



OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

Press and Public Information Unit

Vecernje Novosti daily, 18 December 2008

Interview with Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

Corruption as a brake

You have capacity to harmonise legislation, but not the efficiency

In a one-page interview to *Vecernje Novosti* daily, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia talks about the conditions for Serbia on the road towards the EU.

Hiding and not surrendering, Mladic and Hadzic are doing damage to their country, said Ambassador Urstad, and added that Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic must be brought to justice.

- *The GAERC did not approve implementation of the SAA with Serbia exactly for the Hague issue. Do you believe that Serbia's authorities are doing everything to find the Hague indictees?*

I believe the expression is "full cooperation with the ICTY" and how this is defined somewhat differently. It is sad to see how these two indictees, Mladic and Hadzic are still doing damage to their country. If they had any courage, honour and moral standing they would of course turn themselves in.

- *Do you think that EU could request from Serbia to recognise Kosovo as an independent state in exchange for Serbia's becoming part of the EU?*

EU as such, or EU membership for Serbia, as well as Kosovo are not within mandate given to OSCE Mission to Serbia. OSCE has its largest of 19 field operations in Kosovo, and has been and plans to be also in the future very active there.

- *The European Commission said in its progress report that corruption is one of the biggest problems on Serbia's road towards the EU. In which fields this problem is strongest -judicial, education, health sectors?*

It is very unfortunate that Serbia is ranked below No.70 in the global corruption perception index. This is obviously far too low for a country like Serbia. It has a double negative economic effect: first, corruption means that normal economic control mechanisms are not in place or effective, and second, this has a negative effect on international as well as national investment in Serbia. I cannot be specific as to which sector corruption is strongest, but please notice that all three sectors you mention in your question are public sectors. This might be indicative, but hard to prove. We need transparency and openness in the economy, starting with all details on financing of political parties to an Anti-corruption Body that is allowed to function normally and a proper and efficient State Audit System. This year the Mission continued to help Serbia implement its National Anti-Corruption Strategy and to support institutions established by related laws. Our experts supported the drafting of the new Public Procurement Law. I am confident that this law will be adopted soon. The Mission also supported the establishment of the Public Procurement web Portal, which was qualified by the latest European Commission progress report as a major breakthrough in the sector. And this only is a start to the combat of corruption in Serbia!

- *What were the biggest projects of the OSCE in Serbia in 2008 and what are your plans for the next year?*

Relying on good co-operation with the Serbian authorities, the Mission, together with its partners, successfully implemented 56 projects, in support of the fundamental reform of basic police education and to progress on judicial reform, and intensified activities in south western Serbia. We supported the drafting of key laws such as the Law on Assets Seizure, or soon to be adopted laws, such as Law on Prosecutors and Law on Judicial Training Academy. We also assisted the Ministry of Justice with the establishment of the Commissioner Service for Alternative Sentences to imprisonment, an instrument to reduce prison overcrowding and prevent crime.

We follow the process of refugee integration in Serbia.

We helped the Ministry of Youth and Sports in completion of the National Youth Strategy and respective Action Plan, and began the work on the establishment of youth offices.

- *Serbia is also criticised for the pace of harmonising its legislation with the European legislation?*

For different reasons, it could have gone faster. Four changes of governments in eight years have slowed down the process, not least because of the time it has taken to get new institutions established and running. Serbia has capacity to tackle this problem, but has so far lacked political efficiency. I hope the new government and Parliament now will provide also the efficiency needed! Basically, the whole legislation of the country has to be changed, renewed or adopted during this transition period, and this is an enormous task that Serbia is taking very seriously now. In this respect, the Mission supports the efforts of authorities in drafting legislation to enhance the accountability, transparency and efficiency of local self-government and to harmonize legislation with European standards.

- *The OSCE has been observing the situation in Sandzak. There have been conflicts in this region, though between the members of the same ethnic group. How does this region seem to you nowadays?*

We have felt for some time the need for a stronger presence there, which was well accepted by their authorities and communities. Therefore, we have now established an office in Novi Pazar to be closer to the people and relevant issues of South Western region of Serbia. This region is considerably poorer than most of Serbia. It has twice as high as the average Serbian unemployment rate and therefore needs more help, both from national and international sources, so that people can live and prosper in this multiethnic and beautiful part of Serbia, which I always enjoy to visit.