

1. Protection of the rights of national minorities in Croatia

The State Election Commission informed on the **second elections for the councils (308) and representatives (228) of national minorities in self-government units**, which were held upon the expiry of their regular four-years mandate on 17 June 2007. The opportunity to propose candidates for the councils of national minorities was used by 14 national minorities and to propose candidates for a representative of national minority by 18 national minorities (out of 22 national minorities in Croatia). There were 5 437 candidates for the councils and 191 candidates for a representative. No incidents were noted during the elections. **12.76 % of eligible voters went to the polls.**

A **Handbook for national minorities' councils** with answers to a number of questions and explanations of terms and procedures related to the exercise of rights envisaged by the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities was presented in Vukovar on 5 July 2007 by the Croatian Council for National Minorities and WYG International from United Kingdom. The Handbook, which is part of a project assisting national minorities' councils in areas of special state interest, was financed with EUR 700,000 from CARDS 2003. The Handbook contains explanations and interpretations of minority rights, institutions in charge of their rights, and a definition of minority councils and their role.

Croatia has spent nearly **HRK 38.5 million on implementing the National Programme for the Roma and the Decade of Roma Inclusion Action Plan**. Reports on the implementation of the National Programme for the Roma for 2004, 2005 and 2006 and the Decade of Roma Inclusion Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 were presented by Deputy Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor, who chairs the Commission monitoring the implementation of the National Programme for the Roma and coordinates the implementation of the Action Plan, at the seminar organised by the Croatian Government's Office for National Minorities held on 23 July 2007. Deputy Prime Minister Kosor informed that HRK 934,000 was earmarked for the implementation of the National Programme for the Roma in 2004, about HRK 2.7 million in 2005, and nearly HRK 11.9 million in 2006, adding that considerable progress had been made and a series of steps had been taken to improve living conditions for the Roma community in all areas. In the last two years, the number of Roma children included in pre-school education programmes has increased from 345 to 707, while the number of those attending primary school has tripled from 1,013 to 3,010. With regard to the efforts to resolve housing problems for the Roma minority, Deputy Prime Minister Kosor stressed that steps had been taken to legalise illegally-built Roma settlements where possible. She added that nine such settlements had been legalised in the Medimurje region. Deputy Prime Minister Kosor said that in the past three years over HRK 5 million had been allocated from the state budget for the activities of Roma organisations, adding that 220 Roma people had been given employment or sent for training. Roma people are also included in decision-making processes. For the first time three Roma representatives have been elected into local legislatures, and 20 councils and seven representatives of the Roma minority have been elected at local and regional levels. The Commission monitoring the implementation of the National Programme for the Roma includes eight Roma representatives while the task force for the implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Action Plan includes four Roma representatives.

Roma associations supported the Government's report on the implementation of the National Programme and the Action Plan in the conclusions of the meeting which gathered 54 representatives of Roma associations. The associations stated they were willing to cooperate and called on the Government to continue implementing the National Programme and the Action Plan.

2. Civil and Political Rights

In accordance with the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality for the Period 2006-2010, on 4 July 2007 the Government Office for Gender Equality established the **Working Group with a task to prepare an action plan to combat violence against women**.

The **Act on Amendments to the Act on Execution of Prison Sentences** was passed on 6 July 2007, thus harmonising it with several other laws such as the Misdemeanour and the Criminal Act. The Amendments aim at giving further guarantees for equal status of all persons under detention, increasing the safety level in penitentiaries and prisons as well as lower the costs of serving time.

The Croatian Parliament adopted on 11 July 2007 **the amendments to the Family Act** that will help children realise their rights to support as well as facilitate the adoption process. All parliamentary parties supported the Government-sponsored changes to the Family Act, stressing they would help the process of collecting alimony and provide better care for children.

The Croatian Parliament adopted on 13 July 2007 new **Act on Foreigners and new Asylum Act** which are elaborated in accordance with the relevant EU *acquis*. The Foreigners Act regulates the sojourn of foreigners as well as the terms for granting temporary and permanent residence. The adoption of the Asylum Act was welcomed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, stating it was in accordance with *acquis communautaire* on asylum and the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees.

The Croatian Parliament adopted on 13 July 2007 **the Data Confidentiality Act**. The Act stipulates that Members of Parliament, Ministers, State Secretaries at the Central State Office and the Chief State Prosecutor may access national data without a security check, but must undergo one to access confidential international documents. The President of State, the Parliament Speaker and the Prime Minister are exempt from security checks. The Act also envisages the types of classified documents: top secret, secret, confidential or restricted.

