



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSCE Mission to Croatia

News in brief

16 May – 29 May 2007

New HRT Director General appointed

On 17 May, the Programme Council for Croatian Radio and Television (HRT) elected Vanja Sutlić as new Director General of the national broadcaster. Mr. Sutlić, previously acting HRT Director General and former deputy to the last HRT Director General, Mirko Galić, was elected for a four-year term. Competing with ten other candidates, Mr. Sutlić received the minimum number of votes required for the election to be valid. In an earlier round of voting in March, the Programme Council failed to elect a Director General, with no candidate, including Mr. Sutlić, receiving the required two-thirds majority.

In his presentation to the Programme Council as a candidate, Mr. Sutlić outlined his proposals for the reorganisation and improvement of HRT. These included the introduction of an independent editorial policy protected from political and other influence, an overhaul of the public broadcaster's finances, increased transparency in public procurement and greater reliance on electronic as opposed to print media for news and current affairs material. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Sutlić stressed that as the public broadcaster, HRT's credibility and standing must be built on honesty, transparency and fairness.

Government conference on new models for consultation with civil society

On 16 May, the Government Office for Co-operation with NGOs together with the Council for Civil Society Development organized a conference entitled, *New Models of Consultation between the Government and Civil Society Organisations*. This forms part of Government efforts to develop and implement the *Code of Positive Practice for Consulting with Civil Society Organizations* required by the National Strategy for Civil Society Development, adopted in February 2007.

The Code is expected to be a contentious issue as it regulates the relationship between various stakeholders responsible for creating public policy. Civil society organisations have lobbied the Government for years, requesting that a methodological approach to civil society consultation be developed so that the interests of all stakeholders within the society can be better co-ordinated. The conference was organised in anticipation of the drafting of new legislation in this area.

The active engagement of civil society institutions and the large turn-out of NGO representatives from across the country, indicates that civil society in Croatia is entering a new period of maturity, dialogue and partnership with the governmental sector.

First Government/Mission mandate related plenary in war-affected area

One of the biggest challenges to fulfillment of mandate-related issues is the often inadequate and delayed implementation at the local level, of Government commitments made at the national level. To better acquaint local authorities with these commitments, the Government in co-operation with the Mission recently began a series of meetings in war-affected areas where the Mission concentrates its field efforts.

The first meeting took place on 18 May, in the town of Benkovac in the Zadar hinterland and was chaired by the Minister of Maritime Affairs, Tourism, Transport and Development (MMATTD), Božidar Kalmeta, who is responsible for refugee-related issues. Among the participants were senior officials from the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs, State Secretary of the Central State Administration Office (CSAO), Antun Palarić, Serb parliamentarian, Ratko Gajica, Zadar County Prefect and most mayors from the County. Accompanying the Head of Mission was the Ambassador of Spain to Croatia, representing the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, the Head of UNHCR and representatives from the European Commission Delegation to Croatia and the US Embassy. Members of NGOs were also present.

Minister Kalmeta provided an overview of Government efforts and investments aimed at improving conditions for sustainable return in war-affected areas, concentrating on reconstruction and infrastructure projects. Presentations on the implementation of the housing programmes for refugees and displaced persons and the requirements for proportional representation of national minorities in State and local administration as well as the judiciary were given by the respective State Secretary and Assistant Ministers, with a particular emphasis on Zadar County. Both State Secretary Palarić and the Assistant Minister of Justice noted that national minorities with the requisite qualifications should invoke their right to be prioritized in consideration for employment in the State administration and judiciary.

In his address, the HoM emphasized the need for local judges and courts to ensure fair trials regardless of national origin and free of political influence.

Comments and questions after the presentations addressed local issues such as the repossession of occupied agricultural land, waste disposal, repair of water and electricity utilities in Croatian Serb villages and the updating of voters' lists, important for both minority elections and employment guarantees. Highlighting weaknesses in many of these areas, Mr. Gajica warned that the situation was still not conducive to sustainable return, with improvements in the effectiveness of State institutions and greater political will on the part of local officials still required.

Similar meetings are scheduled in June for Vukovar, Sisak, Gospic and Knin.

Mission roundtable examines civil service minority hiring goals

On 21 May, the Mission and the Central State Administration Office (CSAO) co-sponsored a roundtable on proportional employment of national minorities in the State administration, as guaranteed by the 2002 Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities (CLNM). The discussion focused on the newly adopted 2007 Civil Service Employment Plan (2007 Plan), which sets out this year's targets for civil servant hires, including, for the first time, targets for employment of national minorities. This was the second of three Mission roundtables dedicated to the employment of national minorities in public services. The first focused on administration in local and regional self government, while the final roundtable to be held later this year will focus on the judiciary.

The roundtable was opened by Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and featured presentations by the Ministers of Interior and Justice, Ivica Kirin and Ana Lovrin, as well as State Secretary of the CSAO, Antun Palarić. The Prime Minister noted that representation of national minorities in the public service was important for their successful integration. He expressed his wish that Croatia's efforts in relation to minority rights would have a spill-over effect on neighboring countries included in the South East European Co-operation Process (SEECp).

The State Secretary of the CSAO introduced the revised 2007 Plan, which the Government adopted in mid-May. It contains current employment statistics as well as hiring goals revised from the incomplete plan adopted in late February. Excluding the Ministry of Interior, national minorities constitute approximately three per cent of civil servants employed at the national level, contrasted with 7.5 per cent of the total population. In its projections for 2007, the Plan sets a goal of national minorities constituting 7.5 per cent of new hires. The highest targets are for the Ministries of Interior and Justice.

At the county level, approximately six per cent of civil servants are national minorities. Because national minority percentages in some counties are much higher than at the national level, the Plan sets a goal of national minorities constituting 25 per cent of new hires. The highest targets are set for the counties of Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem in Eastern Slavonia.

Noting that national minorities make up approximately four per cent of current judicial employees – Serbs nearly 2.5 per cent - the Minister of Justice stressed that ensuring minority representation in the judiciary would take place in the context of reducing court personnel as part of the overall judicial reform effort. The Minister of the Interior indicated that approximately 4.5 to five per cent of Ministry employees – both police officers and civilian staff - are national minorities.

Participants welcomed the Plan's minority hiring targets, highlighting the need for further efforts toward implementation. Milorad Pupovac, President of the Independent Serb Democratic Party (SDSS) and Serb parliamentarian, proposed the creation of a mechanism inside the CSAO to monitor implementation. Some participants noted the general lack of qualified applicants for civil service positions, including national minorities. Other participants stressed the need to create an atmosphere conducive to applicants voluntarily declaring their national origin.