



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSCE Mission to Croatia

News in brief

16 May – 31 May 2006

Croatia welcomes Montenegro's vote for independence

News that Montenegrin citizens had voted in favour of an independent State in the country's referendum on 21 May was greeted positively in Croatia. Following the release of preliminary results, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader announced that Croatia would be among the first to recognize Montenegro as a new member of the international community, together with the European Union.

On 26 May, the Croatian Government issued an official statement commending the positive vote on independence as the most important moment in the modern history of Montenegro, confirming Montenegro as "a mature, stable, democratic and Europe-orientated society." The Government also expressed its readiness to work together with Montenegro on developing good neighbourly relations based upon equality, mutual respect and a joint contribution to permanent peace and co-operation in South Eastern Europe. In this regard the Government welcomed an apology by Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanović for the role played by Montenegrin forces in the 1991-1995 conflict. In an earlier address to his cabinet, Prime Minister Sanader had said that Croatian recognition would be contingent on Montenegro's recognition of its role in Serbian aggression against Croatia between 1991 and 1992.

Congratulating his Montenegrin counterpart, Filip Vujanović, and the citizens of Montenegro, President Stipe Mesić said that Croatia will continue to build on the existing good relations with Montenegro, albeit on new foundations, in the interest of both states and the entire region. The President also stressed that Croatia supported Montenegro's European aspirations and was ready to share the experience it had gained so far on the road to European integration.

Court to auction Serb owner's property to pay for unsolicited investments

Despite discussions in the context of the Sarajevo process as well as with the competent Minister, a comprehensive solution to the problem of investments made by temporary occupants into properties allocated by the Government has yet to be reached. In the absence of a solution, local courts continue to hold the Serb owners of these properties responsible for the costs of such unsolicited investments. Where owners lack sufficient financial means to reimburse costs, the courts regularly propose auctioning the property to recoup the investment claimed by the occupant. In several recent cases of this type the auction has been forestalled by the intervention of the Mission and Ministry for Maritime Affairs, Transport, Tourism and Development.

The most recent example of a court ordered auction is that of *'Pizzeria Sara'*, in which the Korenica Municipal Court in south-central Croatia, has scheduled a court auction for 6 June to sell a Serb owner's property to recover approximately €30,000. The court awarded this amount to the former occupant, a Croat settler from Istria, who used the property rent-free as a pizzeria for more than eight years. Having submitted a request for repossession in 1998, the owner re-gained possession in early 2005. In early 2006, the Constitutional Court found that although under applicable law the owner had no right to claim back-dated rent from the occupant, it was nonetheless consistent with the Constitution that the owner pay for unsolicited investments made into a property allocated for use by the Government.

The Government has recently consulted the Mission and other IC partners on a draft model for solving these cases, which will involve extra-judicial settlements between the State and the temporary occupant. This is due to be adopted in June. Meanwhile, the Mission will continue to seek an overall solution to this issue, as well as solutions on a case-by-case basis.

Government presents anti-corruption plan at Transparency International Conference

Between 26 and 28 May Transparency International Croatia organized an international conference entitled 'Enforcing Anti-corruption Standards - a European and Central Asian Dialogue' on the island of Brijuni. The event gathered 100 participants, including Croatian Government officials, representatives of the international community and delegates from Transparency International branches in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In his address, Deputy Prime Minister Damir Polančec stressed that the Government of Prime Minister Ivo Sanader possessed the political will necessary to tackle corruption in all sectors of Croatian society. Recalling the Government's recent adoption of a National Plan for Combating Corruption between 2006 and 2008, Minister of Justice Ana Lovrin enumerated the list of Government measures aimed at preventing, detecting and punishing corruption in the next three years. The Head of the European Commission's Delegation to Croatia underlined the vital importance of Croatia's fight against corruption, with effective anti-corruption measures forming part of the political criteria for admission to the European Union. He added that Croatia could learn from the recent anti-corruption experiences of two other candidate countries, Bulgaria and Romania. While praising the Government's good intentions, he concluded that concrete results were now expected.

The HoM pointed out that the fight against corruption is fast emerging as a major issue on the agenda of international organizations and is one of the priorities of the current OSCE chairmanship. Recalling that Croatia ranks 71 out of 159 countries according to Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perception Index, the HoM reiterated the Mission's readiness to assist the Croatian authorities in their anti-corruption efforts, particularly in relation to the drafting of new legislation regulating the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns.

Among other topics, workshops dealt with public finance audits, public procurement and ethics within the private sector. Two sessions focused on the introduction of rules and procedures in the financing of political parties, with discussions on the current lack of a comprehensive framework in Croatia. The recommendations of the Council of Europe on party financing were presented by the Head of Political Unit in the Mission.

Mission project supports Croatian membership of UN Peace-building Commission

On 16 May 2006, Croatia became the 31st member of the UN Commission for Peace-building, recently established at the 60th session of the General Assembly. The initiative to establish the Commission was supported by Croatian members of the *Peace-building Platform* who attended a preparatory UN Conference entitled 'From Reaction to Prevention – Civil Society Creating Partnerships for Prevention of Violent Conflicts and Peace-building' in New York in July 2005. Croatian NGO participants were among 456 peace organizations from around the world who attended the Conference. These same NGO participants were subsequently instrumental in an OSCE-funded project to develop and adopt the *Peace-building Platform*, which was signed by 60 NGO and local authority representatives at a national conference in Vukovar in December 2005.

The *Platform* sets out the long-term goals of peace-building founded on strong cross- sector partnerships among State bodies, NGOs, local authorities, the business sector and the media. In a 17 May letter to the Foreign Minister, Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, *Platform* Project Manager, Nikolina Svalina, congratulated the Government and asked to meet Ministry officials to present the *Platform*, a successful grass-roots achievement which had gone some way to ensuring Croatia's membership of the UN Commission.