



## NGOs

**N**GOs were born at the end of the 19th century with the creation of the Red Cross in 1863, as a result of citizens' efforts to participate in solving the problems of contemporary society. They practically installed themselves in all political, social and technical areas of life, making it difficult to think of a field not covered by these organizations which wanted to complete government actions through the prism of private endeavours. It should be noted that, at the beginning, governments looked upon NGOs with the same distrust with which NGOs looked upon the government bureaucracy. Intrinsicly, governments and NGOs have not always seen eye to eye, since the former thought that their actions were sufficient and that NGOs were therefore unnecessary and repetitive, seeking to criticize the administration and to rectify tasks already completed.

But with time, NGOs have not only increased in number but have moved further towards consolidating their activities and, through that, achieved the support and endorsement of citizens who - always critical of the official bureaucracy - saw NGO activities as very beneficial, altruistic and courageous. On many occasions NGOs operate in countries with great social difficulties with economic compensations significantly inferior to those of the envoys of governments or international organizations. Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders and Greenpeace are good examples of some of the most well-known and reputable NGOs.

No country escapes the effervescence of these organizations. Croatia is a good example in this regard. With its 4.5 million inhabitants, Croatia could be considered sufficiently represented in this field if it counted on no more than half a thousand NGOs. The fact is that it has approximately 30,000, and although half of them are of a cultural and sporting character, there still remain 15,000 associations of a political and social nature.



HOM attends a lunch with representatives of : GONG, Transparency International Croatia, Organisation for Civil Initiatives, Human Rights Centre and Centre for Peace, Non-violence & Human Rights, on 16 January, 2007.

These numbers are even more commendable if we take into consideration that there are only around 40,000 NGOs operating at the world level and that a country of such dimensions as Russia counts on no more than 4,000. It is also true that, at the opposite end, the U.S. has approximately two million NGOs and India almost as many.

Can this proliferation of organizations be considered positive or negative? It is evident that not all of them, have the required minimum level of infrastructure, personnel and means, which is the reason why their abilities are modest.

Nevertheless, the great proliferation of NGOs in Croatia must be considered as a positive sign. It reflects a strong citizens' inclination towards public causes, as well as their desire to engage in dialogue and association with others. Without a doubt, all this is positive for the country, denoting a high degree of democratization and heightened civic awareness. GONG in the field of monitoring of elections, Transparency International in the fight against corruption, Human Rights Centre, the Centre for Peace in the monitoring of war crime trials, OGI in the democratization of local administration, SDF in the defence of the Serb minority, ODRAZ seeking good directions in development of the city of Zagreb and CESI in the protection of joint education are some excellent examples of how NGOs should work in Croatia, with certainty, effectiveness, responsibility and honesty.



HOM and CSPM Unit attend lunch with the members of the Civil Society Working Group: former Head of the Government Office for Associations, MFA co-chair of the Working Group, members of the Council for Civil Society Development, 7 December, 2006.

Ambassador Jorge Fuentes, Head of Mission

## Calendar

- 5 January** - HOM attends Christmas Reception organized by the Serb National Council.
- 9 January** - Meeting with Serb minority MP Milorad Pupovac.
- 11-12 January** - HOM attends annual HOMs Meeting in Vienna - opening of the Spanish Chairmanship.
- 15 January** - Reception and concert on occasion of 15th anniversary of international recognition of Croatia, hosted by the President Stjepan Mesic, Parliament Speaker Vladimir Seks and Prime Minister Ivo Sanader.
- 16 January** - Lunch with representatives of prominent NGOs: GONG, Transparency International Croatia, Human Rights Centre, OGI Osijek and Center for Peace, Non-violence and Civil Initiatives Osijek.
- 17 January** - Christmas and New Year Reception hosted by President Mesić.
- 18 January** - Opening of Days of NGO.
- 23 January** - Police Hate Crimes Roundtable at the Police Academy.
- 25 January** - Morning briefing with Ambassador of Spain, H.E. Mr. Manuel Salazar.
- 26 January** - Morning briefing with Minister Marina Matulovic Dropulic.
- 29 January** - Roundtable on Victim Support, organized by Ministry of Justice.
- 30 January** - Reception at the Spanish Embassy marking the beginning of the Spanish Chairmanship.

