

CROATIA MONTHLY

Regional Conference in Slovenia



Source: GOC

A Conference of Prime Ministers from Southeast European countries was held on March 20th in Brdo pri Kranju, in Slovenia, jointly organized by the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia.

PM Jadranka Kosor and PM Borut Pahor said that by turning up for the conference, which was attended by SEE countries with outstanding bilateral issues, all leaders had shown that they support a culture of dialogue and the establishment of mutual trust. PM Pahor said that the main message of the meeting of leaders from these seven countries is the fact that they need one an-

other and added that all countries and leaders should recognise one another and establish a relationships of trust.

PM Kosor said that it is very important that the conference and the process launched at the conference were opened by Slovenia as an EU member, and by Croatia which should this year conclude its EU accession talks and join the EU soon.

The Conference ended with the adoption of a joint declaration reaffirming support to processes leading to the integration of the Western Balkans countries to the European Union.

WELCOME NOTE



On behalf of the entire team of the Embassy of Croatia to the United States of America, I would like to welcome you to the second issue of our monthly newsletter. In this issue we bring you news from Croatia and our neighborhood, as well as some key public affairs activities of our Embassy. The past month was marked by several meetings of Croatian leaders with their European counterparts and important steps were taken toward further development of good neighbourly relations in Southeast Europe. I would like to invite you all again to let us know what you think about our newsletter, especially what areas could be further improved. I hope you enjoy reading our newsletter and wish you all a happy Easter!

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic
Ambassador

PAHOR, KOSOR AND TADIC STARTED TRILATERAL MEETINGS

Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor, Slovenian PM Borut Pahor and Serbian President Boris Tadic met on March 5th in Ptuj, Slovenia in an effort to contribute to the continuation of good relations in all areas between the three countries.

They announced the March 20th regional conference in Slovenia that was to follow(see previous page). Croatian PM Kosor said solutions to problems should be sought “in keeping with the trust, friendship, respect for the ability, possibility and willingness to resolve problems and outstanding issues that PM Pahor

and I, namely the governments of Croatia and Slovenia, have shown”.



Source: GOC

All sides agreed that it is necessary to create a good political climate, not only for the European integration of the countries of the region, but

also for ensuring major investments and creating new jobs.

Pahor said the trilateral meeting was a step towards strengthening trust between the three countries and a signal to others that mutual trust among leaders could help resolve some important issues more easily and more quickly.

All three officials agreed to meet regularly in the future and when necessary, announcing that the next meeting, after the upcoming Regional Conference in Slovenia, will be held in Zagreb, Croatia.

NEW CYCLE OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT TO BE LAUNCHED IN CROATIA



Source: GOC

This year Croatian public companies will make investments worth 2.4 billion USD and capital projects worth close to 377 million USD will be financed from the budget. The investments refer to companies such as the Croatian Power Company

(HEP) and the Croatian motor way operator (HAC) as well as to the constructions of schools, daycare centers and other facilities, announced PM Kosor at a meeting with the representatives of the national employers’ association (HUP) held on March

12th this year. She announced the abolishment of the two percent extra tax rate imposed last year on salaries and other income. HUP officials said it was good that the government had announced its plan to abolish the tax rate three and a half months in advance so that everyone could get prepared.

The talks between PM Kosor and HUP officials were also focused on possible changes to the Labor Act designed to preserve the existing jobs and facilitate the creation of new ones.

The two sides discussed ways of removing non-tax levies in the business sector, including fees for fresh water fish-farming and changing the system of calculating payments for water used for commercial purposes. By May 15 the government will prepare changes to the law on public utilities management.

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES
OF CROATIAN OFFICIALS

Croatian President Ivo Josipovic visited Brussels on March 4th and 5th, on what was his first visit abroad since he took Office in February. He met with the President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek, the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, and the European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso. President Josipovic and EP President Buzek discussed the most important issues related to Croatia's EU entry: reforms, relations with neighbors, and the fight against corruption. They said that they were confident that Croatia would very soon become a member of the EU, underlining that the remaining work on reforms was being done not only for the sake of EU membership, but for the sake of Croatian citizens. "Croatia must implement the necessary reforms regardless of the process of its accession to the EU, which is nearing completion even though a lot of work remains to be done", said President Josipovic and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso after their meeting.

On March 12th President Josipovic visited Slovenia where he met with Slovenian President Danilo Tuerk. Both presidents stated that the efforts of the two countries' governments to solve outstanding bilateral issues and Croatia's forthcoming entry to the EU are turning a new page in relations between the two countries.

