

**INTERVIEW: The OSCE Secretary General, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, speaks about the democratic development and the role of Croatia in the region**

## **CROATIA IS THE “EXPORTER” OF STABILITY IN THE REGION**

Interviewed by Veronika Reskovic

**ZAGREB – The OSCE Secretary General, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, paid a visit to Croatia, in the course of which he met with President Stjepan Mesic, the Delegation of the Croatian Parliament in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and with Milorad Pupovac, SDSS representative. He had a working lunch with diplomats from Austria, Belgium and USA, as well as with representatives of the UNHCR, the ICTY and the European Commission. The first visit of the OSCE Secretary General to Croatia was marked with optimistic messages to Croatia:**

- Croatia is an example of a successful process of democratization and the messages it sends encourage processes of mutual cooperation and reconciliation in the region – those were the messages of the interview. We had a conversation with the high-ranking OSCE official at the end of his dynamic working day, just prior to his last obligation: a dinner with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic.

- I am going to leave Croatia with very positive impressions. Our Mission to Croatia is a very successful story. We have exceptionally good cooperation with Croatian authorities. We work on fulfilling our mandate in the atmosphere of trust. This positive advancement will be discussed in Vienna in June when we discuss the extension of mandate for the OSCE Mission to Croatia.

▪ **What should Croatia still improve? What will you focus on in your midterm review in June?**

- Our mandate has been agreed on with Croatian authorities. All priorities are equally important, they complement each other. In other words, the return and integration of refugees, the rule of law, the reform of judiciary, police and electoral legislation are equally significant. Croatia is currently making good decisions in relation to these issues. However, it is not enough to have good decisions and laws, it is necessary to work on their implementation. A good atmosphere needs to be created in the society. We are aware that it is not possible to easily smear a difficult period; a lot needs to be done with civil society, whereby we also expect the support of open media.

▪ **Citizens are wondering why is the OSCE Mission still in Croatia. We started negotiations with the EU, but at the same time we are still the subject of OSCE monitoring.**

- Our presence in a country is a matter of joint decision by both sides. The country assumes certain commitments and works on certain standards. In order to

work on that as good as possible, countries cooperate with the OSCE, they receive advice from us, etc. There is no weighing why we are still here. For example, we are still following certain topics in Latvia and Estonia although they are already members of the EU.

- **Are you, in spite of that, preparing an exit strategy for Croatia? The OSCE has been in Croatia for ten years already.**

- The main task of the Mission is to fulfill its mandate. We are on a good path. However, the decision on the extension of mandate will be passed by all 55 OSCE member states after the presentation of our midterm review.

- **How do you assess the situation in the region after the death of Slobodan Milosevic, on the eve of referendum on the independence of Montenegro and constitutional changes in B-H, along with the on-going search after the solution for Kosovo?**

- I agree with you that these are challenges we will need to face. The situation is not simple, but there is advancement. Steps forward have been made in B-H as well, and there is certain stabilization in Kosovo where the situation is improving. There are certain steps made towards the accession to NATO and the European Union, which will encourage these countries to invest additional efforts. I believe that positive steps forward will prevent steps backward in the field.

- **How do you perceive Croatia in relation to the region and in relation to the EU?**

- Croatia is the “exporter” of stability in the region. Primarily due to the wisdom of its leadership that is highly appreciated by the EU, but also due to its exceptional cooperation with the OSCE, which contributed to the opening of European doors for Croatia. Good cooperation with our organization and positive steps in democratization will definitely be taken into consideration in Croatia’s advancement towards the EU.

- **During the visit of your predecessor, Jan Kubish, two years ago, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader said that Croatia no longer wishes to be only a country that is being monitored but also a country that has an active role in the OSCE. Are there any improvements in relation to that?**

- There are no differences among the OSCE member states. This is an organization where we do not have less or more valuable countries. Croatia is an equal member state. You have a very competent ambassador who initiates and considers different topics within the organization; your citizens participate in at least two OSCE Missions...

#### **Observers also in Guantanamo?**

- **The OSCE is criticized, even by the member states themselves, that the organization deals only with countries in transition. Russia, for example, considers that the OSCE should deal also with the “old” Europe, even with human rights and democratization in America.**

- Such criticism is unfounded. The OSCE will monitor elections in Italy and we are considering the sending of observers to the US prison Guantanamo. The OSCE is dedicating a great deal of energy to tolerance and non-discrimination. We are cooperating with countries with the majority Muslim population. The OSCE is continuously working on democratic development, regardless whether that concerns a country in transition or old democracies.

**“What would be your message to Croatian authorities and what to Croatian citizens?**

**- The message is the same for everybody. Nobody is perfect; there are problems in every country. However, it is important that we work together on the same values; sincerely and resolutely.**