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## **Croatia implementing the political criteria - UPDATE - JUNE/JULY 2006**

### **1. Protection of the rights of national minorities in Croatia**

On 8 June 2006 the State Secretary of the Croatian Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Tourism, Transport and Communication, Damir Špančić, accompanied by officials from the OSCE, the UNHCR, the European Commission and the United States Embassy in Zagreb visited the Topolik refugee camp outside Lipik, about 100 kilometres east of Zagreb, ahead of its planned closure later in June this year. Last year there were 156 returnees at the camp waiting for their housing problems to be solved with the help of the National Real Estate Agency.

Four attackers who stoned homes of Serb returnees in the village of Biljani Donji near the coastal city of Zadar were arrested by the local police on 25 July 2006. The police intervened quickly and caught the perpetrators who were brought before an investigating judge of the Zadar County Court. Croatian President Stjepan Mesić and the Croatian Government strongly condemned the incident. The trial of four accused started on 31 July 2006 and it is scheduled to continue on 24 August 2006.

### **2. Civil and Political Rights**

The Head of the *OSCE Mission to Croatia*, Ambassador Fuentes, presented to the OSCE Permanent Council on 15 June 2006 the latest report covering the period of the last five years of the activities of the Mission. The report underlines progress made in certain areas, such as public administration, judiciary, the status of minorities and human rights. The report also contains recommendations concerning further steps to be taken by Croatia in this regard.

On 9 June 2006 the Croatian Parliament amended *the Penal Code*, and one of the adopted amendments, proposed by the Parliament's Human Rights Committee, defines hate crime as aggravating circumstance in all criminal acts. The amended Penal Code now also includes amendments under which defamation will be punished with a fine amounting to 100 daily incomes, and defamation through the press, radio, television or in a public gathering with a fine of up to 150 daily incomes. Libel no longer entails prison sentences of six and 12 months if stated for or carried by the media, but now entails a fine.

*An international conference entitled „Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings in War and Post-War Circumstances”* was held in Zagreb on 2 to 4 June 2006. The conference was organised by the European Women's Lobby, the Coalition against Trafficking in Women, the Centre for Women Victims of War and the Centre for Women's Studies.

### **3. Public administration reform**

A ***seminar on the modernization of public administration***, organized by the Central State Office for Administration in cooperation with the EU gathered representatives of institutions and organizations directly or indirectly involved in the public administration reform (the Croatian Parliament, the Government, public administration bodies, judiciary, the Prosecutor's Office, trade and industry experts but also experts from Germany, Austria and Slovenia) on 3 July 2006 in Zagreb where they presented various aspects of the public administration reform and concluded that Croatia was on the path towards improving the quality of administrative services through the rationalization of proceedings.

The Head of the European Commission's Delegation in Croatia's projects for internal market, statistics and consumer protection, Friederike Wuenschmann presented on 5 July 2006 three ***twinning projects from the statistics sectors*** which are financed by the CARDS program and implemented through the state statistics offices of Denmark and Finland. Croatia's twinning partner in the project CARDS 2003 Public Finance Statistics, worth EUR 800,000, is Statistics Finland. The purpose of the project is to develop government sector national accounts statistics to follow EU legislation. The project was launched in February and will last 24 months. The expected key results of the project are: development of annual non-financial and financial sector accounts according to the European System of Accounts (ESA 95), ensuring that the national level cooperation especially in the compilation of national accounts statistics for the government sector functions properly and ensuring that the statistical data on the Croatian general government, included in the Excessive Deficit Procedure, is based on EU legislation. Statistics Denmark is Croatia's twinning partners in the other two projects - CARDS 2002 Establishment of a System for Producing Regional Accounts at NUTS II Level and CARDS 2003 Labor Market Statistics Upgrading. The first project, worth EUR 400,000, started in May 2006 and will last 20 months. The second project, worth EUR 320,000, started in September 2005 and will last 24 months.

The Croatian Ministry of Agriculture and the Delegation of the European Commission in Zagreb presented the results of a ***twinning project aimed at increasing phytosanitary inspections*** in the country on 20 July 2006. The project, launched 18 months ago as part of the CARDS 2002 program, was financed by the EU with nearly four million kunas and as a result, the Croatian law regulating plant health has been harmonised with the the *acquis communautaire*. The project was carried out with the assistance of the German Ministry for Consumer Protection, Food and Forestry and the German Biological Centre for Agriculture and Forestry.

### **4. Fight against corruption and organized crime**

Croatian Finance Minister Šuker and Justice Minister Lovrin met representatives of the European Commission's Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), led by Director-General Franz Hermann Bruenner, in Zagreb on 7 July 2006 for talks on ***combating fraud and corruption and establishing an Anti-Fraud Coordinating Service (AFCOS) in Croatia*** where it was announced the AFCOS will be

set up by the end of the year. The purpose of the service will be to assist OLAF and EU member States in effectively combating fraud.

