by the IPTF in vetting the police force in Bosnia.

We continued to make accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity during the war a priority of our work in the former Yugoslavia. Through our reports, numerous articles in the press, and in a broad-based international NGO coalition, we maintained pressure on Western leaders to order SFOR troops in Bosnia to arrest the remaining war crimes suspects. The *Arrest Now!* campaign was launched on July 10, to coincide with the second anniversary of the fall of Srebrenica. A press briefing was conducted in Madrid (at the time of the NATO summit), and press conferences were held in Washington, D.C., London, Paris and Sarajevo by Human Rights Watch and its partners on the campaign. We released an open letter- signed by more than 130 prominent individuals and ninety organizations from throughout Europe- to European political leaders on September 9 calling for NATO action to arrest war crimes suspects.

In Croatia and FRY, Human Rights Watch focused on the governments' crackdown on civil society, as well as ongoing discrimination against ethnic minorities, and pressed for all financial assistance to be linked to respect for human rights. In an effort to highlight human rights concerns that needed addressing before the transfer of authority in the only remaining Serb-controlled region of Croatia, in an April report we warned that unless the international community pressured Croatia to fulfill its human rights obligations, the transition could bring more violence and displacement to the region. In June, we successfully urged the United States government to use its influence to block a U.S.$30 million loan to Croatia because of that country's human rights record and failure to cooperate with the ICTY. In an effort to prevent a mass exodus of ethnic Serbs at the time of the transfer of authority in Eastern Slavonia, we met with Croatian government officials and senior representatives of the international community to urge respect for human rights guarantees; we also monitored the treatment of ethnic Serbs in the Krajina. Before the Serbian elections in September 1997, we released a report analyzing electoral violations during the November 1996 municipal elections and documenting police abuse during mass demonstrations in Belgrade to protest those violations. We conducted detailed investigations into minority rights in Sandzak and Vojvodina, as well as Kosovo. A report on violations against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo was released in December 1996. In statements and reports, we also criticized Milosevic's failure to cooperate with the ICTY.

To keep the legacy of abuse committed during the war in Chechnya a vital issue in Russia and among international institutions, we published two reports about the war's aftermath: one addressed to the OSCE Review Conference in November 1996, the other timed for the January 27 presidential elections in Chechnya. In February, the first anniversary of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe, we issued a report enumerating Russia's failure to implement Council of Europe requirements, including its conduct during the Chechnya conflict and continued use of the death penalty. Building on our research and advocacy- locally and among the international community-on xenophobia, refugee rights and residence restrictions, we documented the Moscow residence permit system and the predatory and racist way in which it is enforced. Our Moscowoffice intervened in several specific cases and conducted regular advocacy to stop the extradition of refugees to other CIS countries. In an effort to secure a veto on the discriminatory law on religion, we urged the international community through numerous letters, briefings and other advocacy efforts to register concern about the deeply flawed law and issued a series of letters to President Boris Yeltsin, the Council of Europe, and individual European leaders about our concerns. As provincial authorities attempted to silence local human rights activists and public defenders, we petitioned the Russian procurator general's office to secure their release.

Due to the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and Albania, our work in these countries took on a new urgency during 1997. Beginning soon after the crisis erupted in early 1997, three separate field missions to Albania allowed Human Rights Watch to document and publicize violations-such as the banning of demonstrations, police brutality, and the harassment of key opposition politicians, journalists, and government critics by the secret police-as they were taking place and to provide information to policymakers and the public. We followed up our field work with numerous statements and letters of concern addressed to the Albanian government and the international community. After the June elections, we worked to make international aid to Albania conditional on respect for human rights. In September, Human Rights Watch representatives met officials of the new government to discuss human rights concerns, including judicial reform, depoliticization of state institutions, and government respect for a free press.

Based on an April mission to Belarus to investigate the government's crackdown on civil society, we issued a severely critical report in August at press conferences in Minsk and Moscow and met with Belarusian government officials to present our findings and recommendations. As follow-up, we urged the Clinton administration, the OSCE and the E.U. to censure and isolate the regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka if human rights violations continued. We also pressed the Russian government to use its influence in Belarus to obtain human rights improvements.

The countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus suffer from numerous human rights violations, including to varying degrees torture and other mistreatment in detention, pervasive disregard for due process, strict control of the mass media, police brutality, and abysmal prison conditions. To highlight and expose human rights abuses there to greater international scrutiny, in light of the Council of Europe's review of human rights conditions in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia for possible membership, as well as the growing international business interest in the region, Human Rights Watch began the process of establishing a permanent field office in Tbilisi, Georgia from which to monitor

human rights in the Caucasus. During 1997, we made submissions to the U.N. Committee Against Torture (October) and the U.N. Human Rights Committee (March) highlighting ongoing concerns in Georgia. In March, we also made a submission to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights regarding serious human rights violations in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. A mission is underway in Azerbaijan as of this writing. In Uzbekistan, police brutality and the government's backtracking on its commitments to respect the independence of the press were the primary themes in our work.

In Turkey, we continued to press the government to put a stop to torture, including by holding abusive police accountable. We issued a report in March that exposed the systematic pattern of torture and other abuse by anti-terror police units, which have methodically incorporated torture and abuse into their daily operations, utilizing special equipment, including special straps to bind detainees, high-pressure hoses, racks for suspending suspects by their arms, and instruments to apply electric shock. We also conducted a fact-finding mission to the country in September to investigate ongoing violations of freedom of expression.

During 1997, Human Rights Watch attempted to make constructive recommendations related to cease-fires and peace talks in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and Tajikistan. Taking lessons from other peace processes, we worked throughout the year to identify human rights concerns -most importantly, accountability for abuses committed during the conflicts, confidence-building measures such as the vetting of abusive military and police forces, and the creation of institutions to address the complaints of civilians- that would be essential to any successful peace process. We were intensely engaged in Northern Ireland during the year and worked with a coalition of human rights groups to monitor police action during the 1997 marching season. We issued a report analyzing police practices in Northern Ireland in May, at press conferences in London and Belfast, and met with government officials in Belfast, Dublin and London to discuss our findings. In Tajikistan, our field office monitored human rights during the peace negotiations, investigated the political crackdown in the Leninabad region, and raised our concerns about the treatment of Tajik refugees and returnees in numerous international fora.

Human Rights Watch continued to highlight the human rights implications of the European Union's increasingly restrictive asylum policies, believing that E.U. policies not only increased the risk of refoulement in individual cases, but also ran the risk of undermining internationally guaranteed refugee rights worldwide. In 1997, we continued to monitor asylum policies at the E.U. level, as well as in Sweden, the U.K., Germany, France, and the Netherlands, issuing reports on the Netherlands and on France during the year. In February, we called on E.U. member states to reject Spain's proposal to eliminate the right of E.U.-member-state nationals to seek asylum in the E.U. and, in April, we cosponsored a meeting of nongovernmental organizations, parliamentarians, and representatives of the European Commission and Council of Ministers to discuss the commission's proposed joint action on temporary protection.

In 1997, we remained committed to documenting human rights abuses against Roma and pressing governments to address the difficult problems of racially motivated violence both by private and state actors. Following up on a 1996 report on police abuse against Roma in the Czech Republic, we issued a translation of the report in 1997 and conducted numerous meetings with Czech government officials to urge progress on specific recommendations contained in the report.

*For a listing of relevant reports, missions and letters, see at the end of this report. Partial listings also follow each country chapter*.