On the same date, the Croatian Parliament also adopted **the Information Security Act**, which introduces minimal criteria for the protection of classified data at the national level for the first time.

3. Public Administration

The final conference of the Local Self-government Units Reform Project took place on 5 July 2007 in Zagreb. The reform project was conducted by the Urban Institute (a non-profit organisation from the USA) with the financial aid (USD 16 million) of the USAID. The Project supported the decentralisation and strengthening of management and administrative capabilities of the local self-government units in Croatia.

4. Return of refugees

On 6 July 2007, the UNHCR and the European Commission have signed an agreement on the implementation of the CARDS 2006 Regional Programme called „Regional Refugee Return in the Western Balkans“. The Programme will be carried out by UNHCR and its partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.

5. Media

The Croatian Radio and Television (HRT) Programmes Council appointed on 24 July 2007 new directors of the three branches of the national broadcasting company (Robert Šveb was appointed as a Croatian Television Director (HTV), Davor Mezulić was appointed as a Director of Croatian Radio (HR), and Josip Guberina was re-appointed as a Director of the Music Production Department) and

relieved of duties, at the request of Vanja Sutlić, the HRT General Director, HR's Programme Director Domagoj Veršić and the Editors-in-Chief of the HR News Department Vladimir Kumbrija and the HTV News Department Vladimir Rončević, and invited applications for those posts.

6. Judicial Reform

All Croatian public prosecutors (627) have received specialised training as part of a EUR 1 million twinning project (the project was carried out by the French National School for Magistrates (ENM) and the Spanish Centre for Judicial Studies (CEJ)) **under the EU's 2003 CARDS**, the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Croatia, Vincent Degert, stated on 5 July 2007 in Zagreb. A group of 44 public prosecutors underwent special training to be able to conduct specialised seminars for domestic public prosecutors in the future. Croatian Chief State Prosecutor Mladen Bajić and Justice Minister Ana Lovrin stressed that the project was important for the development and efficiency of the Croatian judicial system.

Croatian Chief State Prosecutor Mladen Bajić presented the 2006 report on the work of Chief State Prosecutor's Office in the Croatian Parliament on 6 July 2007. Chief State Prosecutor Bajić said that Croatia's crime rate last year dropped three percent in relation to 2005, the number of people against whom charges were pressed rose by two percent, while the number of unknown perpetrators went down by nine percent.

7. Fight against corruption

The Croatian Parliament briefly discussed on 4 July 2007 the Amendments to the Law on the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime that gives it the additional powers to prosecute corruption crimes

The Zagreb County Court launched an investigation of eight suspects in the Croatian Privatisation Fund (HFP) on 17 July 2007. The investigation was being conducted against three HFP vice-presidents - Josip Matanović, Robert Peša and Ivan Gotovac, HFP Real Estate Department Head Igor Petlevski, Attorney Asja Piplović and her associate Mladen Jandriček, Attorney Juraj Parazajder and businessman from Bosnia and Herzegovina Svjetlan Stanić, who is currently the only suspect at large.

8. Regional cooperation

Multilateral

Croatian Interior Minister Ivica Kirin attended on 5 and 6 July 2007 in Bucharest an informal meeting of the Interior Ministers from Southeast European countries. At the margins of the meeting, Croatian and Bulgarian Interior Ministers, Ivica Kirin and Rumen Yordanov Petkov, signed a Croatian-Romanian Action Plan aimed at combating transnational organised crime, illegal migrations and other related activities. The Action Plan provides for operational cooperation in combating international crime in conformity with the agreement between the Governments of Croatia and Romania on cooperation in combating terrorism, organised crime and illicit trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substances.

The Croatia Summit 2007: Europe's New South took place on 6 and 7 July 2007 in Dubrovnik. The host of the Summit was Croatian Prime Minister Dr. Ivo Sanader. The Summit gathered senior European and North American leaders and key opinion makers. The Summit focused on the immediate issues of SEE, the main strategic, geopolitical and security challenges in Southeast Europe, the region's status within the Euro-Atlantic framework and the new NATO, how to increase public support for NATO in countries aspiring to become full members and to identify ways to maximize the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, which has proven to be an effective catalyst for positive

transformations in security, internal reforms and prosperity for the countries of the region. The Secretary General of NATO, Jaap De Hoop Schaeffer said that he is very optimistic regarding the invitation for Croatia to become a full member of the alliance at the forthcoming NATO summit in 2008, and expressed the satisfaction with the advancement of reforms in the defence sector. Secretary General Schaeffer also commended Croatia for the engagement in NATO's international missions and for winning public support for membership of the alliance. At the summit, the Chairman-in-Office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, announced **the closure of the OSCE Mission in Croatia** after 11 years of activity. Minister Moratinos praised Croatia for the successful completion of the transition process and for a high level of development of democratic institutions. He added that Croatia has transformed from a country that required international assistance into a country that provides support to others. The Council of Europe Secretary-General Terry Davis commended Croatia for playing an active role in the Council of Europe. He added that Croatia could serve as an example to other Southeast European countries in democratic development and that the Council of Europe appreciated its active role in all processes in this part of Europe.