The Mission visitor's photo gallery at MHQ



## Activities

### Open doors of the Mission

Anyone who visits the Mission Headquarters today cannot overlook the impressive array of photographs of prominent visitors who have accepted the Head of Mission's invitation to visit Zagreb HQ. Our visitors have all come to exchange information and ideas about their roles in government and society and the way the Mission works in partnership with Croatia toward the common goal of completing the OSCE Mandate and promoting a stronger democratic, rule of law based society, prepared to take its place among the leaders of the world community. A quick scan of the photo-wall shows the visits of the President and Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Culture, MMTD and Environment, representatives of the rule of law such as the President of the Supreme Court and Constitutional Court, the General Attorney, the Ombudsman for Human Rights, former Chairmen in Office, university rectors, opposition leaders, mayors, Director of the Police, and Radio and Television. The Mission's doors are open and it seems as if almost everyone wants to come and visit us. From the day the Mission began its work in Croatia it has held open its doors to visitors -- anyone seeking guidance or help in addressing the myriad post conflict problems which beset refugees and returnees alike following the 1991-95 conflict. Initially our open doors were almost exclusively the doors to our field offices and coordinating centers located in some 17 different cities across the Areas of Special State concern stretching from Beli Manastir in the Danube region to Split on the Dalmatian coast. Headquarters in Zagreb received a few people mostly seeking

legal assistance, the return of their apartments and support in battling the bureaucracy, but the numbers were relatively small. Notably during the first five or six years, few if any Government officials ever came as visitors. We went to them but the level of trust and partnership between us had not been established. Our offices seemed to be "off limits" for them. What began eleven years ago as a parade of troubled, unhappy, disoriented and uncertain visitors looking for help in our Field Offices has burst into a regular pilgrimage to the HQ following the Head of Mission's outreach to prominent Croatian leaders inviting them to visit us, to exchange ideas and experiences and develop a true partnership relationship with the Mission. As a result, it has become apparent to virtually everyone in Croatia that the Mission stands for true partnership with the entire society and all of its institutions, organizations and groups. The time and effort it took to convey that message in a convincing and effective manner reflects in turn the tremendous time and effort of all Mission staff over the past decade. Croatia's leaders and the average "man in the village" would not have come to us if we had not reached out to them, and demonstrated by years of conscientious effort that our commitment to all Croats meant that all Croats were welcome at "our house." The numbers of visitors and partners coming to us (rather than we going to them) continues unabated, and speaks volumes about the success which we and Croatia are experiencing together today.

Robert W. Becker, Deputy Head of Mission

### A touch of humanity - Children's smile

On a cold and foggy winter's day, a children's laugh is heard in the yard. Familiar faces bringing presents are warmly welcomed in over a hundred returnee homes!

With the years' end approaching, Mission members have traditionally gathered around to offer a touch of humanity for a worthy cause. This human gesture in December of last year was expressed by collecting clothes and shoes for adults and children alike in addition to toys. These were divided into a large number of packages which were delivered to selected recipients among returnee families, especially among their children. It is estimated that between 60 and 70 children - from new born babies to teenagers - were supplied with clothes. The highlight of our efforts was the princely sum of 11,000 HRK which was collected by Mission members from all offices in Croatia. 80 packages of food were put together, each containing five kilograms (kg) of flour, two liters of oil, three kg of rice, three kg of pasta, three kg of sugar, one kg of salt, one liter shampoo, and other foodstuffs. These were in turn distributed to returnee families during December. Reports received from all Field Offices naturally spoke of a joyful and happy atmosphere, as well as returnees' positive reactions together with their sincere appreciation for the received packages!

Maja Andrić Lužaić, R&I Unit



Tihomir Radosavljevic from the village of Markovci, near Pakrac is one of many children who received the OSCE humanitarian packages for Christmas.



# The Spokesperson's Office



Spokesperson's Office (L-R): Ljerka Drazenović, Public Information Officer, Antonella Cerasino, Spokesperson, and Nikolina Balija, Public Information Assistant

The Public Affairs and Media Unit has been active from the beginning of the Mission's operations in 1996 and underwent a major restructuring at the end of last year. Considering the positive trend in Croatian media, the media freedom chapter was closed and the unit was transformed into the Spokesperson's office.

