

# The Courier

Newsletter of the **OSCE** Mission to Croatia

Belgian OSCE Chairmanship

## "Croatian Week" in Vienna

In keeping with the established tradition of the Croatian Foreign Minister addressing the OSCE's Permanent Council, Ms. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic did so on 15 November 2005. What was unusual on this occasion was the close proximity to the Head of Mission's appearance at the same body just two days later to present the main findings from the Mission's 17th Status Report. As there was also an informal meeting of the Permanent Council devoted to Croatia and the fact that the Mission's mandate was extended for a further 12 months, the week was euphemistically referred to in Vienna as "Croatian week".

As one would expect, the Foreign Minister delivered a detailed summary touching all six chapters of the Mission's engagement in the country. The Minister noted that since the positive *avis* of the European Commission in April 2004, the most recent phase of the relationship between the Government and the Mission had been characterised by an upward trend in the partnership, citing the visits by the President, the Prime Minister and herself to the Mission Headquarters in the previous months as evidence of this trend. She added that there was a high degree of understanding between the Mission and the Government on the tasks to complete in the upcoming period. As expected, much attention was devoted to the refugee file, which the Minister stated was one of the Government's top priorities. She paid particular attention to the Sarajevo Declaration, asserting that the Declaration reflected the commitment of the Government to speed up and facilitate settling this complex issue by utilizing the regional co-operation framework. On the monitoring of war crimes transferred from the ICTY, the Minister praised the role that the Mission had played in this context through its reports concerning the readiness of the Croatian judiciary to monitor cases handed to the national judiciary from the Tribunal.

As is the custom, many delegations of participating States responded to the Minister, including the USA, European Union, Russian Federation and Serbia and Montenegro. The EU (UK) stated that the decision on 3 October to open accession negotiations with Croatia reflected the substantial progress made in the processes of reconciliation and democratisation, in which the OSCE and its Mission played an important assisting role. The positive assessment of the working relationship between the host Government and the Mission was echoed in the US response to the Minister, which also welcomed the Government's determination to resolve outstanding issues as soon as possible.

Two days later, the Head of Mission (HOM) addressed the Permanent Council on 17 November. He emphasised that the Mission maintained openness in its work, which was exemplified by the good relations with Governmental officials. He stressed the importance of the first war crimes case transferred from the ICTY to the national judiciary and the Mission's plan to monitor the trial. Furthermore, a positive atmosphere had been established between representatives of the International Community and the relevant Government Ministry on the issues of refugee return and housing. Finally, HOM informed the OSCE Permanent Council that the

Mission would submit a Mid-Term Review of activities in the summer of 2006, which would be a detailed examination of how far the Government had come in the implementation of the Mission's mandate and just how much work remained to be done. Responding to HOM, the Russian Federation stressed the importance of national minorities' representation in local administration and judiciary. It also noted the OSCE's role in democratic transformations in Croatia, including reforms in the judiciary, police, democratic institutions, electoral legislation and the media.



**Croatian Foreign Minister Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic addresses OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 15 November, 2005. (Photo: OSCE/Bernard Vrban)**

The US Delegate agreed with HOM's assessment that the Mission should be adequately staffed until the completion of its mandate and supported the proposal for a Mid-Term Review in 2006 of the Mission's budget.

Finally, in a commendable statement well received for its positive regional context, Serbia and Montenegro stated that European integration was a driving force and the incentive and impetus for reform in the region. Serbia and Montenegro stated that the Mission was an indivisible and significant part of the reported positive trend and furthermore, the Mission had room to play a conducive and productive role in mandate-related areas. With regard to refugee return, it supported the full implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration and welcomed the support of the OSCE, EC, and UNHCR in its implementation. Serbia and Montenegro commended the Mission's assistance in the field of housing care programmes and expected that the Croatian National Roadmap on refugee return would represent an encouraging step forward.

**Mark Fawcett**

Head of the Executive Office, MHQ

## Calendar

**11 & 12 January** - Annual meeting of Heads of Missions in Vienna hosted by the new OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht.

**16 January** - Ambassador Fuentes attends a New Year reception hosted by President Mesic for members of the diplomatic corps in Zagreb.

**20 January** - Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and Ambassador Fuentes meet to discuss outstanding tasks within the Mission's mandate.