A regional conference of prosecutors (from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro) on issues relating to criminal prosecution of perpetrators of war crimes by national courts was held on 12 July 2007 at Brijuni. Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY Carla Del Ponte also attended the conference. Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY Carla Del Ponte underlined good results achieved in cooperation of prosecutor's offices of countries in the region with the ICTY. The conference participants discussed new possibilities of cooperation with a view to arresting and prosecuting war criminals and agreed that after the signing of agreements on cooperation in prosecuting war criminals and perpetrators of genocide, cooperation between prosecutor's offices from the countries of the region has been advanced.

Croatian Interior Minister Ivica Kirin participated at a meeting of the Participating States of the Salzburg Forum on 12 and 13 July 2007 in Innsbruck. The host of the meeting was Austrian Interior Minister Günther Platter. The Ministers exchanged views on the security status in the region of Southeast Europe, the police cooperation among the Salzburg Forum Participating States and the organisation matters related to the forthcoming Euro 2008 football championship.

Croatia has made significant progress in fulfilling commitments covered by the mandate of the **OSCE Mission, which will most probably be closed down by the end of the year**. Mission Head Ambassador Jorge Fuentes stated on 20 July 2007 in Zagreb. Fuentes presented a **report on the progress Croatia has made since June 2006, which states that "the climate of democracy, the openness of society and the growing operational transparency of government bodies has become better established and will continue as Croatia pursues its twin goals of EU and NATO membership"**. The two issues on which the Mission will focus until its closure are refugee return and supervision of war crimes trials in Croatia. Prior to the report, Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader briefed the OSCE Permanent Council on 10 July 2007 in Vienna about Croatia's achievements and highlighted its cooperation with the OSCE and the Mission to Croatia.

A traditional Informal Meeting of Heads of Government from Southeast European countries entitled "Stability in Southeast Europe in the 21st Century" was held on 28 July 2007 in Salzburg. The meeting was attended by the Prime Ministers Sali Berisha of Albania, Ivo Sanader of Croatia, Vasile Tarlev of Moldova, and Želko Šturanović of Montenegro, and their hosts, Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer, Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, and the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe Special Coordinator Erhard Busek. The participants discussed regional problems, economic cooperation and the economic situation in the region, including energy issues, environment protection, transport corridors, as well as the countries' EU membership prospects.

Bilateral

Croatian and Slovenian Interior Ministers, Ivica Kirin and Dragutin Mate, met on 3 July 2007 in Otočec ob Kupi in Slovenia. The Directors of the Croatian and Slovenian Police, Marijan Benko and Jože Romšek, were also present at the meeting. The Ministers confirmed the excellent cooperation between the two Ministries in the fight against illegal migrations. Also, the Ministers signed a Protocol on the establishment of a joint control point at the border crossing Bregana-Obrežje.

Croatian President Stjepan Mesić paid an official visit to Bulgaria on 11 and 12 July 2007. During the visit, President Mesić met Bulgarian President Georgi Prvanov, Parliament Speaker Georgi Pirinski and Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev. In the talks between the high officials, the good political relations without outstanding issues were confirmed between the two countries. Also, it was emphasised that potentials from the both sides should be engaged in order to boost economic cooperation. The high officials, also, discussed the current situation in Southeast Europe, the Croatian progress on the path towards the EU and NATO and the engagement of the two countries in peace-keeping operations.

Croatian Prime Minister Dr. Ivo Sanader officially visited Greece on 16 July 2007. During the visit, Prime Minister Sanader met Greek President Karolos Papouilas and Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis. The high officials confirmed the existence of the very good relations between the two countries, with notion that the additional effort should be made in order to strengthen economic cooperation. The talks between the high officials were focused on the current situation in the Southeast Europe and the regional cooperation within the SEECP and RCC.

