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**Address by**  
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**and European Integration of the Republic of Croatia**  
**to Permanent Council of**  
**the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**Vienna, 5 November 2009**

Madame Chair-person,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Distinguished members of Permanent Council,

I am **pleased to address the esteemed Permanent Council** at this important time on the eve of the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Athens and during the meetings within the framework of the Corfu Process that are **opening new possibilities to the many current challenges to our Organisation.**

On this occasion, I would like to **give credit and express gratitude to my colleague and friend Dora Bakoyannis** who, with her very capable team of Greek diplomats, has left quite an important mark in the OSCE activities.

We share the belief that new prime minister and foreign minister Mister Papandreu, whose diplomatic capabilities are very well known, will sail the Greek ship to a safe harbour at full speed, as brave Greek seaman do.

I would like to extend my greetings to our Secretary General, Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, recalling that it was in Corfu that the idea for today meeting was initiated.

Croatia is **actively following security discussions which are taking place within the OSCE in Vienna** and is keenly interested in **making existing security institutions and mechanisms more efficient in addressing current and new security threats and in mitigating insecurities felt by some states.**

**The Corfu Process** that hopefully will be launched through the decision of the Ministerial Conference in Athens **provides a new framework** for a thorough **discussion about the situation within our Organisation** and the measures to reinforce its effectiveness.

We find the **Corfu Process extremely useful** in terms of identifying and articulating problematic areas of common concern and **in finding answers to existing security vacuum with full engagement of all key actors.**

**The key to improving a dialogue** and to fashion it into genuine security partnership will lie **in restoring the viability of the CFE Treaty**, and in mastering the **political will to find solutions for protracted/frozen conflicts** on the European continent in accordance with the international law.

We welcome **efforts of the OSCE in tackling the wide scope of counterterrorism issues**, including new and emerging threats.

In this regard I would like to note with satisfaction that the **Government of the Republic of Croatia and OSCE Action against Terrorism Unit** are organizing a **National Expert Workshop** on a Comprehensive Approach to Cyber Security that will be **held in Zagreb in November 23 and 24 2009.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Croatia's foreign policy **priorities and activities stem from our dedication to assume responsibility for strengthening regional as well as global security.**

As new NATO member and, I believe I can say, in near future EU member **Croatia is aware of shared and assigned responsibility.**

Our engagement in the Security Council **has been focused on crisis in our region and the topic of work of the ICTY.** Unique experience gained in the UN Security Council was valuable experience in building consensus on security issues.

As we can see, **multidimensional approach is the key to reaching consensus on issues of common interest and concern.** Of course one element to that end is provided by NATO's transatlantic security consultations, other by NATO - Russia security dialogue as well the European Security and Defence Policy.

Croatia believes **that a strong European Security and Defence Policy** can foster an equitable transatlantic security partnership and **a strategic link between NATO and EU.**

Distinguish permanent representatives,

Regarding negotiations with EU, I want to underline that last month we have marked **four years since the official opening of our accession negotiations,** with a substantive breakthrough achieved at the October Inter Governmental Conference.

I am glad to inform you that **yesterday Croatia and Slovenia have signed the Arbitration Agreement in Stockholm.**

This was **made possible due to a bilateral understanding that has been reached between the prime minister of Croatia and Slovenia, Kosor and**

**Pahor**, based on a renewed dialogue in the **European spirit of good neighborly relations and mutual respect**.

We see the Arbitration Agreement **as a win-win situation for both, Croatia and Slovenia**.

Croatia can now **focus with renewed energy to bring the technical part of accession negotiation to its completion by mid 2010**.

We are **aware of the challenges that still lie ahead** and remain fully committed to meet the remaining obligations in accession negotiations.

Regarding regional cooperation,

**Croatia is determined to maintain its constructive role in the region** and it will continue to actively support Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the SEE countries based on the **principles of individual approach and fulfillment of the established criteria**.

**We will continue to share our experience** with our neighbours until they reach these goals, deeply convinced that the Euro-Atlantic perspective has no alternative for the prosperity and full stability of the region.

As a co-signatory of the Dayton Agreement, Croatia carefully follows the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the current discussion on constitutional reforms.

We are happy to report that regional cooperation, regional ownership of our comprehensive relations is constantly growing.

Croatian Government **regards issues of the return or integration of refugees as the important humanitarian issue that should be resolved as matter of priority with no political connotations.**

Croatia has fulfilled **its obligations stemming from the international refugee law and the regional 2005 Sarajevo Declaration.**

Additionally, in order **to facilitate return of ex-tenancy rights holders**, Croatia is implementing **intensive Action Plan for accelerated implementation of the Housing Care Program.** Clear benchmarks are set in this regard and process is approaching its final phase.

