



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
TO THE OSCE, UN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
VIENNA

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Statement

by H.E. Neven Madey, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Croatia to the OSCE, UN and other International Organizations in Vienna, on the Report of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to join previous speakers in welcoming Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos in his first address to the Permanent Council.

Allow me also to state that Croatia fully supports the statement of the EU delivered by the Ambassador of Spain. The fact that we have not aligned ourselves with that statement is solely determined by our desire to present to the Permanent Council our national points of view on some issues which are mentioned in the Report, particularly on relations with Croatia which seem to attract more attention than relations of Serbia with its other neighboring states, including Kosovo.

The Report of the OSCE Office in Serbia is very elaborated and comprehensive, referring to all areas of the mandate. We note its general positive tone in regard to the political situation in our neighboring country but also analytical part which normally indicates the complexity of these processes, difficult economic situation of the country and the fact that the Serbian leaders they themselves proclaim that some of the processes are not yet irreversible. The path which Serbia has chosen to follow – that of becoming a member of the European Union – is a justified goal and an idea of strategic significance. Croatia supports that policy and is willing to share its own experience about the challenging and lengthy accession negotiations.

Croatia believes, Mr. Chairman, as our president dr. Ivo Josipović has declared in his inaugural speech, that the development of good relations with neighboring countries and the entire region is of strategic significance for our country. He emphasized that it is necessary to resolve all open issues, both border disputes and those that are a consequence of war. Peace policy has no alternative and the current generation of politicians simply has no right to leave problems to coming generations. Each country has the responsibility and the role to play, generating positive atmosphere and contributing to positive results, while not being a key player or a driver.

As the report states relations between Croatia and Serbia are of central importance for the region and as such they are viewed with particular attention. While underlining the high importance of this relationship, it is necessary to point out that Croatia at this moment, being a member of NATO and close to the completion of its accession negotiations with the EU, is far less burdened with problems which little by little assume historical significance, but is totally concentrated towards encouraging, through its own

positive example, other countries in the region on their path towards European integrations.

One of such problems, which has its roots in the past tragic developments, is the closing of the refugee chapter in the region. Ambassador Kypreos has referred to the preparations for the International conference on Refugees which should establish permanent solutions for that problem in the region. The Process was initiated by Serbia, as the report states, but in the meantime it became a regional ownership of the four countries involved in its preparations which are now very intensive. Although the Republic of Croatia has so far financed herself its own programs of return and reintegration, and expects to bring this process to a successful result in the nearest future, it has joined the preparations for the International conference aware that some other countries, like Serbia, are not in the same position and that they require additional international financial assistance. Croatia is in favor of searching for pragmatic solutions focused on concrete and verifiable projects intended to assist those individuals and segments of refugee population who are mostly in need of such assistance as they have not yet found durable solutions. We agree with Ambassador Kypreos that the role of international community in this process is of vital importance, particularly in the area of financial and expert assistance, and that this process should be conducted entirely in accordance with international standards.

In order to guarantee the success of that process it is crucial to clarify the statistics on the number of refugees still existing in the region, particularly in relation to Serbia. The OSCE Mission report quotes the number of 86.000 refugees in Serbia, mostly from Croatia. Two decades after the beginning of resettlement, it is very probable that most of the refugees have opted for one of the permanent (durable) solutions – either return to the country of origin or local integration. I wish to draw your attention to the fact that the process of return to Croatia is proceeding well and it also looks certain that a large number of persons who are still counted as refugees, have locally integrated, received the Serbian citizenship and nearly 25.000 of them have double registration as refugees and returnees. We consider it essential to establish real figures and for that purpose it is necessary to proceed to the de-registration process in line with international standards. The representatives of the international organizations share this view of ours – establishing exact facts is the precondition so that the programs and projects can be focused on the real needs of these persons.

Mr. Chairman,

Furthermore, the elections for the National Minority Councils to be held by the end of May or beginning of June are considered in the OSCE Mission report as important political and social issues. Croatia shares this view and welcomes the encouragement that the OSCE Mission is giving to this process. However, I would like to point out to the problems which have risen in the registration process. The Minister for human rights and refugees of the Republic of Serbia Svetozar Čiplić has stated in his recent interview that the financial assistance from the responsible Ministry was lacking, and that the media promotion was delayed. The promise was not kept either that the data which the state institutions possess on evidence of voters would be put at the disposal of respective minority organizations.

Equally, I would like to stress the importance of avoiding any interethnic incidents which would discourage the voters to register themselves, in this process in which the establishment of voters list is dependent on the explicit expression of voters ethnicity.

Croatia has already drawn the attention of Serbian institutions on negative implications of incidents such as the one which occurred in Futog during the celebrations of the National Day of Serbia when “unknown assailants” have physically attacked and broke the windows on the house belonging to a Croatian family. In order to ensure the results and success of the elections for the National Minority Councils it is essential that Serbian institutions establish conditions in which this process is conducted in the atmosphere of tolerance and encouragement of the representatives of national minorities to make use of their rights and legal means to protect their rights.

And finally, I would like to express to Ambassador Kypreos my best wishes for the future work, looking forward for further positive news in his next report.

Thank you.