



Two days in Vienna

Vienna is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. It has become the real centre of the continent and this is most evident since the end of the Cold War and the enlargement of the European Union. The Viennese are elegant, its buildings imposing, the food delicious and art ever-present. But the perspective of the city for the OSCE Head of Mission, who goes there for a couple of days and during which has four working luncheons and dinners, no less than five official presentations and numerous bilateral conversations, resembles the torture of Tantalus.

On 14 - 15 June, I went through such an ordeal. It made me hope that next time things would be better and that I'll be able to go to the opera, have a quiet dinner with my wife, or simply walk through the distinguished streets surrounding St Stephen's Cathedral. Certainly, I will be able to do this during my holidays because it is becoming increasingly clear that to report to the OSCE Permanent Council once or twice a year is all work and no fun. Over all, however, I cannot complain. Ambassador Sanchez de Boado, the head of the Spanish delegation to the OSCE, and his charming family welcomed us in their residence as kindly as always; the 55 members of the Permanent Council were extremely attentive and understanding; the formal and informal meetings of the Permanent Council, the EU Troika, the NATO Caucus, the budget committee, were all very helpful, particularly on this important occasion.

I had been asked to present to the Permanent Council the Mission's Mid-Term Review (MTR), a 35-page document prepared carefully as a co-ordinated effort by Mission members, aimed at summing up the Mission's programme in the last five years and indeed, its entire presence in Croatia since 1996.

The essence of the MTR was to show the Permanent Council that Croatia is doing well, is advancing rapidly and in the right direction, as well as transforming a post-war country with plenty of problems into a modern, transparent, democratic and stable state. Croatia had to pass not only one transition – like countries of the Warsaw Pact did – but at least three, going from communism to a free market, from Federation to independence, from war to peace.

It has not been easy and it is not yet finished, but the 55 members of the Permanent Council, starting with the Belgian Chairman-in-Office, accepted the MTR with warm support as well as the proposal of a strategy which may

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Press conference on Mid-Term Review at MHQ, 13 June, 2006.

lead to the Mission closing four of its six units in 2007. Eventually, a solution will be found for the remaining two units dealing with the return and integration of refugees and monitoring of war crimes. The latter could become the object of a thematic Mission conducted from Vienna, but this remains to be debated.

Croatia has grown accustomed to the OSCE. Our Mission has excellent relations with the central government, with the local authorities and with the Croatian public. Maybe they will miss us when we leave. Perhaps some will consider that we could still continue here for some time to come. I am persuaded Croatia might benefit from our presence for many years in the same way that the OSCE could be helpful in most – if not all – the OSCE members, the EU and NATO Member and Partner countries.

But the time will come, and it will be sooner rather than later, when Croatia will be able to solve its own problems, face its responsibilities, risk making mistakes and correcting them independently. In fact, the role of the Mission for the last 10 years, and particularly for the last year with the creation of a negotiating platform, has been to foster capacity building by transferring to Croatian institutions the responsibility of identifying and resolving its problems.

Jorge Fuentes, Head of Mission

Calendar

1 July - HOM attends the conference "Legal, financial and institutional framework for civil society development" in Opatija.

5 July - Dutch Ambassador Lionel Veer and Dutch Parliamentarians visit Split-Dalmatian and Zadar Counties.

5 - 6 July - DHOM attends regional workshop "Lessons Learned in Promoting Cross-border Co-operation in SE Europe" in Dubrovnik.

6 July - OSCE Mission and Education Ministry organized a working meeting with school principals from Osijek - Baranja County to present the OSCE project "Children Together".

7 July - Outgoing German Ambassador Juergen Staks at MHQ morning briefing.

7 - 9 July - Two-day workshop in Tuheljske Toplice for working group set up to create a program for the education of councillors, officials and public servants.

10 July - The Field Office Zadar moves to a new address.

11 July - Monthly plenary session on war crimes trials, which includes the Justice Ministry, the Chief State Attorney, as well as representatives from the Supreme Court, OSCE, ICTY, and EC Delegation.

17 - 18 July - HOM attends conference on 2007 Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE, organized by the Spanish Foreign Ministry.

15 August - Mission holiday.

Deputy Head of Mission, Ambassador Robert Becker, speaking at a seminar in Split on improving communication between the media and authorities regarding Croatia's accession to the EU. The seminar was organised by the OSCE Mission, the British Embassy and Croatian Parliament.

Activities

Media seminar on EU accession

At the end of May in Villa Dalmacija, a very beautiful seaside villa in Split formerly owned by Tito, Croatian politicians and about 20 journalists exchanged ideas on how to improve communication between the media and Croatian authorities in reporting on Croatia's accession to the European Union as part of a training seminar organised by the OSCE Mission, British Embassy and Croatian Parliament.

The overall atmosphere was informal and relaxed and both journalists and politicians expressed very openly and in a lively fashion their views on each other's role and work as well as a mutual wish-list for improvements.

