Mrs POPTODOROVA (*Bulgaria*).- I will begin with a banal truism, by stating that the greatest harm done at times of war is that inflicted on children. Adults are better equipped to survive. Children, being absolutely vulnerable and unable to defend themselves, bear for the rest of their lives the scars inflicted on them at times of war.

Producing the report on the children of Kosovo created many grim impressions. Those of us who visited Kosovo suffered with the children all their experiences both before and after the peace agreement. So the report covers both refugee and repatriated children.

The consequence of the cruel policies pursued by a person who wanted to be the dictator of the whole region, Mr Milošević, was that a mass of people left the province of Kosovo, leading to an exodus to neighbouring countries - Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. A high proportion of the people who left the area were children, and this is the time and place to commend the governments of Albania and Macedonia for having taken such good care of so many people, especially children, who poured across their boundaries within days. I shall also make a special mention of the efforts of Unicef, which was so quick to organise child care and education on the spot. Without Unicef's efforts education for the refugees would have been impossible.

The report gives an outline of how the refugee camps were organised in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, and focuses on several practical problems. Problem number one is the physical security of children. In times of war, that problem is easy to analyse and to try to combat and speak against, but even after repatriation it remains a problem because of the present situation in Kosovo. In all honesty, we must say that there is still a security vacuum there - again, that is most harmful and dangerous for children. Land mines have not yet been cleared from the area, which presents an immediate threat to the life and health of children.

Food and shelter were another problem, and although they are relatively well taken care of now, many of the houses and other buildings have not yet been restored, and many families live in temporary shelters, some of which have been made from kits provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organisations. Those are not really proper homes for children, so that remains an open issue to be dealt with, perhaps in the near future.

Education is the next problem, and I shall spend some time describing it. As I said, when people were refugees, Unicef installed temporary schools in all the camps. However, when they went back to their own places in Kosovo, they found their schools either badly ruined or entirely destroyed. That immediately posed the problem of where to study, and the post-conflict restoration of school premises. Curricula and textbooks are another sensitive issue. Kosovo is now trying to develop its own systems for everything - such as administrative and judicial systems - and I shall now say a few words about the education system that Kosovars need. It was understandable that they wanted to get as far away as possible from the Serb education system, and tried to develop an alternative system - which, unfortunately, was influenced by another country. The Council of Europe must send education experts to help them to develop an education system of their own, which would best fit the traditions and needs of Kosovo, and that will need teachers, curricula and textbooks.

While I am talking about education, I cannot ignore the most serious problem, which also has implications for the future - ethnic segregation, and ethnic tension, hostility and intolerance, which are increasing rather than decreasing. In Kosovo now, Albanian Kosovars

and non-Albanian Kosovars - that is, the few remaining Serb and Gypsy children - cannot go to school together, but attend school in shifts.

As the Assembly will know, in practice there are Serb enclaves where attempts are being made to establish some kind of schools - and, in my view, we have to put up with that segregated schooling for the time being, for the sake of giving those children at least some kind of education.

Another specific peculiarity of education in Kosovo is that although primary education gets a fair amount of attention, and higher education is the focus of political attention - unfortunately, it has become a political instrument - secondary education remains in oblivion. Again, assistance should be rendered to local groups and experts to improve secondary teaching.

There is a high percentage of drop-outs. We can imagine what the rural areas are like after the war, but there is also a problem of tradition. Especially in those rural areas, the percentage of girls who drop out of school is as high as 60%. So besides the remedies needed for the post-war situation, we also need, gently and persuasively, to teach different habits and traditions.

Prostitution and trafficking, which were non-existent in the traditional patriarchal Albanian family, have now begun to emerge, but there is nothing about that in the report, because when we were there, not enough information was available. Perhaps not enough symptoms of the phenomenon existed at that time. Unfortunately, however, in later discussions with people who have visited the area in recent weeks and months, I have been told that channels of trafficking and bringing young girls into prostitution are gaining ground in Kosovo. For criminal groups, that has become a rather profitable way of earning bread.

Some may say that the report comes rather late, but I would say that although it covers an earlier period, it is timely in terms of the problems outlined in it, and should urge us to further action.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you, Mrs Poptodorova. The next speaker is Mrs Vermot-Mangold, to present the opinion of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography.

Mrs VERMOT-MANGOLD (*Switzerland*) said that war robbed children of their future and of their joy for life. Adults and politicians had to shoulder the responsibility for this situation. The children of Kosovo could not return to their previous peaceful lives. An entire generation would have memories of rape and destruction. Health systems had broken down, families had been split up, and schools destroyed. Many women and girls had been traumatised by rape. Long-term help and psychological support would be needed. Well-trained people were needed to provide support for children who had been abused. Some children had been orphaned and had no social support. Children should be treated as individuals. Schooling needed to be provided. Tolerance was extremely important in Kosovo. Racism and enmity needed to cease. Children should be able to enjoy themselves.

Many countries were about to return the Kosovar Albanians who had sought refuge. Their return should be planned very carefully.