

TALKING POINTS

ENGLISH only

**for the Address by H.E. Mrs. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Croatia
before the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on 15 November 2005**

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Introduction

- Very glad to have the opportunity to speak before the Permanent Council, the main operative body of the Organisation, in the year in which the OSCE celebrated three important anniversaries of the events that laid the foundations and determined further development of the Organisation.
- The OSCE has grown into an indispensable mechanism for building and upholding democracy, peace and stability in Europe. This jubilee year is an excellent opportunity to renew our commitments and to reinforce the role and effectiveness of the Organisation in the face of the challenges of the modern world and the so-called crisis of multilateralism.
- I hope that at the upcoming meeting of the Ministerial Council in Ljubljana, we shall - pursuant to the suggestions of the Panel of Eminent Persons and the proposals of the Participating States - be able to adopt appropriate decisions on a more efficient structure and operating mechanisms of the Organisation.

Co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Croatia

- I would like to share with you some recent achievements of the Republic of Croatia. The decision of the EU Council of Ministers of 3 October on opening negotiations on the accession to the EU is one of the most important achievements in the international affirmation of Croatia, the EU decision will provide the GoC with an additional incentive and energy to further pursue the fulfilment of the OSCE mandate.
- In 1996, this Permanent Council sent, at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, a Mission to Croatia with the mandate to help Croatian Government meet its commitments in connection with a number of post-war issues. In this initial phase, the Mission reported, on the basis of its first-hand experience, on the fulfilment of the commitments following from the admission of the Republic of Croatia to the Council of Europe in 1996.
- You are all familiar with the further course of cooperation reflected primarily in the Mission's consulting assistance in the reform of Croatian legislation following the signature of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in October 2001.
- The third and current phase of the Mission began when the positive *avis* in April 2004 recognised that Croatia met the Copenhagen political criteria. Since then, the Mission has focused on the so-called short-term and medium-term priorities of the European partnership with Croatia which this Government has made one of its priorities.
- This last phase has been characterised by an upward trend in the partnership between the Mission and this Government. The best confirmation of this is the fact that the President and the Prime Minister as well as many other officials, including myself, on different occasions in the last

several months, visited the Mission's headquarters in Zagreb and talked to its representatives about the ways to settle the remaining open issues passed down to us from earlier periods.

- The operation of the Mission has become more transparent and familiar to the Croatian public, and one of the results was also consolidation of cooperation between the ministries and other state administrative bodies with the Mission and other international partners.
- I would like to mention that considerable credit for the new quality and deepening of cooperation and partnership between the Mission and the Government goes to the Head of Mission, Ambassador Fuentes.
- There is a high degree of understanding between the Government and the Mission on the tasks to complete next year.
- We are glad that the Mission has already noted a satisfactory progress in several chapters from its mandate, and that it has announced the termination of some of its activities (police, media, civil society), this underscores the maturity of our internal institutional framework as being capable of settling any remaining open issues. The Mission and the Government will be able to focus their joint efforts to closing more complex issues such as the return of refugees and the reform of justice.
- The progress made is also confirmed by the recent decision of the ICTY to transfer the Ademi-Norac case to Croatian judiciary, the first instance of ceding an indictment in accordance with Rule 11bis to national judiciary. In this context an important role was played by the previous positive reports of the OSCE Mission concerning the readiness of Croatian judiciary, as well as by the monitoring mechanisms established within the OSCE framework. We hope that the OSCE observers will be able to report further positive development in this area to the Organisation and the ICTY.

Refugee return

- Resolving the refugee issue is one of the top priorities of the Government, so we highly appreciate the support of the international community.
- Also, the Republic of Croatia highly appreciates the contribution of all the countries which individually or through contributing to multilateral projects supported the reconstruction of the settlements destroyed in the war and their infrastructure.
- Croatia is working toward closing this issue primarily in order to create conditions for a comprehensive development of the country and the transformation of our society, but with full awareness that settling this issue is one of the basic requirements for establishing lasting stability and security in our immediate neighbourhood and in our broader surroundings.
- In this spirit the GoC, together with the respective Governments of BH and SMN, signed the Declaration on the Return of Refugees (Sarajevo, 31 January 2005), in which the three Governments undertook to complete the process of the return of refugees by the end of 2006 by having each Government provide a lasting solution to the remaining refugees, be it through the return of those who want to return to their original state, be it through local integration.
- The implementation of the Declaration is under way, with another Ministerial Conference coming up soon to integrate the three Road Maps into a single Joint Regional Operation Matrix.
- On 22 July, the Government adopted the Croatian Road Map for the completion of the return of refugees who wish to return to Croatia by the end of 2006, with clearly defined activities, schedule and funding. Most of the activities and funds in the Road Map are dedicated to the return of refugees who wish to return to Croatia and to solving their housing issues through

