



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, Ambassador Semneby

As delivered by Acting Deputy Representative James Cox
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 8, 2004

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

It is a pleasure to welcome Assistant Foreign Minister Vidosevic, Ambassador Semneby, and Ambassador Wunenburger to the Permanent Council today.

The United States fully supports the priorities of the OSCE Mission to Croatia and we thank Ambassador Semneby and his team for their continuing good work.

We are extremely pleased to hear about the positive relationship between Prime Minister Sanader's government and the Mission. We commend the Croatian authorities for accepting the OSCE as a true partner and we hope this cooperation will continue until the Mission's mandate is fulfilled.

The United States believes that all who wish to return to their homes should be allowed to do so, with the full support of national and local governments. We are pleased by the statement made by Prime Minister Sanader, welcoming the return of all Croatian citizens regardless of their ethnicity, when he visited the Zadar region with the Chairman-in-Office this May. We look forward to seeing the fruits of this policy in the near future.

We urge the government of Croatia to continue to take the necessary steps to address all outstanding obstacles to returns, including property repossession and occupancy/tenancy rights.

Better implementation of laws protecting the rights of national minorities, as well as an increased representation of minorities in civil service and police positions, are also needed to ensure the returns are sustainable.

The issue of full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia remains of utmost importance to the United States. We urge the Croatian authorities to apprehend General Gotovina and transfer him to The Hague directly. Regarding domestic war crimes trials, we urge the government of Croatia to pursue its commitment to the prosecution of all alleged war criminals, without regard to ethnicity.

Both of these issues, refugee returns and the prosecution of war criminals, are related to another area of concern – judicial reform. We continue to support the work of the Mission in assisting Croatian authorities to reduce the major backlog of cases, to create an impartial tribunal system, and to improve free legal assistance in civil cases. We also welcome the Mission's recent report on war crimes trial monitoring.

We urge the Government of Croatia to continue stepping up efforts to combat trafficking in human beings, including by strengthening legislation related to the issue. No one of us is immune to this scourge, and we will only be successful if we all work together.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, please allow me to thank all three speakers for their informative reports. As Croatia progresses steadily along the path to Euro-Atlantic integration, we believe the OSCE can and should continue to play a vital role in fulfilling our shared goal of a democratic, multiethnic Croatia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.