

Press Release

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Croatia: Commissioner Hammarberg encourages the adoption of further measures for post war justice and the protection of displaced persons and Roma

Strasbourg 12.04.2010 - Croatia appears ready to do its part in resolving the human rights issues which still remain after the war-related atrocities in the nineties, stated Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg when concluding a four-day visit to Croatia.

He held discussions with national and local authorities, including with President Ivo Josipovic and Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor. Meetings were also held with representatives of international and non-governmental organisations involved in the process of post-war justice, the protection of the human rights of displaced persons and of the Roma population.

The Commissioner welcomed the pledges by the Croatian authorities to resolve rapidly the remaining issues related to the return home of refugees and internally displaced persons. Recalling the relevant judgments of the European Court of Human Rights he highlighted the need for both national and local authorities to do their utmost to ensure the prompt and sustainable return of all those displaced.

Further efforts are necessary in order to accelerate the programme of house reconstruction and to process pending cases without delay. Claims by holders of acquired tenancy rights should be dealt with effectively and fairly, including for those who have not returned.

Commissioner Hammarberg welcomed the authorities' readiness to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and to take effective measures to ensure that cases concerning war-related crimes are examined and followed through in domestic courts, in accordance with the standards of promptness and fairness established notably by the European Court of Human Rights. He noted in particular the Justice Ministry's ongoing efforts to enhance dialogue and cooperation in this area with neighbouring countries concerned.

The Commissioner visited the region of Medimurje where he observed the efforts made to improve the housing conditions for members of the Roma minority. Similar improvements are necessary in other settlements where people, including children, live in slum-like conditions undermining their health. Systematic efforts are also necessary to ensure access of Roma to employment, as well as to education in full compliance with the European Court of Human Rights' judgment in the case of *Oršuš and others*. The Commissioner recommended further efforts to develop facilities for pre-school education.

Measures remain also to be taken to resolve the persistent, serious problem of statelessness. Procedures for obtaining the Croatian citizenship should be simple and prompt and complemented by an efficient system of free legal aid. In this regard, the ratification by Croatia of the European Convention on Nationality and the Council of Europe Convention on the avoidance of statelessness in relation to state succession was highly recommended by the Commissioner.

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