reconstruction and accommodation, and to infrastructural and development projects in the areas of return.

- The Road Map pays particular attention to the housing solutions for those former occupancy/tenancy rights holders who wish to return, particularly in urban centres. The ministry in charge has begun to systematically tackle their housing issues. An integral housing plan for the former tenancy right holders is being prepared, and it will include purchasing flats on the market and a construction of a greater number of apartments.
- Only yesterday, the State Secretary at the Ministry for Maritime Affairs, Tourism, Transport and Development, at a meeting with the Mayor of Osijek, arranged the construction of blocks with about 400 flats for the former tenancy right holders who wish to return. The construction is to begin in the spring, and during the winter everything will be prepared and designed. Osijek is the city with the highest number of applications submitted by the former tenancy right holders outside the Areas of Special State concern.
- Concerning the 41 most urgent humanitarian cases indicated to the Government by the OSCE Mission in late September, most of the cases have been solved and for most of the beneficiaries flats are being purchased in Osijek, Karlovac and Zagreb. It is expected that most of the sum of 44 million kunas provided for the housing of the former tenancy right holders outside the areas of special government concern who wish to return will be utilised by the end of the year.
- Currently, talks are being conducted with other cities as well. The Government has given its firm guarantees in this respect, and it will not let the implementation of this program compromise its credibility.
- The Croatian Road Map covers only the most important activities of the Government which are vital to the implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration and to creating conditions for the return of refugees.
- The Sarajevo Declaration reflects the commitment of the Government to speed up and facilitate settling such complex issues as refugee return by utilizing the regional cooperation framework
- But there is also the individual dimension of the return, notably the right of everyone to decide for themselves whether, when and where to return.
- In that regard, Public Awareness Campaign on Sustainable Return and Reconciliation, jointly initiated in September 2004 by Mission and the Government is of special importance. The campaign is designed to contribute to an atmosphere conducive to return and reintegration of the Serb refugee population, and is supported by our President and Prime Minister.
- The final phase of the PAC will be launched at the pres conference in Zagreb at the end of this month, with the presence of my college minister for Maritime Affairs, Tourism, Transport and Development, and myself.
- The process of repossession of private residential property is almost finished. Out of total of appr. 19.500 properties belonging to Croatian Serbs which had been allocated for temporary use and claimed for repossession, only 59 remain occupied.

Regional co-operation

- Croatia views its future membership of EU and NATO as a chance to fulfill its commitment to strengthened stability and prosperity in South-Eastern Europe. Croatia is willing to contribute to that stability and prosperity by assuming its role of the economic leader and political model in the region.

