

Interview/Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, Peter Semneby

EUROPE AND EU MEMBERSHIP IS A VISION EVERYONE CAN SHARE IN CROATIA

“I hope Croatia will rapidly move towards the EU membership because that is where Croatia belongs”, is an opinion of Peter Semneby

The training for Councils and representatives of national minorities was attended by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, Ambassador Peter Semneby who willingly responded to invitation of the OSCE FC Sisak.

GS: Basic aim of republic of Croatia is to enter EU as soon as possible. What is the role of the OSCE mission in this process and what is your estimation of present situation in Republic of Croatia?

Most of the issues that we are working with in the OSCE Mission are related to political conditions which Croatia must fulfill for EU membership. We are working very closely with European Union and European Commission in order to support Croatia in addressing those issues. I hope that Croatia will rapidly move towards the EU membership because that is where Croatia belongs. I'm convinced that the vision of belonging to Europe is a powerful engine that could bring this country together and could be the bridging which would help to overcome the conflicts which are result of the war. Europe and the EU membership is a vision that can be shared among everybody in this country regardless of their ethnicity or background.

GS: What is the OSCE Mission doing in order for democratization process to be more efficient, e.g. Law on Media and Constitutional Law on National Minorities (CLNM)?

We have given the advises on drafts of both laws and we are doing it together with other organizations such as Council of Europe and European Union in order to ensure that the laws are in conformity with high international and European standards. Also we are supporting the implementation of these laws, particularly the CLNM implementation. With that aim, a first session for National minority representatives is being held with our support. By organizing such sessions we want to make sure that the laws will be implemented in a better way. There are still quite a lot of things to be done and we hope that we will move forward with big steps, for example in representation of National Minority Councils and representatives in state administration which is still not satisfactory.

On media legislation, the main outstanding issue at the moment is the appointment of the HRT Broadcasting council which should have been appointed already in accordance with the Law on Croatian Radio Television which was adopted in February this year. As a result of apparently politicized discussion over the appointment of members of this council, the HRT is at this moment in a kind of vacuum being sensitive to political influence which is not good for the organization. The Mission urges the Parliament and the Political parties to take resolute steps to ensure that the council is appointed as soon as possible.

GS: How does the Mission feel about the situation at this very moment and has there been any development or is the Mission dissatisfied with how the problems are being solved?

We have seen a lot of positive development over the past few years. A lot of this can be explained by the European integration perspective. Political efforts have been concentrated towards resolving the existing difficult issues and GoC together with local authorities have been encouraged to address difficult issues. On positive sides I would mention the statement by Prime Minister Racan who encouraged and called all refugees to return to Croatia and the exchange of the recent apologies of presidents of Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro in Belgrade. I think that these are the two very important steps towards contributing the stabilization and reconciliation in this area. The progress is seen in adopting the Law on the Area of Special State Concern, announcing the Government's programs which are being implemented in refugee return process in the formerly occupied areas and adoption of the Constitutional Law on Rights of National Minorities. However, the implementation of all these laws is very slow and much more efforts will have to be taken to ensure their better implementation.

GS: What is your assessment on how long will the OSCE Mission remain in Croatia and how much time will be needed to overcome all obstacles on the path to EU?

I wouldn't like to speculate on a concrete date. We have the mandate and very important tasks still ahead of us. As I already said, there is a progress in terms of legislation but the OSCE can provide a great support in the implementation of the legislation. I think that the OSCE can play a very useful and constructive role in some time to come. Our presence here is a temporary one but I will repeat that we have important tasks still ahead of us.

Interview/OSCE FC Sisak Regional Representative, Michel Dreneau
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What is the situation in Sisak-Moslavina County and co-operation between the OSCE and local authority representatives we found out from the OSCE Mission to Croatia FC Sisak Regional Representative, Michel Dreneau.

GS: What are the major problems in Sisak-Moslavina County and the OSCE assessment of the situation in this region as well as co-operation with local authorities, in particular with regard to the return of refugees?

Including Sisak-Moslavina County, we cover six counties in the region and co-operate with the local and regional authorities. Our action towards the local authorities is similar to the OSCE HQ action towards the Government of Croatia. Especially in Sisak-Moslavina County we are trying to approach and work together with all institutions and their representatives. What happens today is a part of this work, communication and is helping people to work together. In general we have very good relations and understanding with regional authorities in particular with the head of the County Administration, Mr. Stevo Bajic with whom we work together regularly. Also, we have activities of communicating with representatives of institutions but also with politicians, mayors and prominent persons from this area. We are still in the area which had been devastated in the war, which is visible in the walls, in the streets of villages and towns and also in the mentality of the people. Due to the hard living conditions in this area, the poor economy and social problems, it seems that some people are still looking back to the past and not thinking enough about the future to build new, better Croatia. I think that in this area all people have to work together and understand that the effort of all together can boost development of this region. With regard to this, local authorities and mayors may be of a great help.

GS: The biggest problem here is a return of property. What is your assessment of the situation regarding the property return?

We have seen that a number of problems have started being successfully resolved in this area. It is difficult to give a complete picture of the progress because we do not have access to all information from the field. But as the Ambassador Semneby said the progress in resolving of this problem in this area is visible. Still, there are outstanding cases which are not solved and we are going to deploy all our efforts in order to help these people.