



OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

The Head of Mission

Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of OSCE Mission to Serbia

International Conference on Asset Forfeiture – the importance of taking assets away from criminals

Belgrade 15 March 2007

- Dear I would like to greet the participants and guests of this conference.
- On behalf of the OSCE Mission, I am pleased that we have the opportunity to support the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime in holding this event.
- In this conference the Italian system of asset forfeiture and the US system of asset forfeiture will be considered and compared with the current regulations in Serbia. We hope this comparison will assist you in considering the way ahead for the Serbian system, and that it will provide valuable inputs to both practitioners and lawmakers in this field here in Belgrade.
- The asset forfeiture is a key tool in fighting serious crime and organized crime. This sort of crime is almost always financially motivated, so any financial loss to the criminal is particularly effective as a disincentive. Furthermore, the removal of money from the criminal reduces his working capital and ability to fund large scale crime. Finally, taking assets away from the criminal shows the general public that criminals can be beaten.
- We are grateful to the Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime who has taken a proactive approach in organizing this conference. We strongly support his wish to prioritize the issue of asset forfeiture.
- We are also grateful for the successful working relationship that we have with the US Embassy. This is one of a number of co-sponsored events which we have held using the combined strengths of the OSCE and the US Embassy to draw together experts to assist in the fight against organized crime. In the last few years we have co-sponsored events on special investigative techniques, asset forfeiture and witness collaborators.
- The OSCE Mission highly appreciates the assistance that has been provided to Serbia by the Italian Anti Mafia directorate. The OSCE has, in close cooperation with the Italian Embassy here, supported the development of bilateral relations between the Anti Mafia directorate and the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime for 3 years. The Italian Anti Mafia directorate has had much success fighting organized crime and thus have much useful information to share.
- The Mission hopes to see the greater use of asset forfeiture powers which are currently available to the criminal justice system, the adoption of the draft law on asset management and the commencement of the process to introduce new, stronger asset forfeiture laws.

- I wish you success in your conference, which I trust, will also lead to a better-informed public on this important issue.
- Thank you