



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Croatian Foreign Minister Miomir Žužul

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
16 February 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We also very warmly welcome Minister Žužul to the Permanent Council here today. Your presence Mr. Minister is a clear demonstration of the importance your country places on the OSCE and the principles for which it stands, which both the United States and this Council have noted.

Mr. Chairman, the public pronouncements of the new Government in Croatia appear to be a step in the right direction as has been the theme of the Minister's visit here today: namely, putting words into action.

We laud the emphasis that the Minister rightly put on refugee returns, and agree with him that all who wish to return must be able to do so. And we agree that words are not enough. Especially in light of the recent attack on a returnee in Biljani Donji, the government of Croatia must do everything in its power to ensure that all refugees and displaced persons who wish to return to their homes may do so. For Croatia to move forward on its path to Euro-Atlantic integration it must restore property and provide the full protection of the laws to all displaced persons, regardless of ethnicity.

We strongly support the public awareness-raising campaign being conducted jointly with the Government of Croatia and the OSCE Mission there under the leadership of Ambassador Peter Semneby who we also warmly welcome here. On the rights of refugees we also welcome the holding, over this last weekend, of bi-elections to fill the voids left after the last round of minority elections. The United States also strongly supports the Government of Croatia's stated emphasis on judicial reform, and hope for close and strengthened cooperation with the OSCE in this area.

Full cooperation with the ICTY remains of utmost importance to the United States, and we urge the Croatian authorities to fulfill their international obligation to seek, apprehend and transfer Ante Gotovina to The Hague. We also urge the Government of Croatia to pursue its commitment to the transparent prosecution of all alleged war criminals, without regard to ethnicity.

Cross-border crime, most notably the trafficking of persons, is an especially difficult challenge for the countries in the region. We again encourage the government of Croatia to expand its efforts to prevent trafficking, protect its victims, and to prosecute traffickers. Progress on these and other post-conflict issues are necessary

elements of regional stability. We are pleased to see the emphasis Croatia places on peaceful relations with its neighbors. We hope that Croatia will do everything it can to ensure regional stability in the Balkans.

Finally, we would like to commend the work that the Government of Croatia has done in implementing anti-terrorism legislation and acceding to international conventions on transnational organized crime. This is an international problem of immense seriousness that we can fight only if we work together.

Again, I would like to thank Minister Žužul for taking time to visit us today and we wish you Mr. Minister and your country well in pursuing your Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Thank you.