



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Statement in Response to HOM Croatia, Ambassador Semneby**

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
December 18, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to welcome Ambassador Peter Semneby to the Permanent Council today and we thank him for his thorough report and pledge our continuing support to the Ambassador and his staff at the OSCE Mission to Croatia. We are also glad to see the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Croatia, Ambassador Wunenberger.

We welcome the progress made in Croatia since the last Status Report in July 2003. One of the most significant developments in this time period was the successful general elections held in Croatia on November 23. As we stated in our November 27 PC intervention, the United States shares the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' assessment that the elections in Croatia were generally in line with international standards and that the campaign period was generally orderly.

The United States urges the newly elected government, and Prime Minister-designate Dr. Ivo Sanader, in particular, to maintain a cooperative and constructive relationship with the OSCE Mission to Croatia.

We welcome the list of goals that the Mission plans to propose to the new Croatian government, as outlined by Ambassador Semneby. The focus of these goals is on implementation – a clear signal that Croatia has moved beyond the first step of developing and adopting legislation and procedures, and now must focus on applying these policies evenly and systematically.

The issue of full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia remains of utmost importance to the United States and we urge the Croatian authorities to apprehend General Gotovina and turn him over to The Hague and to apprehend others, whether they are located in Croatia or located in other jurisdictions, and in that case actively cooperate with those jurisdictions for their extradition and for their rendering to The Hague. We also urge the government of Croatia to pursue its commitment to the prosecution of all alleged war criminals, without regard to ethnicity.

Another issue of particular importance to the United States is refugee returns. We urge the government of Croatia 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 that returns are sustainable.

All who wish to return to their homes should be allowed to do so, with the full support of national and local governments. We thank the OSCE Mission for its continued engagement on this issue and we look forward to future updates on the progress in the area of refugee returns.

Both of these issues, the prosecution of war criminals and refugee returns, are related to another area of concern - which is judicial reform. We welcome the adoption of the implementation plan for judicial reform in June 2003, but regret that little progress has been made to put this plan into action since its adoption. Competent, unbiased judicial personnel must take steps to address the backlog of more than one million cases. Judicial reform remains a huge challenge and will require the full support of the new government. We recall the adage that justice delayed is justice denied.

We welcome the adoption of the Regional Statement on Southeast Europe at the Maastricht Ministerial and the constructive engagement of the Croatian delegation in the negotiations on that document. The statement highlighted, in particular, the progress made in the region, due to the collective efforts of the Southeast European governments, the OSCE, and the international actors.

The United States, working together with the OSCE, the EU, and other international partners, offers its full support to the government and people of Croatia in their endeavors to reform, rebuild, and reinvigorate Croatia and to continue on the path toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we wish to thank Ambassador Semneby for his commitment and dedication as the Head of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, and we praise, as well, the tireless efforts of his staff. Thank you very much.