**27 January** - President of the Croatian Peoples' Party (HNS) Vesna Pusic visits Mission Headquarters (MHQ).

**9 February** - Meeting of the Area Return Facilitation Group (ARFG) held in Knin.

**10 February** - Deputy Head of Mission, Ambassador Robert. W. Becker, attends the OSCE Ball in Vienna.

**14 February** - Serb minority MP Milorad Pupovac visits MHQ.

**23 February** - Ambassador Fuentes and senior staff meet with Croatian Foreign Minister, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic.

**7 March** - Belgian Ambassador Marie-Jehanne Roccas visits MHQ.

## Activities

### “Croatia - home to all its citizens”

#### The Mission's Public Awareness Campaign on Return & Reconciliation

On the 30th of November, the Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, the Croatian Minister for the Sea, Transport, Tourism and Development, Bozidar Kalmeta, and the Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, Ambassador Jorge Fuentes, launched a Public Awareness Campaign on return and reconciliation at a press conference in Zagreb.

The campaign, supported also by UNHCR and the EC Delegation, targeted Serb refugees and displaced persons in neighbouring countries as well as Serb returnees in Croatia. It aimed at encouraging refugees and displaced persons to

make a decision on whether to return to their home country or stay put.

The campaign also aimed at promoting tolerance and reconciliation among the majority population, to foster a welcoming atmosphere as well as strengthening government and local community commitment to facilitate return and integration.

“The implementation of the Programme of Return and Reconstruction is a part of the overall Government's efforts aimed at enhancing the broadest democratic and social stability in the country, to introduce European standards and values into all segments of social relations and state commitments,” Minister Grabar-Kitarovic said.

From the 1st to the 15th of December, major public and private media in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro broadcast the campaign's television spot and radio jingle. Over 450 billboards scattered across the three countries displayed the campaign's slogan “...where there's a place for everybody ... Croatia is home to all its citizens”.

For more information on the campaign, please consult the website: [www.povratak.hr](http://www.povratak.hr).



(L-R) Mission Head Jorge Fuentes, Foreign Minister Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, Development Minister Bozidar Kalmeta, launch a public awareness campaign on the return of refugees, 30 November 2005. (Photo: Nikolina Balija)

**Antonella Cerasino**  
Spokesperson

#### Croatian government and Mission organize roundtable on Draft Law on State Election Commission

### Roundtable a big step forward, says PM

On 13 December 2005, the Mission and the Central State Administration Office organized a roundtable to review and discuss a draft law establishing a permanent election body in Croatia, the State Election Commission (SEC), prior to its second reading in Parliament this year.

The establishment of the SEC was unanimously supported by all participants, including Parliament Speaker, Vladimir Seks; Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader; as well as the Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, Ambassador Jorge

Fuentes, who opened the event.

“Support of electoral reform in Croatia is a priority for the Mission,” said Ambassador Fuentes.

Prime Minister Sanader noted that the number and ranking of the participants at the roundtable testified to the importance of this topic.

“I think this is a big step forward for Croatia towards fully democratising the electoral system,” he said.

**Dinka Zivalj**  
Political Officer



Ambassador Jorge Fuentes (left), Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Vladimir Seks (centre) and Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader at electoral reform roundtable, 13 December 2005. (Photo: Tomislav Pavlek)

## Field Office in Focus: Sisak

### FO Sisak at a glance

- The Head of Field Office (FO) Sisak is **Michel Dreneau**.
- FO Sisak has one sub-office in Pakrac.
- The total number of staff working at FO Sisak and Sub-Office Pakrac is:
  - 3 International Mission Members
  - 2 National Professionals
  - 27 Local Mission Members
- FO Sisak covers five counties: Sisak-Moslavina, Brod-Posavina, Virovitica-Podravina, Požega-Slavonia and Bjelovar-Bilogora.
- Geographically, the region covered by FO Sisak borders Bosnia and Herzegovina in the south; Eastern Slavonia in the

- east; and Hungary to the north.
- Approx. 676 000 people live in the area of FO Sisak.
- The town of Sisak is the economic, administrative and political centre of the Sisak-Moslavina County, which is the biggest county in Croatia covering approx. 7.9% of Croatian territory, with 187 000 residents.



