



OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

Press and Public Information Unit

Police Today, May 2009

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

Co-operation on a high level

1. How would you rate the current political situation in Serbia?

As more stable and better than any since PM Djindjic was murdered. The numerous elections and governments since 2000 have to some degree halted progress on reforming the system. Now I am hopeful that we might, for the first time after Milosevic, have a government and a Parliament in place that could last throughout the period it is elected for. This is, obviously, particularly important for Serbia now that we are in the middle of an international financial and economic crisis.

2. Has the cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and OSCE been enhanced?

It is now at a very high level generally, and I can only boast about this cooperation. At any given time, our Mission runs more than 50 different programs and projects, many of these in a very close cooperation with the Serbian government. In fact, I think this is at the highest level we will reach.

3. How would you rate the level of cooperation between the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia and OSCE?

After the new government was established and Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Dacic took over, we have seen a clear and most welcome increase in and improvement of our cooperation. We cooperate at different levels, Minister Dacic and myself meet both in regular meetings and at specific events, and our Law Enforcement Department meet at various levels with the MoI, depending on what issues, programs or projects we cooperate on. I am sure our cooperation could still be intensified and refined,

For further information, contact Maria Dotsenko, Head of Press and Public Information
OSCE Mission to Serbia
Tel: +381 11 3606 164, fax: +381 11 3606 116, mobile: +381 63 337 461
E-mail: ppiu-serbia@osce.org

While press releases are made available in both English and Serbian, the English version controls.

but would underline my satisfaction in general with developments so far between our Mission and the MoI under Minister Dacic.

4. What are the greatest achievements of OSCE in cooperation with the MoI in the past years?

It started out with the creation of the so-called Multi Ethnic Police Force in southern Serbian including Albanians into the regular police. Today, the Chief of Police in Presevo is Albanian, and over 50% of the police force there. We have achieved a lot in the re-education of the Serbian police force, mostly with “train the trainers” type of approach. Add-on education was needed in a number of areas like community policing, forensics and to promote a new basic police training system. And apropos this: in close cooperation with the MoI, we have achieved a totally new police basic training model in Sremska Kamenica. This will, in time, provide for an excellent general standard of policing in general in Serbia, I strongly believe. And there are many other areas, let me mention also our work in the sector of forensics. Now three new forensic laboratories have been established – in Nis, Novi Sad and in Belgrade, accompanied by intensive education in the use of the most modern forensic techniques. This will undoubtedly lead to a much higher percentage of criminal acts being solved.

5. What are the most positive steps in the work of the MoI in the past years?

Opening up to the world. During the Milosevic era it became isolated and closed, operating in its own world and to some degree being part of an oppressive system. Therefore, enormous and thorough changes were needed. This is what we are still working on, the most positive steps of the MoI are realizing this and being willing to change. And it has to change, as the main aim of the government is approaching the EU as soon as possible, significant changes within the Serbian policing system have to happen – look only to the border control system and passports as to the visa liberalization issue.

6. Have you noticed any changes in the work of the Police today? What are the changes?

The changes are visible to everybody, I believe. You can see it every day in the equipment of the police, but also in their behavior in relation to the public and their openness with media. What we are striving with the MoI to achieve is, among other things, to make the police force trustworthy to the public, even popular! Community policing is a new concept in Serbia. It is important to continue changing the unfortunate image the police got earlier, to regain full trust in the population. This is not an easy task, and it is a two-way process. Police also needs the help of the public! In a recent opinion poll we did on the relationship the public had to the police, scores were still not very high, but showing improvement. Police accountability is extremely important, the MoI has to continue focusing on this.

So, the answer is yes, certainly, the police in Serbia is in a process of far-reaching reform, many things have improved as described before, but there is still considerable work that needs to be done.

7. What are the most important goals in Serbia that the Serbian Police needs to achieve in the future?

A full policing strategy to enhance its accountability, to decentralize decision making, to develop further community policing, to become more open and friendly to the public are some general goals. Setting goals is a complex task for any organisation. It is a complex process especially in the public sector, where all decisions have cost implications for the budget and directly impact the public. Recently, Minister Dacic has stated that his main goals will be, among other, combating organized crime as well as improved relations with the citizens of Serbia. However, only by the application of a more strategic approach through adoption of a strategic plan, which will set top priorities for the MoI, will specific goals be formulated and presented. I am aware that the Ministry is working on the adoption of such a key document, since the Mission is advising this process. I look forward to reading it soon, as the process is the only guarantee of a measurable and sustainable reform in line with European integration requirements.

8. How do you estimate execution of the police tasks in Serbia?

Since our Mission does not focus on monitoring of the execution of everyday police work, it is possibly more relevant to repeat the opinion of the Serbian citizens on this matter. In cooperation with the MoI, a public opinion survey already mentioned was conducted end of last year, the results of which show that 38% of the population believes there has been a change for the better in the work of the police over the last five years, while only 11% see a change for the worse. Further development of the concept of community policing, on which the Mission places great importance, will further contribute to knowledge-based policing and proactive approach which is fundamental to combating today's security risks.

9. What would you highlight as a major problem in policing nowadays?

Out of many reports, including several conducted by the Mission, I would like to highlight four issues. The first is the requirement to place more emphasis on accountability across the service, both at the level of individuals as well as the organisation as a whole. No doubt, accountability is one of the cornerstones of police reform. Secondly, to decentralise and delegate decision making. Furthermore, to be more adaptive and responsive to changes. This includes the acceptance of strategic management techniques across the leadership, a new systematisation and new procedures that will cut down bureaucratic processes. Last, but not least is the frequently repeated argument for complete depolitization of the service. The Mission is actively supporting the MoI in all these complex issues.

10. In which manner the cooperation with the MOI and Police of the Republic of Serbia could be improved?

The Mission has vested much effort over the years, and has much expertise representing many nations. The Law Enforcement Department within the Mission has over 45 staff dedicated to advising and assisting police reform in Serbia. Currently the Mission is finalising the revision of the existing Memorandum of Understanding originally signed in 2004, which would re-define our future relationship. It is based on the notion that the Mission is working in Serbia, and assisting police reform, upon the invitation of the Government of Serbia.

11. How could the OSCE provide assistance to the MOI and Police of the Republic of Serbia and could some of the current OSCE projects improve their work?

The Mission is now focusing more on the broader, more strategic level which includes more emphasis on an advisory function. This is a step away from the previous format which focused on assistance implemented through projects. This change in approach has become necessary, as reform itself has entered a more advanced level and the Ministry also has gained more capacity at addressing such issues themselves. All our activities, developed jointly with the Ministry are intended to directly or indirectly improve policing in Serbia.

12. Which are the current projects the OSCE is working on?

As known, we are active in several important areas, but let me highlight again our involvement in the reform of police education and training where significant results have been achieved in basic police training. Our focus in this area will now be to support reforms related to the specialised training as well as management training. This is all connected to the wider issue of human resources management. Second important area relates to assisting the Ministry in drafting an action plan as a follow up to the recently adopted Strategy on Combating Organised Crime. A variety of similar activities are being worked on, emphasis being placed on joint coordination and implementation.

13. Which are the problems you have been facing with in your work here?

First and foremost over 8 years gaining the trust and full understanding for the Mission's important work in this area. It is a central mandated field for this Mission, a mandate that Serbia itself has agreed to as one of the 56 nations of the OSCE. We are here to help and assist only, and for a time-limited period. Secondly, as mentioned, I believe Minister Dacic has a challenge ahead of him in decentralizing and delegating decision making throughout the service and the Ministry. But, as I stated before, our cooperation is now on the right track, and I do not see insurmountable problems ahead of us.