- Within the framework of the mechanisms and activities of the OSCE, as well as other regional and sub-regional organisations and initiatives, Croatia actively cooperates with neighbouring countries and countries in the region on many issues of common interest (e.g. to combat trafficking in human beings, manage the borders and their security, sub-regional arms control). We shall continue our policy of active involvement in SEE and promote further consolidation of stability in the region that has greatly managed to transform itself from a conflict zone to a zone of cooperation.
- For Croatia the success of the key political processes related to the negotiations on the status of Kosovo and Montenegro is of vital interest, particularly the possible review of the Dayton Agreement in order to eliminate the existing ambiguities. In this connection Croatia, as a co-signatory to the Dayton Agreement, firmly supports the view that all three constituent peoples in Bosnia-Herzegovina should enjoy equal rights on the entire territory of B-H.
- As regards our bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries, to which this Government is particularly committed, I would like to particularly mention constant improvement of relations with Serbia and Montenegro. New dynamics was given by the visit of Prime Minister Sanader to Belgrade on 15 November 2004 and the signature of the bilateral agreement on the protection of ethnic minorities. This agreement is of particular importance for the Republic of Croatia because it provides the framework and guarantees for the protection of members of Croatian ethnic minority in Serbia-Montenegro
- The day before the visit to Zagreb of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, on November 23, the meeting of the Interstate Joint Committee for Monitoring of the Implementation of the Bilateral Agreement on the Protection of ethnic minorities will be held.
- As an example of rebuilding severed links and destroyed bridges between Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro, I have signed recently the Declaration on Resuming Ferry Traffic between Vukovar and Bač with the Minister for Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, in Vukovar on 21 October. The project will be realised with the financial and technical support of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In June, I signed a similar declaration regarding the reconstruction of the Erdut-Bogojevo railway bridge to be co-financed by the Government of the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium. The purpose of these and similar projects is not just to re-establish severed traffic links, that is: to boost border traffic and economic development at large, but primarily to bring closer the population and local authorities on both banks of the river and, last but not least, to bring the two states closer.

National Minorities

- With a view to protecting the rights of national minorities, preserving cultural and national identity of national minorities, their integration, inclusion in the life of the society and participating in public affairs, the Republic of Croatia will continue to implement the Constitutional Law on the rights of national minorities through the competent ministries, the Office for National Minorities and the Council for National Minorities as a consultative body.
- Members of national minorities exercise most of their ethnic rights through the regular institutions of the Republic of Croatia, just like the majority Croat population, which provides security against assimilation and ghettoisation and makes it possible to develop cultural and ethnic identity with a view to integrating it into Croatian society.
- One of the goals of the National strategy for Combating All Forms of Discrimination, whose preparation is being completed, is precisely to adopt measures for securing equal representation of ethnic minorities in the administration and judiciary. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice has just completed the analysis of the national make-up of judiciary officers, which will be the basis for planning the amendments to the regulations in order to improve the effective implementation of Article 22 of the Constitutional Law on the rights of national minorities.

- As regards education, Croatia provides the highest standards to all the minority members on the basis of the Constitution, the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, the Law on the Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities, and the Law on Education in Languages and Scripts of National Minorities. Nevertheless, the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the competent Ministry are open to all constructive and feasible proposals for possible improvements in this area.
- With regard to the situation in the Danube region, the model implemented there, which in practice has resulted in separate education for Croatian and Serb children, is an example of a free choice between the possibilities offered by the law, so the parents and pupils can only be presented the advantages and disadvantages of any one of the three models. The Government is aware that cultural and customary variety enriches the country and it is making effort to encourage multiethnic society on all levels, unless members of minorities decline it.

Electoral reform

- The GoC will participate in the series of roundtables, which will be organised by Mission in December and January to provide a public forum for discussions about proposed legislative reform. The draft law on the Permanent State Election Commission will be reviewed by ODIHR and Council of Europe Venice Commission. Their recommendation will be discussed at the December roundtable. The Prime Minister has also confirmed his participation in the event.

Police

- Community Police project – one of most advanced forms of concrete cooperation between the Mission and the Government, namely the Ministry of Interior. Croatia became a sort of regional instructor and held a seminar for neighbouring countries.
- Croatia will also participate, as one of the pioneer countries (with Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Spain, the USA, and the United Kingdom), in the newest Law Enforcement Officer Training Program for Combating Hate Crimes to be conducted by the OSCE/ODIHR

Conclusion

- The OSCE is invaluable in reinforcing the concept of comprehensive regional security which, as we all know, also includes protection of human rights, democratisation of the society and the rule of law, support for the development of civil society and non-governmental organisations, and strengthening tolerance and non-discrimination.
- Croatia undoubtedly supports all such initiatives, and it is committed to meeting its commitments. I would like to emphasise our strong support for the activities with which this Organisation is generally contributing to strengthening gender equality and gender mainstreaming, both within the Organisation and in Participating States, combating trafficking in human beings – whose victims, regrettably, are mostly women and girls, and the initiatives launched for combating violence against women and the affirmation of the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts. Only an integral recognition of the interests, experience, and views of both women and men can fully contribute to peace, security and stability of the OSCE region.

Thank you very much for your attention!