(L-R) Michel Dreneau and Sisak-Moslavina Deputy Prefect Marijana Petir, 22 November 2005. (Photo: Krunoslav Rac)

### Projects in 2005: Roma education to Good Governance

In 2005, Field Office Sisak and Sub-Office Pakrac financially supported the implementation of numerous projects in Central Croatia and Western Slavonia. The projects over the last year ranged from good governance, to supporting the return of refugees and integration of minorities, particularly the Roma.

The hugely successful pilot project providing municipal councillors with capacity-building workshops was organized for a second year running. The training was offered to locally elected leaders in six communities, mostly return areas, to improve the efficiency of local self-governments.

Projects implemented by GONG, the election monitoring non-governmental organisation (NGO), in Central Croatia and Western Slavonia encouraged civic participation through increased communication between citizens and authorities.

The project “Active, Visible and Empowered” implemented by the Centre for the Education and Counselling of Women (CESI) locally and nationally helped to promote values of the NGO sector.

Support of sustainable return was provided through a project offering free legal aid and in-court representation to refugees. The social integration of Roma children was assisted with a project developing their skills in the pre-school period.

#### FO Sisak Civil Society and Project Management Unit



Projects to socially integrate Roma children in the Sisak area. (Photo: Krunoslav Rac)

### Political horse-trading in Sisak

Recent events in Sisak, Slatina and the Požega County demonstrate that the trading of councillor mandates can effectively defy the will of the electorate and oust fragile local coalitions from power.

In Sisak and Slatina, mayors from the Social Democratic Party (SDP) lost confidence votes after councillors swapped sides to join the opposition. In the Požega-Slavonia County, a councillor also

decided to swap sides but the local government managed to stay in power by brutally preventing the councillor, the opposition and the media from attending the council session. These events provoked serious discussion among parties and politicians on the urgent need to change electoral legislation.

While SDP accused the Government, led by the Croatian

Democratic Union (HDZ), of using pressure and blackmail to keep its party in power at local levels; the Croatian Party of Rights’ (HNS) stated that political mandates should primarily belong to parties.

Political scientist Ivan Grdesic, however, favoured the current situation whereby mandates belonged to the councillor. He emphasised that citizens participated in power through individuals, not parties; and that awarding mandates to parties would give them a monopoly on power.

The Croatian Party of Rights’ (HSP), no strangers to crossing sides, was not opposed to the idea put forward by HNS. However, such a change would require amendments to the constitution, which the party believed was too risky a practice. According to HSP, mandates should be protected within existing legislation. Mato Arlovic of SDP believes that the solution lies with parties taking greater care of who they put on their slates.

Most parties, however, advocated the direct election of local officials and parliamentary deputies, despite warnings by legal experts that this could result in the creation of untouchable “local sheriffs”. Constitutional Court judge Smiljko Sokol and administrative law professor at Zagreb University Ivan Kopic explain that the main problem with directly elected officials was that they were not accountable to anyone, yet held very broad and responsible powers.

With new elections already called in several local regions, including the Požega-Slavonia county, it appears that the reform of election legislation will be a top priority for the Government this year.

**Julije Katancevic, National Public Information Officer, FO Sisak**

# Photo Gallery

## 2005 - end of year highlights



Photo: Hrvojka Dokoza

*Above:* Croatian Radio and Television Director General Mirko Galic discusses the role of the public broadcaster in Croatia's media scene, 10 November 2005.



Photo: Nikolina Balija

*Above:* Outgoing Serbia & Montenegro Ambassador Milan Simurdic applauds the Mission for its excellent work and co-operation during a farewell visit, 20 November 2005.



Photo: Maja Polic

*Above:* During his visit to MHQ, which took place shortly after the arrest of Ante Gotovina in Spain, outgoing Spanish Ambassador Sebastian de Erice discusses Spanish - Croatian co-operation, 14 December 2005.



Photo: Slavka Jureta

*Above:* Charismatic Zagreb Mayor Milan Bandic discusses his visions and plans for Zagreb during a visit to MHQ, 23 November 2005.



Photo: Maja Polic

*Above:* Zagreb University Rector, Jasna Mercer, and her deputy, Vlasta Vizek Vidovic, meet alumnae and other Mission members during a visit to MHQ, 15 December 2005.



Photo: Slavka Jureta

*Above:* Outgoing Norwegian Ambassador, Knut Toeraasen, receives a plaque in appreciation for the great contribution he made to both the Mission's work and to Croatia, 15 September 2005.