At the beginning of June 2006 an international arms smuggling ring has been broken and 10 persons have been arrested in the police operation Trigger on suspicion that they manufactured and processed for a longer period of time various types of pistols, revolvers, automatic pistols and machine guns in an illegal factory in Novi Golubovec, a town in northwestern Croatia near the border with Slovenia. The seizure was the result of professional work of the Croatian police, good cooperation with other countries, and the use of all of USKOK's (Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime) capacities. Information about the trafficking of arms manufactured and processed in Croatia came from Slovenia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Austria and Belgium.

## **5. Regional cooperation**

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### **Multilateral aspect**

The summit "Communication of Heritage: A new Vision of Southeastern Europe" was held from 31 May 2006 until 2 June 2006 in Opatija. The summit was attended by six Heads of States from countries in the region, the UNESCO Director-General and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The Declaration from the summit welcomed the intensifying of regional dialogue in Southeast Europe at the highest level, noting that it had created a new atmosphere of good-neighbourly relations and joint projects in different areas. The Opatija summit was the fourth in a series, after Ohrid, Tirana and Varna. Participants agreed in the closing Declaration that the next summit should be held in Sibiu, Romania, in the first half of 2007.

On 9-10 July 2006, in Dubrovnik, the Government of Croatia hosted a summit entitled "Completing Europe's Southern Dimension: The Values That Bind Us." The event pooled Heads of States and Governments from several countries from the region, as well as representatives of renowned international institutions. The summit focused on the question of the integration of Southeast Europe in the Euro-Atlantic institutions. At the summit "Dubrovnik Declaration" was adopted confirming the strong commitment of Southeast European countries to the membership of the EU and NATO.

The third Informal Meeting of European Affairs Ministers of Southeast European Countries was held in Dubrovnik on 7 July 2006. The main subject of the meeting was the issue of progress of States of Southeast Europe towards the EU and further EU enlargement. Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Grabar-Kitarović, who hosted the meeting, stressed the importance of cooperation with other countries in the region in accordance with European principles and EU policies.

The Conference "Women from South-East Europe in Politics and Their Vision of Europe", aimed at the advancement of the role of women in social, public and political life, was held on 6 July 2006 in Dubrovnik. The Conference was jointly organised by the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe and the Croatian Government. Attending the conference, among others, were Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović,

Croatian Justice Minister Ana Lovrin, Austrian Health Minister Maria Rauch Kallat and Albanian Minister for European Integration Arenca Trashani. The participants concluded that women in Southeast Europe had achieved significant representation in politics this year.

Ministers of the Interior from members of the Salzburg Forum - Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania, including Interior Minister Kirin of Croatia, met in Wachau on 28 July 2006 where they discussed possibilities of improving international cooperation and a common anti-crime strategy. The ministers adopted a Joint Declaration envisaging closer cooperation and exchange of information among the member countries in the judiciary and home affairs with emphasis on the fight against organized crime and corruption, adjustment to the Schengen standards and the migration and asylum policy, as well as on border management and dialogue among different cultures and religions in the EU and Southeast Europe. Slovenia took over the six-month chairmanship of the forum from Slovakia at the conference.

The Adriatic Euroregion, a new Euroregion, was established in Pula on 30 June 2006. The establishment came after two years of preparations under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The founding assembly was attended by representatives from all six member countries - Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania. Croatian President Mesić, also attended the ceremony. The founding session adopted the Statute of the Adriatic Euroregion and elected the President of the Croatian Istria County Ivan Jakovčić and Angelo Michele Diorio of the Italian region of Molise as its Vice-President.

The Croatian-Slovenian-Italian Commission in charge of the protection of the Adriatic Sea and coastal areas held a two-day meeting in the Croatian seaside resort of Opatija on 4 July 2006 where it concluded that the protection of the Adriatic against ballast waters was a common goal and that the three countries should intensify their joint efforts in this field. Croatia also launched an initiative for declaring the Adriatic as a protected area and proposed that the joint motion on the matter be sent to the International Maritime Organization.

In line with its policy of active support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, together with United Kingdom and the Netherlands, became a leading country in NATO's project aimed at reintegration of personnel from the defense system into a civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project was approved in Brussels on 15 June 2006. The Croatian Government will allocate EUR 100,000 to the Trust Fund for Bosnia-Herzegovina which will help some 6,000 members of the defense system to reintegrate into society. The implementation of the project, worth some 8 million EUR, will last three years. Croatia was the first candidate country which NATO entrusted a leading role in one of its projects.

The Croatian Parliament amended the Law on Ownership and other Property Rights and the Law on Expropriation on 30 June 2006 in a manner which will ensure a simpler procedure for foreign nationals buying real estate in Croatia. Under the amendments to the Law on Expropriation, the institute of expropriation will be applied only on the basis of spatial plans. Apart from state interests, expropriation will also be possible to implement if a competent local self-government body determines that it will benefit the common well-being. Under the amendments, the party requesting expropriation will no longer have to pay compensation to the previous owner for an illegally built facility.

