



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSCE Mission to Croatia

News in brief

20 September – 3 October 2006

President Mesić highlights negative implications of Serbia-RS agreement

On 26 September, Presidents Boris Tadić of Serbia and Dragan Čavić of Republika Srpska (RS) and Prime Ministers Vojislav Koštunica of Serbia and Milorad Dodik of Republika Srpska signed a revised 'Agreement on the Establishment of Special and Parallel Relations' between the two Republics. In a statement issued the same day, Croatian President Stjepan Mesić commented on the "potentially long-term negative implications" of such an agreement on both Bosnian and regional stability.

While acknowledging that the agreement was in line with the letter of the Dayton Agreement, President Mesić said that it was not at all in harmony with the spirit of the times, adding "we have continuously drawn attention to the fact that the entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not states, and that they may not behave as states or para-states." Emphasising the fact that Croatia has always seen its vital interest in the maintenance of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an integral state, the President noted that the Republic of Croatia has never concluded any agreement on special relations with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He said that in the specific case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, agreements on special relations ought to be concluded with the internationally recognized state and not with the entities.

ICTY affirms two journalists' contempt convictions and criticizes national daily for inaccurate reporting

In late September, the ICTY Appeals Chamber confirmed the contempt convictions of Ivica Marijačić and Markica Rebić as well as the €15,000 fine imposed on each. In March 2006, Mr. Marijačić, former editor-in-chief of the Croatian weekly *Hrvatski List*, and Mr. Rebić, former head of the Croatian Intelligence Service, were found guilty of publishing the testimony of a protected witness in direct violation of an ICTY court order. The protected witness in this case was a Dutch army officer testifying in the trial against Bosnian Croat General Tihomir Blaškić.

On 25 September, in another dispute involving the Croatian media, the ICTY expressed concern over false information published by the Croatian daily *Vecernji List*. The newspaper claimed that its journalist had visited and photographed the cell of Ante Gotovina at the ICTY's detention facility. The ICTY refuted this claim, stating that visits by journalists are not permitted in order to protect the privacy of detainees and that the photographs published by *Vecernji List* come from the Tribunal's website.

Martić Trial Chamber visits war crime scenes in Croatia

From 25 to 30 September, ICTY judges visited numerous sites in Croatia where war crimes related to the ongoing trial of Milan Martić, a former Croatian Serb official in the so-called

“Republic of Serb Krajina,” are purported to have taken place. Similar visits have taken place in a number of other ICTY cases. Local media largely misreported the visit, claiming incorrectly that it was a visit of ICTY investigators looking into new crimes, rather than judges engaged in an ongoing trial.

Ethnically related incidents condemned by authorities in Vukovar

Following the introduction in September of joint premises and shifts for secondary school pupils of Serb and Croat ethnicity in Vukovar, four ethnically related incidents have been reported either to the police or the Mission. One incident on a school bus involved a seventeen year old ethnic Serb threatening and causing minor knife injuries to a 13 year old ethnic Croat. The case is currently before the Vukovar Municipal Court for juveniles. The other three incidents involved anti-Serb graffiti, which appeared on or near the vicinity of three of Vukovar’s four secondary schools. In all cases the graffiti was immediately painted over by the school authorities. While two schools decided not to press charges in order to downplay the incident, the State Attorney has pressed criminal charges against unknown perpetrators for racial and other discrimination in one school.

In light of these incidents Vukovar’s four leading parties - the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) and the Independent Serb Democratic Party (SDSS) – held a joint press conference to condemn such behaviour, restating their support for peace and co-existence among Vukovar’s citizens and giving their full support to the continuation of joint premises and shifts. According to the principals of the schools affected, these incidents have not interfered with the normal functioning of classes or the integration of pupils.

Mission project ‘Partnership for Development’ spreads best practice

The *Regional Forum of Associations*, a conglomerate of NGOs from five Slavonian counties, is currently implementing the OSCE-funded project ‘Partnership for Development’ which aims to stimulate co-operation between local authorities and civil society organizations in thirty municipalities in Croatia. This project has seen encouraging developments in different parts of the country, building on best practices from Slavonia where local authorities have been at the vanguard in signing charter agreements with NGOs to increase levels of transparency, efficiency and accountability before the citizenry.

On a recent visit to Lika-Senj County, the *Regional Forum* offered its consulting services to the newly established *Association of Lika-Senj County NGOs* and county officials. Discussions focused on Osijek’s ‘Charter on Co-operation’ signed in 2004 as a basis on which to plan and develop a similar charter for Lika-Senj County. Having already adopted a Rulebook for the transparent allocation of funds for NGO activities as part of their Charter, the authorities in Osijek have issued their first call for ‘public needs’ project proposals and contracted the *Regional Forum* to provide training, education and technical assistance to NGOs applying for funds.

These are encouraging steps forward for civil society in Croatia and are a direct result of the Mission’s presence in the field. Both the *Regional Forum* and the *Lika NGO Association* are newly established organizations generated by the Mission’s coordination and facilitation efforts.