Croatian Parliament Speaker Vladimir Šeks met Serbian Parliament Speaker Oliver Dulić on 17 July 2007 in Zagreb. The Parliament Speakers stressed the importance of the relation between the two countries for the future of this part of Europe. The two high officials discussed numerous aspects of relations between the two countries, with focus on the role of the Parliament on the path towards the membership in the EU and NATO. Parliament Speaker Šeks reiterated that Croatia was supporting Serbia in its efforts to join Euro-Atlantic institutions as soon as possible.

Romanian Ministry of Defence Delegation, led by Defence Minister Teodor Melescanu, paid an official visit to Croatia on 23 and 24 July 2007, and was received by Croatian President Stjepan Mesić, Deputy Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor and Defence Minister Berislav Rončević. The talks between the Romanian Delegation and the Croatian officials were focused on the reforms in the Croatian Armed Forces, the security issues in the Southeast Europe, the bilateral military cooperation and the cooperation in the fight against international terrorism.

Croatian President Stjepan Mesić received Slovakian President Ivan Gašparović on 23 July 2007 in Zagreb. The two Presidents discussed the overall bilateral relations between the two countries and the current situation in the Southeast Europe.

Croatian President Stjepan Mesić held a meeting with the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Presidency Chairman Željko Komšić on 29 July 2007 in Umag. The two high officials discussed the relations between the two countries, including plans for the construction of the Pelješac bridge and the management of the Ploče seaport. They agreed that it was necessary for the two countries to reach as soon as possible an agreement on property rights.

9. ICTY and domestic war crime proceedings

Antun Gudelj was arrested in Sydney in September 2006 based on an extradition warrant issued by Croatian authorities and was extradited to Croatia on 15 July 2007. The first hearing in the case is expected to be held in mid or late September. Gudelj was sentenced *in absentia* (fled the country shortly after the murders) in 1994 to 20 years in prison for the murders of Osijek Police Chief Josip Reihl-Kir and two local Serb politicians near Osijek in 1991. He was arrested by German police and

extradited to Croatia in 1996. The Croatian Supreme Court then quashed the trial verdict and returned the case to the Osijek County Court. However, in May 1997, the Supreme Court suspended the proceedings and granted Gudelj amnesty in line with the General Amnesty Act. After he was released, he left the country for Australia. In March 2001, the Constitutional Court quashed the ruling granting Gudelj a pardon and returned the case to the Osijek County Court for a retrial.

The Oslo Appeals Court on 24 July 2007 positively ruled on Serbia and Croatia's request for the extradition of Damir Sireta, indicted for war crimes at the Ovčara farm near Vukovar in eastern Croatia in 1991. The Norwegian Justice Minister and the Interior Minister is expected to decide whether Sireta would be extradited to Croatia or Serbia. Sireta has already been sentenced *in absentia* by the Croatian judiciary to 12 years in prison for the murder of one prisoner of war in Vukovar.

The trial of retired Generals Rahim Ademi and Mirko Norac, who are accused for war crimes committed in the 1993 Medak Pocket operation, continues before the Zagreb County Court.

Croatia implementing the political criteria – UPDATE – AUGUST 2007

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The **eighth Jewish cultural event Bejihad/Together 2007**, with some 300 participants from Europe, the United States and Israel, was held in Opatija from 26 August until 1 September 2007. Participants were welcomed by the Special Envoy of the Croatian President, local officials and Bejihad Director Vladimir Salomon, who announced a project called "Unity Through Culture", to be implemented by European Muslims and Jews. The event also featured exhibitions, book presentations, film showings, concerts and lectures.

2. Civil and Political Rights

In August 2007, the third cycle of the **project "Mobilising the Community in Preventing Human Trafficking"**, which the CARE International North West Balkans and the PETRA network of women's non-governmental organisations have been implementing in Croatia since 2004, was ended. According to the data presented by the Head of the Human Rights Office of the Croatian Government and the National Coordinator for the Prevention of Human Trafficking, Luka Mađerić, eleven (11) victims of human trafficking were discovered in Croatia which - for the time being - can be considered as a transit country and not the final destination. Aware of the fact that this may change after its accession to the EU, Croatia is very interested and thus fully engaged in the implementation of reforms in order to meet relevant EU standards in that field.

3. Regional cooperation

Bilateral

Slovenia

Croatian and Slovenian Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader and Janez Janša, met on 26 August 2007 in Bled, before the opening of the Bled's Strategic Forum conference "European Union 2020: Enlargement and Integration".

Prime Ministers Sanader and Janša agreed in principle that the border disputes between the countries will be dealt with by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, while other outstanding issues in relations between the two countries will be addressed bilaterally. A framework for possible Court's decision will be prepared by two intergovernmental commissions and approved by the Parliaments of the two countries, before being submitted to the ICJ.