

THE NEW SEMI-ANNUAL OSCE REPORT ON CROATIA'S PROGRESS IN THE FULFILMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

**Croatia is going in the right direction,
but it is far from reaching its goal**

Consistent efforts are required with regard to the return of Serb refugees, the reform of the judiciary and the rule of law, conduct of war crimes trials, and further implementation of minority rights, according to the OSCE

By Ladislav Tomicic

ZAGREB – The return of Serb refugees to Croatia, the reform of the judiciary and the rule of law, conduct of war crimes trials, and further implementation of constitutionally-guaranteed minority rights are the areas in which Croatia must put forth further “consistent efforts over a longer period of time”, according to the latest semi-annual report of the Mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on Croatia’s progress in the fulfilment of its international commitments. The report contains six chapters which are related to international commitments which Croatia must fulfil in order to achieve the intended degree of democracy and ensure its place in the EU.

“The situation in Croatia is better than it was six months ago. The country is going in the right direction, but a lot still remains to be improved,” said the new Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, Jorge Fuentes, who introduced himself yesterday to the Croatian public for the first time. In relation to the return of refugees, Fuentes assessed the situation in the field as serious and dramatic and stated that Croatia must provide returnees with living conditions worthy of the human being. The Head of the OSCE Mission also talked with Prime Minister Ivo Sanader about this problem, who presented to him the Government’s “Road Map”- a plan for the resolution of the refugee problems.

“The process of refugee return should be completed by the end of 2006,” stated Fuentes.

The necessary reform of the judiciary, which should ensure the rule of law in Croatia, was also mentioned as one of the required steps towards a higher degree of democratization, while, on this occasion, the Head of the Mission also stressed the role of the OSCE in the co-operation between Croatia and the Hague Tribunal.

“I talked with Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponte about this co-operation and we received confirmation that the OSCE would monitor war crimes trials transferred to Croatia from The Hague. We will provide our assistance towards having fair trials in Croatia, and this will be a good opportunity for the Croatian judiciary to show that it can carry out that task. I have noticed that the judiciary has a very poor rating in the Croatian public. I have read that judges are at the top of the list of corrupt officials, together with doctors and police officers, which is a particularity of Croatia. In other countries they are at the bottom of that list,” pointed out Fuentes.

Deadline for the return of occupancy/tenancy rights also beyond September

The application deadline for property return for former occupancy/tenancy rights (OTR) holders could be extended beyond September. The OSCE Mission will in September try to inform 200,000 Serb refugees about the possibilities of return through an information campaign under the slogan - "There is enough place here for everybody".

"We will not force anyone to return. If someone wants to return – that is good, if not – that is again good. We will try to extend the application deadline to be as long as possible, but that will not go on indefinitely," said the Head of the OSCE Mission.

Slobodna Dalmacija, 13 July 2005, p. 4

OSCE: Croatia made significant progress

By S. Selimovic

ZAGREB - "Croatia has made significant progress, but there are outstanding commitments in the areas of refugee return and the rule of law, which, because of their sensitivity, require more time and efforts. Prime Minister **Ivo Sanader** and his Government have committed to carry out important steps, including the adoption of an electoral law after the summer parliamentary recess as well as the implementation of a "Road Map" comprising of a series of tasks to resolve all refugee return issues by the end of 2006," said **Jorge Fuentes Monzonis-Vilallonga**, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, on Tuesday, while presenting the report of this Organization on Croatia's progress for the period between November last year and the present day.

"When Croatia carries out these outstanding steps, as well as its commitments towards the Hague Tribunal, we will be able to say that the implementation of the OSCE mandate is at an advanced stage," concluded Monzonis-Vilallonga.

The Head of the OSCE Mission paid special attention to the situation in the Croatian judiciary, in reference to which he said that it had a poor public image and that, according to the media, judges were at the top of the list concerning corruption, ahead of doctors and police officers. Fuentes also pointed out the co-operation with the OSCE and the Hague Tribunal, reflected in the monitoring of those war crimes processes which will be held before the domestic courts, which was also confirmed at the meeting with **Carla del Ponte** during her latest visit to Croatia.

The Head of Mission announced at the press conference that an information campaign for about 200,000 Serb refugees would be launched in September in relation to the possibilities of their return to Croatia. "However, that campaign does not mean that we are forcing or trying to persuade anyone to return," stressed Fuentes.

“We cannot leave Croatia with the business left undone, and the Croatian Government can have the greatest influence on our departure, by consistently fulfilling its internationally undertaken commitments, while we can only facilitate its progress,” said the first man of the OSCE to Croatia.