Gordan Jandrokovic, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Croatian Parliament, started the working part of the day. He underlined that reforms undertaken by Croatia were good and necessary for the country regardless of its accession into the EU. "The accession process provides crucial assistance in this very difficult reform process," said Mr Jandrokovic, highlighting the important role journalists play in educating Croatian citizens on the technical and complicated process of EU accession. He encouraged journalists to report objectively and avoid negative stereotypes.

Journalists, on the other hand, emphasized how important it was to receive accurate information in a timely manner. They also complained that

several ministry spokespersons were not available to journalists and did not respond to their calls. Journalists stated that politicians were too suspicious of the media and were reluctant to provide information. "We work to deadlines so if I don't receive information on time from the officials directly concerned I have to look elsewhere," said one journalist.

In the afternoon, journalists and politicians were mixed up and divided into two groups for a competition to come up with a list of activities that would be helpful in improving communication. Several useful proposals were the result.

Journalists suggested that Parliament organise background briefings on specific topics, as well as distribute written information that is concise and non-technical. They also called for further training of government spokespersons. Politicians expressed their wish to see more balanced and non-sensational reporting, as well as headlines that reflected the tone of the article. They suggested roundtables with editors-in-chiefs to highlight the need of less sensationalistic news. In pure European spirit, the two teams were both given twelve points and won the competition!

Antonella Cerasino, Spokesperson





FO Split team, June 2005

Minorities call for inclusion in local decision-making process

On 12 June, FO Split organized in Sibenik the biggest roundtable discussion to date between representatives of national minorities in the Dalmatia region and local government officials.

Almost all 30 presidents of the Councils for National Minorities (CNMs) from all three Dalmatian counties attended the discussion, as well as the Sibenik Major, heads of the Ervenik, Kistanje and Biskupija municipalities, representatives of the Central State Administration Office, and several officials from county and town executive bodies.

The agenda focused on the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, the co-ordination of CNM activities, and most important of all, co-operation with local decision-making bodies. During the discussion it was highlighted that although the constitutional law provides CNMs with an advisory role in

local decision-making processes, this has not yet come into force in the three Dalmatian counties.

Despite the fact that on the whole minority representatives are better organized and capable of standing up for their interests and rights, only the town of Knin has adopted regulations enabling members of local CNMs to be compensated for their work.

The roundtable ended in the adoption of five mutually-agreed conclusions, including a promise by local government representatives to be more attentive towards minority issues in the future. Although the level of minority involvement in local affairs will inevitably vary throughout Dalmatia, it was agreed that the roundtable was an excellent step forward.

Political Affairs Unit, FO Split

At a glance:

- Head of Field Office (FO) Split is Jeroen Jansen.
- FO Split has a sub-office in Knin.
- The total number of staff at FO Split and sub-office Knin is:
 - 2 International Mission Members
 - 3 National Professionals
 - 17 Local Mission Members.
- FO Split covers central and southern Dalmatia. It consists of three counties: Sibenik-Knin, Split-Dalmatia and Dubrovnik-Neretva. Geographically, the area borders Montenegro in the south, Bosnia and Herzegovina in the north and east, and the Zadar County in the west.
- The population of the area covered by FO Split is about 710,000.
- Split is the second largest town in Croatia and is the economic, administrative, cultural and media centre of the Split-Dalmatia County, which is the largest county in Croatia area-wise, covering 14 045 km², of which only 4572 km² is land.

Successful co-operation in Šibenik

With the adoption of a Charter on Co-operation between the civil sector and town of Sibenik on 9 May 2006, Field Office Split was witness to the result of efforts invested throughout 2005 in a project entitled "Improving cooperation between Sibenik Town Authorities and Civil Society Organisations". This project was implemented in partnership with the Association Mi, one of the leading Split-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Also established as a spin-off to the Charter process was the formation of a NGO Forum, which consists of 16 Sibenik-based NGOs.

Although successful, the project proved to be a challenge for the experienced Association Mi. Some resistance was noted by the Sibenik-based NGOs as to the sincerity of Sibenik's town authorities to actively participate in this endeavour. This resulted in a significant meeting between FO Split and the Mayor of Sibenik to underline the importance of the Town's commitment to the completion of the Charter process. To our satisfaction, the intervention resulted in a mutual understanding of the benefits of this project and inter-sector co-operation. Sibenik authorities demonstrated that the development of a more effective service to citizens is vital to building bridges with the community and other sectors.

CSPM Unit, FO Split

Photo Gallery



Ambassador and Mrs Fuentes during the Diplomatic outing to the Islands of Brijuni hosted by President Stjepan Mesic, 9 - 11 June 2006.



Field visit of refugee camp in Topolik, Lipik, 8 June 2006.



Zadar Archbishop Msgr. Prenda and Orthodox Vladika Fotije meet with HOM and the Serb minority MPs Milorad Pupovac and Ratko Gajica to discuss minority issues and reconciliation in Zadar on 26 June, 2006.



Representatives of the International Community and Development Minister Božidar Kalmeta at a plenary meeting discussing outstanding issues related to refugee return, 27 June 2006.



ODIHR Director Ambassador Christian Strohal and Police Director General Marijan Benko during their visit to MHQ, 30 June 2006.



Outgoing German Ambassador Juergen Staks at MHQ's morning briefing on 7 July, 2006.