Until last December, with over ten people working both at HQ in Zagreb and in the various field offices the unit was focusing on two main areas: to promote the visibility of the Mission and understanding of its mandate in Croatia to primarily, but not exclusively, media both in Croatia and abroad; as well as to monitor the development of media freedom in Croatia and provide advice to relevant media institutions and government offices.

The Spokesperson's Office, managed by Antonella Cerasino with the support of Ljerka Drazenović and Nikolina Balija, is the public face of the Mission and its first priority is to effectively attend journalists' requests. Responding to media enquiries in a timely manner, providing meaningful statements and explaining the Mission issues in a simple language are the Office's main focus in all its activities.

The office also ensures that the Mission's staff is properly informed on major developments in the country by compiling and reading every morning the main news of the day, and putting together a daily digest of Croatian news related to the Mission's mandate.

In addition the Spokesperson's Office performs a long list of other tasks such as ensuring the Mission's visibility at events, updating the website, writing press releases, reports, feature stories, producing the Courier as well as briefing vast audiences on the Mission's mandate.

Media freedom has dramatically improved over the past ten years. When the Mission began its operations in 1996 Croatian media faced the difficulties of a post-conflict situation with most media outlets politically controlled and independent media subject to overt pressure and harassment. At present Croatia's media operates under the guidelines of international conventions and agreements and domestic legislation guarantees freedom of

information and freedom of expression.

A major achievement was reached in 2006 when legislation relevant to libel was amended to eliminate imprisonment as a sanction for libel, which can now be punished only with a fine. The Mission however is still working with the Croatian Government to amend the Laws on Electronic Media and on HRT to ensure that the governing bodies regulated by these laws are shielded from the political interference.

The Mission also contributed to increased media professionalism with the organisation and funding of several training seminars as well as inviting politicians to appoint, as members at key posts such as the HRT's General Director and the members of the national news agency Hina's Steering Committee, professionals selected on the basis of their qualifications and without political interference.

Media freedom is by definition fluid, with the situation improving and new issues arising every day. Therefore despite the restructuring of the unit and the closure of the media freedom chapter, the Mission will continue within its mandate responsibility to observe how media freedom develops particularly in view of the 2007 Parliamentary elections which could see political pressure on the media increase.

Antonella Cerasino, Spokesperson

## Improving media coverage on elections

Parliamentary elections scheduled for the end of 2007 will be extremely important in proving the stability of the Croatian democracy and country's readiness to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. Fair and unbiased news coverage of both electoral campaigns and elections are fundamental for the conduct of free elections. Media plays a crucial role in informing voters about elections, therefore political parties and politicians could be tempted to exert their influence on journalists and media owners. For this reason, at the end of last year the Mission financed two training workshops for media on reporting on elections carried out by the International Center for Journalists (ICEJ). Selected journalists from media outlets all over Croatia have been trained to ensure balanced, correct and fair reporting of election and pre election time in Croatia. The training, which was a combination of theoretical lectures and practical exercises and simulations has helped participants to define standards of fair and balanced reporting, to identify critical campaign issues and stories, to define ethical standards, and to learn more about coverage formats. At the beginning of 2007 ICEJ will organize two similar trainings targeted specifically to TV journalists and media editors.



One of many media trainings supported by the Mission and organized by the International Center for Education of Journalists, 22 November 2006.

## Photo Gallery



HOM delivers a speech on the importance of human rights during the celebration of the Human Rights Day at Zagreb's main square, 7 December 2006.



Constitutional Court President, Petar Klarić visits MHQ, 14 December 2006.



Orthodox Bishop for Dalmatia Episcopo Fotije, Archbishop of Zadar Monsignor Ivan Prenda, Serb minority MP Milorad Pupovac, Serbian Ambassador Radivoj Cvetičanin, Ambassador of B-H Aleksandar Dragičević, and State Secretary for Development Zdravko Livaković spoke about the role of churches in promotion of grass roots reconciliation, Krka Monastery, 18 December 2006. The meeting was arranged by the OSCE Mission.



Spanish Ambassador and Representative of the Chairman in Office in Croatia, Manuel Salazar, spoke about objectives of the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship for 2007, MHQ, 25 January 2007.



Environment Minister Marina Matulović Dropulić spoke about construction of apartments for former OTR holders, MHQ, 26 January 2007.