



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Mission to Croatia**

**Opening statement by Ambassador Jorge Fuentes,  
Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia,  
at the opening of the roundtable on  
*Draft Law on the State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia***

**Parliament of the Republic of Croatia, Zagreb  
13 December 2005**

Mr. Prime Minister,  
Mr. Speaker of Parliament,  
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for the OSCE Mission to Croatia to co-organize and participate in this important event. I wish to welcome all the participants to this roundtable on behalf of the OSCE Mission to Croatia.

The Mission is particularly grateful to Prime Minister Dr. Ivo Sanader for his acceptance in opening this roundtable. His presence here is an unequivocal sign that the work of this roundtable is supported at the highest political level. I would also like to express special thanks to the Speaker of Parliament, Vladimir Seks, for hosting this gathering in this distinguished House.

I would also like to convey my gratitude to our main partner in this endeavour, State Secretary Palaric from the Central Office for State Administration. His forthcoming co-operation in the preparation of the event has been greatly appreciated.

As you are probably aware, the OSCE Mission actively supports efforts by the Croatian authorities to address the most important issues pertaining to electoral reform. Elections are an essential and core element in any democracy, and electoral procedures in Croatia, as in all democratic countries, need to be stable and clearly elaborated. Supporting electoral reform process is therefore one of the Mission's priorities, stemming both from our mandate and the recommendations forwarded by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Via its Election Observation Missions between 1997 and 2003, ODIHR has been able to develop a broad understanding of Croatia's electoral framework. The Mission continues to co-operate closely with the ODIHR and other institutions in order to provide Croatian authorities with expertise on electoral matters.

Recently, the Government and Parliament have decided to engage in reforming electoral legislation in the country. I would like to express the Mission's appreciation of such commitments made by the country's most senior political officials.

Initial steps in this reform process include adoption of the Draft Law on the State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia, which passed the first reading in Parliament this September. This is a very important step forward, as the establishment of a permanent authority dealing with the preparation of the elections will certainly provide conditions for enhanced objectivity and professionalism of electoral procedures in Croatia in the future.

The Mission welcomes this development, and greatly appreciates the fact that the Government and Parliament have demonstrated their willingness to openly discuss the draft Law.

Ahead of the second reading in Parliament, the Central Office for State Administration and the OSCE Mission agreed to organize this roundtable, in order to provide a forum for a variety of stakeholders to propose concrete recommendations that could be incorporated into it. In my view, it is a positive achievement that parliamentarians, representatives of important state and judicial institutions, academics and civil society have gathered today around the same table to discuss these proposals.

In order to assist the Government and Parliament in this important task, the Mission has facilitated a review of the Draft Law on the State Election Commission, currently being prepared by experts from the ODIHR and the Venice Commission (Council of Europe). Preliminary findings of the review will be outlined today, and the review itself will be sent to Parliament and Government in the near future.

With regard to the draft law, allow me to touch upon a few concrete points:

The draft law would establish a State Election Commission on a permanent basis, in accordance with international and national recommendations on electoral administration in Croatia. This represents major progress.

The State Election Commission would work on a daily basis to improve the electoral process, propose amendments to relevant legislation, and supervise the management of voter's lists. In addition, this body would promote civic education and public information in regard to elections, and also assume responsibility for the training of local electoral commissions. The jurisdiction of such a commission should be broadened, so as to allow it make proposals in other essential areas of electoral reform, including campaign financing and media coverage of elections.

The conduct of democratic elections requires that the body responsible for electoral procedures is independent and impartial. This is a critical area and I am sure that the composition of the State Election Commission and the appointment of its members will be a subject of intense debate.

For its part, the OSCE Mission, in co-operation with the ODIHR and other organizations, remains ready to assist the Croatian authorities in addressing the key remaining electoral issues, in relation to the regulation of campaign funding, the organizing of voter's lists, and ensuring correct minority representation in local elections.

Finally, I wish all of us a fruitful and open dialogue today, and hope that it will benefit the electoral reform process in Croatia.

Thank you.