The OSCE Mission forwarded the semi-annual report on Croatia’s progress to the ambassadors of the 55 member states of this international organization, as well as to the European Commission and other EU institutions.

Jutarnji list, 13 July 2005

According to the Report of the OSCE Mission, Croatia is facing challenges of return and reform of electoral legislation

OSCE to Ivo Sanader: While amending the Electoral Law, also resolve the issue of Diaspora voting

By Veronika Reskovic

ZAGREB – The Croatian Government must invest necessary efforts in the field of refugee return, rule of law and protection of national minorities so that, along with full co-operation with The Hague, it would fulfil international obligations, is the main message contained in the new Report of the OSCE Mission to Croatia.

Satisfactory progress has been achieved in the development of democratic institutions and civil society, the enhancement of media freedoms and democratization of the police, while in the next months Croatia will face the challenges of return and reform of electoral legislation, is contained, *inter alia*, in the regular bi-annual Report of the OSCE.

The international community expects a lot from the so-called Road Map, a plan which was these days drafted by the Government pursuant to the Sarajevo Agreement. In this plan, the Government should set forth clear deadlines and funds necessary for the return of Serb refugees to Croatia, but also of Croats to Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, so that all return-related issues would be resolved by the end of 2006.

Return of Serbs

The OSCE estimates that approximately 300,000 Serbs had left Croatia, while only 65,000 have permanently returned. The most vulnerable group among Serb refugees is former occupancy/tenancy rights (OTR) holders because the Government has delayed the resolution of that problem. The OSCE expects that the Government will resolve the first group out of a total of 2,600 applications for housing accommodation in towns by the end of September. Repossession of private property and reconstruction are faring better, but there is still the problem of property which is returned to owners devastated as well as the problem of court proceedings initiated by temporary occupants against the owners for the return of investments. Obstacles to permanent return also include discrimination of Serbs in terms of employment and slow reconstruction of infrastructure, as noted by the OSCE. Minority members are still under-represented in the judiciary and state administration.

Croatia moving in a good direction

Jorge Fuentes, the new Head of the OSCE Mission, yesterday welcomed the Government's announcement that it would complete the reform of electoral legislation in the autumn. The Mission's recommendation is that it is necessary to resolve the out-of-country voting of Serb refugees, Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the Diaspora in a transparent manner. Another priority is to regulate voters' lists, the financing of pre-electoral campaigns, and to establish a permanent electoral commission, the OSCE deems.

"Croatia is moving in a good direction. The situation is better than it was before. There was acceleration in the last 2-3 months, after a standstill caused by the elections. When will our Mission be completed, depends only on Croatia," said Ambassador Fuentes at yesterday's press conference.

Ads on tolerance

Jorge Fuentes announced that the OSCE, in co-operation with Croatian Radio and Television (HRT), will start airing television and radio advertisements related to return and tolerance in September.

Vjesnik, 13 July 2005

Croatia moving in a good direction

By Julijana Strbic

ZAGREB – Croatia needs to invest additional efforts in the field of refugee return, rule of law and minority rights so that it would fulfil its international obligations, is the summary of the bi-annual Status Report of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which was presented on Tuesday in Zagreb by the Head of the OSCE Mission, Jorge Fuentes.

However, Fuentes stressed at the press conference that in the last three months the Croatian Government intensified efforts aimed at fulfilling its obligations and particularly stressed the fact that the Government undertook to implement the "Road Map" which should resolve all issues related to refugee return by the end of 2006. The promise made by Prime Minister Ivo Sanader on the amendments to the Electoral Law was also assessed as a significant step forward. "When Croatia fulfils those two steps, as well as the obligations towards The Hague, the implementation of the Mission's Mandate will reach an advanced stage," deems Fuentes.

According to the Spanish diplomat, the main shortcomings of the former electoral system are outdated voters' lists, non-transparent out-of-country voting, financing of pre-electoral campaigns and access to the media. "Despite some areas where things may be improved, the situation in Croatia is better than it was six months ago," concluded Fuentes, adding that the country is moving "in a good direction".

Vecernji list, 13 July 2005

OSCE on Croatia

By Z. B.

ZAGREB – “The situation in Croatia is better than it was six months ago and the country is moving in a good direction,” stated the Head of the OSCE Mission, Jorge Fuentes, while presenting the latest Report on Croatia’s fulfilment of its obligations. Fuentes stated that there was a significant acceleration in the last two to three months, which was primarily the result of the Government’s consent to present a plan for the resolution of the refugee problem and the announcement on amendments to the Electoral Law.