However, we have noticed **a lack of clear standards in the region for the maintenance and termination of the refugee status.**

Despite of internationally acknowledged and steady progress in return process, **for number of years Serbia has been constantly reporting of some 70,000 refugees from Croatia still residing in Serbia.**

These **Serbian data have been automatically, without verification, reproduced by some international monitors.** For example, the 2009 EU Progress Report refers to as many as 80,000 Croatia Serbs still registered as refugees in the region.

**According to recent UNHCR information this number is not a reliable one since is evident that many are double registered,** both as returnees and refugees (24,254 persons). Many others have acquired Serbian citizenship.

More than 18 years after the beginning of the war, **it is highly unlikely that most of these persons qualify for refugee status in accordance with 1951 Refugee Convention.** Therefore, the time has come to transparently reassess the situation, starting with the individual status of the persons concerned.

Termination of refugee's status should be harmonized across the region in line with the international instruments. In this respect, **Croatia proposed bilateral meeting of relevant authorities of Serbia with the purpose to clarify the data** before convening the proposed regional conference on durable solutions for refugees planned by Serbia.

We believe that the **time has come for the finalization of the return process and refocusing of both national and international efforts on the local integration.** This is the most efficient approach for enabling sustainable solutions and dignified life to all concerned individuals regardless whether they opted to return or stay in recipient country.

Mister Secretary General, Excellencies,

Relation between the **OSCE and Croatia has developed in multiple directions.** Today, for example, we are involved in almost all activities, including the ones within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly whose autumn session in 2011 is scheduled in Dubrovnik.

On the other hand, we have been „beneficiaries“ of the **OSCE presence for no less than 13 years now**, first in the form of field missions and now through the Office in Zagreb. The cooperation was, without doubt, **extremely important, irrespectively of the ups and downs or occasional mutual criticism.**

As you know, the **OSCE Office in Zagreb has a very specific mandate compared with other missions: to follow the conduct of war crime trials and of the realisation of the remaining aspects of housing care for OTR holders.**

In the past two years, you could read numerous reports of the Head of the Office on this matter that was reviewed and discussed, including in December last year when it was decided that this year in December **the extension or termination of the mandate will be given a consideration.**

Let me **sum up what has been done in this period and what elements will be before the Permanent Council** in deliberating and adopting a new decision:

Firstly, all the reports confirm that the Government of the Republic of Croatia **has made a great progress in both mandate areas**, meeting its commitments in content and quality. Reports also **assess trends and sustainability of the processes in both mandate areas and highlighting the positive**, sustainable and irreversible progress achieved so far.

Secondly, **institutions and processes are qualified as self sustainable and no-one can deny that in both areas the policy of the Croatian Government is being pursued with full responsibility.** It is only a matter of time when the remaining portion of the planed goals will be reached;

Thirdly, a very **capable network of NGOs has come into being in Croatia in the last two years**, qualified to engage in following, evaluating and possibly indicating to any failures of local courts;

and Fourthly, the latest report of the OSCE Office confirms all this in regard of the remaining local war crime trials that will last on for years. It also confirms that the process of providing housing is irreversible now when the goals are going to be completely achieved. **The dynamics for 2009, with the funds allocated from the budget, will make it possible to hand over the remaining units to the beneficiaries by the end of 2010.**

Consequently, the Permanent Council and all of you as representatives of your governments, have a clear evaluation of the situation made by the OSCE Office in Zagreb and **hard facts supported by the numbers and trends.**

I do not really believe **that anyone familiar with the actual situation** could think of having the Office in Zagreb in place **until the last trial has been closed or until the last flat has been built.**

Excellencies, dear representatives,

I am, therefore, **calling on you to join us in finding a good and responsible solution to this matter that will be a success story for the OSCE and for the Republic of Croatia.**

**After 13 years of presence in Croatia and all recognized achievements Croatia believes that we should now start of defining the framework for the final phase.**

**We shall approach these discussions with a constructive spirit, also bearing in mind important implications on our accession negotiations with the EU, which are also entering its final phase. I feel confident that your approach**



**will be equally constructive – a success story.**

Finally, I would like **to thank to Head of Office, Ambassador Horcajada, for good cooperation and devoted and intensive work.**

I thank you **for giving me the opportunity to familiarize the Permanent Council with Croatian views in this matter.**

Please allow me to extend to the incoming Chairman-in-Office of Kazakhstan our best wishes for successful accomplishment of our common objectives.

I wish the Greek presidency, You Ambassador Marinaki, and your capable team, **to persist in all your efforts to close the Ministerial Meeting in Athens with the positive outcomes we are all expecting.**

Thank you for your attention!