OSCE CHRONICLE

OSCE presence in Albania successful

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1. OSCE presence in Albania
   The OSCE paid considerable attention to the developments in Albania in the recent period. This was the result of the major crisis in which the country found itself after the collapse of the notorious pyramid-funds in spring this year. The international efforts to assist the country in restoring law and order consisted of two elements.

   In the first place a multilateral military force under Italian guidance started operating in the middle of April in order to assist the distribution of humanitarian relief goods. The military force under the code name ‘Alba’ consisted of 6,500 troops, coming from ten countries. It was a ‘coalition of the able and the willing’, the mandate of which had been endorsed by the UN Security Council. In June its mandate had been extended in order to provide proper protection to the international observers who monitored the elections on 29 June. In the beginning of August the troops were withdrawn after having successfully completed their task. In the middle of August only a number of Greek soldiers were still present in Albania, although the formal basis for this presence is rather unclear. The major impact of Alba was apparently the signal to the Albanian population that the international community was serious in its offers to help the country.

   The second element of the international involvement in the Albanian crisis is the OSCE ‘Presence in Albania’. This is the official name for the OSCE mission in Tirana which helped the Albanian authorities in many ways, in particular, also in the field of the organization of national elections on 29 June. Although parts of the territory of Albania were still controlled by armed gangs, the elections could take place, resulting in an (expected) political earthquake. The Socialist Party booked a clear victory and got a comfortable majority in parliament. The Albanian president Sali Berisha kept his promises and resigned. The country is now governed by the former opposition which will have an enormous task to bring back stability in the country where armed gangs are still active in many places.

2. Presidential elections in Croatia ‘free, but not fair’
   The OSCE election observers were not fully satisfied with the way the presidential elections in Croatia on 15 June were held. The elections resulted in a reelection of President Franjo Tudjman. Although the OSCE observer
mission considered the elections themselves to be ‘free’, the process leading to the elections was severely criticized. The opponents of the sitting president Tudjman hardly had a chance to use the media to present their programme. The OSCE observer mission, therefore, made several recommendations to guarantee that in future television and radio time should be carefully balanced between the major candidates.

3. Major OSCE involvement in Eastern Slavonia
The OSCE is heading to a major involvement in Eastern Slavonia after the ending of the mandate of UNTAES in this area. According to the present plan UNTAES will end its work in this last Serbian-hold territory of Croatia in the middle of January 1998. In order to avoid a mass exodus of the Serbian population of this area, the international community is actively looking for ways and means to achieve this aim. The decision has been taken to upgrade the small OSCE Mission in Zagreb to a major operation, encompassing up to 250 staff members, who will provide a visible international presence in the region after the departure of the UN peacekeepers. This will make the OSCE Mission to Croatia one of the OSCE’s biggest field operations, on a par with the current deployment of approximately 250 missions members in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The mission to Croatia will have a major task in monitoring human rights in general and the rights of the Serbian minority in particular.

The Permanent Council decided on 26 June to extend the mandate of the reinforced Croatian mission until 31 December 1998. This is the only OSCE mission with such a long term (normal is an extension of only 6 months), due to the specific tasks in the region.

4. Other OSCE Missions
The mandates of all OSCE missions to the various countries (Estonia, Latvia, Macedonia, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Chechnya) have been extended to the end of this year.

A new mission will be established in Minsk, Belarus, although the official denomination will be ‘OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Office’. The OSCE community has great concern about the developments in Belarus which are considered to be in violation of OSCE commitments relating to human rights, rule of law and democracy. The present Belorussian president Lukashenko has acquired almost dictatorial powers in the political system of the country. Recent elections for parliament are internationally not accepted as well. This has resulted in the remarkable situation that the credentials of the Belorussian delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly have been refused.

5. Activities of the High Commissioner on National Minorities
The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel, has actively continued his involvement in various OSCE states. Since February this year the HCNM paid visits to Macedonia, Croatia, Romania, Latvia, Estonia,