## **Bilateral aspect**

### ***Serbia***

Six Serbian journalists covering war crimes trials in Serbia visited the County Court in the Croatian town of Vukovar on 2 June 2006 as part of a **regional programme of cooperation between the United States Embassies in Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb**. Reporters from B92 and RTS broadcasting networks, Tanjug and FoNet news agencies, Vreme weekly and Danas daily have been visiting courts and media organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia to learn about court practices in war crimes cases in the two countries.

**Croatian President Mesić held a meeting with Serbian President Tadić** in Zagreb on 27 June 2006. The two Presidents discussed relations between the two countries especially focusing on economic cooperation, fight against terrorism, border issues and the visa regime. On the occasion of his visit Serbian President Tadić stressed that the opening of borders and a less strict visa regime was in the interest of both countries and announced that Serbia would withdraw its army from the border with Croatia. Serbian President also said that the purpose of his tour of the region was to send a message to the countries in the region to realize their common goal, remove obstacles on the path to the EU, and cooperate in "de-Balkanising" of the Balkans.

**Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and Serbian President Boris Tadić** assessed in Belgrade on 21 July 2006 that the progress of Croatia and Serbia in European and Euro-Atlantic integration was of common interest. The two high officials discussed the advancement of political and economic relations, the building and strengthening of regional stability and cooperation, respect for human and minority rights, and the settlement of the refugee issue. During the visit to Belgrade Croatian and Serbian Prime Ministers officially opened a renovated border crossing between the two countries Bajakovo – Batrovci which is a part of European Corridor X.

### ***Bosnia and Herzegovina***

Relations between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are progressing well and both countries want a more fruitful cooperation, but there are some open issues which have to be settled so that they will not burden relations in the future, as jointly stressed by the **Croatian President Mesić and the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Tihčić** on 2 June 2006 in Opatija, where they met on the margins of the summit of Southeast European countries "Communication of Heritage: A New Vision of Southeastern Europe".

The **start of the construction of a modern border crossing between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, financed by the EU**, was marked in Bosanski Šamac on 10 July 2006. The ceremony marking the start of the construction works was attended by a large number of Bosnia and Herzegovina's officials, the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Tihčić. The construction works are worth 3.8 million EUR which will be financed by the European Union through the CARDS program.

## *Montenegro*

The Croatian Government adopted on 25 May 2006 the Statement on the Montenegrin Referendum on Independence. Croatian Government recognized Montenegro as a sovereign and independent State on 12 June 2006 .

Chief State Prosecutors Bajić of Croatia and Medenica of Montenegro signed in Budva on 28 July 2006 *Agreement on Cooperation and Prosecution of Perpetrators of War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide*. Under the Agreement, Montenegro's State Prosecution will issue indictments against its citizens who have been accused of war crimes in Croatia and are not in the range of Croatian law enforcement agencies.

Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Đukanović and Croatian President Stjepan Mesić, met on 12 July 2006 in Podgorica, on the occasion of the *first official visit of the Croatan President to independent Montenegro*. Both high officials agreed that good relations between Zagreb and Podgorica were a contribution to the stability of Southeast Europe and its integration in broader international relations. The two officials expressed their satisfaction with the development of good-neighbourly relations and said they were looking forward to the continuation and strengthening of various forms of cooperation, notably in economy. During his visit to Podgorica Croatian and Montenegrin Presidents Mesić and Vujanović signed a Joint Declaration on bilateral relations and cooperation. According to the Declaration Croatia and Montenegro will direct their energy and activities towards the accomplishment of joint strategic objectives such as peace, stability and progress. Croatian and Montenegrin Presidents met again on 29 July 2006 on Brijuni Islands where they held informal meetings.

## *Slovenia*

*Croatian and Slovenian Interior Ministers Kirin and Mate met* in Rovinj on 18 July 2006 where they discussed the cooperation between the two countries. Strengthened cooperation is visible in the implementation of international projects, signed agreements and regular meetings at the state, regional and local levels, both ministers concluded that the cooperation between the two countries' police forces was excellent, very developed and intense. The coordination with the Slovene border police had been intensified due to the tourist season so as to reduce lines at borders, respecting at the same time the principles of the Schengen regime.

## **6. Prosecution of war crimes**

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Munib Suljić, one of the persons convicted in the Pakračka Poljana case, was extradited by the Dutch authorities to Croatia on 25 June 2006. The Zagreb County Court had sentenced Suljić to 10 years of imprisonment for murder of a person near the village of Janja Lipa in 1991, and the Supreme Court later increased the sentence by two years. Suljić disappeared before the Zagreb court handed down its sentence and an international arrest warrant was issued. He was arrested on 1 June 2006 in the Hague.

At the request of the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, Zagreb County Court launched an investigation on 13 June 2006 against Branimir Glavaš and Krunoslav Fehir for their roles in war crimes against civilians committed in the city of Osijek in 1991.

Jcsip Manolić, a former senior Croatian official, testified on 3 July 2006 before the ICTY at the trial of Jadranko Prlić, Milivoj Petković, Slobodan Praljak, Bruno Stojić, Valentin Čorić and Berislav Pušić, whom the Tribunal accused of war crimes allegedly perpetrated during the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1993 and 1994.