With his Austrian counterpart Heinz Fischer, President Josipovic held talks on March 15th in Vienna. President

Fischer said that Austria believes that Croatia can wrap up accession negotiations with the EU this year and join the Union in 2012. "There are good chances for negotiations to be completed this year", said the Austrian President, adding that this would pave the way for Croatia's admission to the EU in 2012. The two presidents agreed that Austrian-Croatian relations are friendly and stable and that the two countries are connected by long historical ties and excellent cooperation.

During his official visit to Hungary, President Josipovic expressed satisfaction with Hungary's support for Croatia's plans on accession to the EU. "I am glad that the Hungarian President has reaffirmed his country's support for Croatia's admission to the EU. Our plan to complete membership talks in 2010 and enter the EU in 2012 has received support", said President Josipovic. President Soloym said that Hungary will be chairing the EU in the first half of 2011 and it wants to be one of the first countries to ratify Croatia's EU accession treaty.

President Josipovic participated in the Brussels Forum on March 26th and 27th. The Forum is one of the biggest meetings of politicians, analysts and business people from North America and Europe. On the margins of the forum, President Josipovic met with the Serbian President Boris Tadic (this was their second meeting, the first being on March 24th in Opatija). "We have reaffirmed the good, positive trends of a few days ago and we can call again on our governments to continue making effort in dealing with issues that have burdened

Croatian-Serbian relations most. Those are primarily border issues, refugee issues, war crimes-questions which burden Croatian citizens, regardless of whether they live in Croatia or as refugees in Serbia", said President Josipovic after the meeting with President Tadic in Brussels. President Josipovic also held talks with NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and World Bank Director Robert Zolelick.

On March 2nd Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor officially visited Russia where she met with PM Vladimir Putin. Her visit to Moscow and meeting with PM Putin, was described as very good, with PM Kosor saying that this first bilateral visit of a Croatian head of government to the Russian Federation opened a new chapter in relations between the two countries. PM Putin described the meeting as open and friendly, adding that "Russia regards Croatia as an important and reliable partner in Europe and in the Balkans. Three bilateral agreements were signed during the visit: one on the construction and exploitation of gas pipelines in Croatia, one on economic, scientific and technical cooperation, and one on reciprocal visits by Croatian and Russian citizens.

On March 25th, PM Kosor attended a meeting of the European People's Party in Brussels which discussed the agenda of an EU-27 summit. She also met with European Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele who expressed hope that by the end of the Spanish EU presidency Croatia would open the three remaining unopened policy chapters and

close the majority of them. On March 12th PM Kosor visited the Vatican where she met with Pope Benedict XVI.

On March 23rd Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Gordan Jandrokovic chaired the 6th meeting of the EU-Croatia Stabilisation and Association Council in Brussels. In his opening remarks, Minister Jandrokovic said that Croatia pays special attention to the meetings of the SA Council, as they facilitate a constructive dialogue with the EU members and the European Commission. In reviewing last year's achievements in EU-Croatia relations, since April 2009 and the 5th meeting of the SA Council, MFA Jandrokovic pointed out that Croatia had made visible progress in numerous areas and credibly met its obligations stemming from the accession negotiations and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, and had thus entered the final phase of the negotiations. The Minister also informed about the activities that Croatia is undertaking to meet the political membership criteria. Thus he reported on the judiciary reform process, state administration reform (to which special attention is being paid), legislative and organizational mechanisms for combating corruption, fight against organized crime, cooperation with the ICTY and the activities concerning the prosecution of war crimes. He also talked about activities directed at the return of refugees and displaced persons, housing of former holders of

tenancy rights, property return, protection of national minority rights and human rights in general. In regard to the economic criteria and the criteria concerning the harmonization with the acquis, Minister Jandrokovic outlined the measures that the Croatian government had carried out in 2009 to counter the consequences of the global economic crisis, and which are still being carried out and updated today. At the same time, Croatia continues to implement comprehensive reforms directed at fulfilling the EU membership criteria.

Minister Jandrokovic officially visited the People's Republic of China, where he met with the Vice President of China Xi Jinping. They described the cooperation in numerous areas as positive, and agreed that the political relations between Croatia and China made a favorable foundation for the strengthening of economic cooperation. MFA Jandrokovic also met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi. In the meeting they talked about the relations between two states, which they described as very good, well developed and dynamic. MFA Jandrokovic emphasized that economic cooperation was a priority in the overall bilateral relationship, primarily as the very good political relations are regarded as the basis for the strengthening of economic cooperation, with regard to the 10th meeting of the Mixed Croatia-Chinese Committee for Economic Cooperation to be held in 2012, and the interest in promoting the highest forms of economic

cooperation. During his official visit, Minister Jandrokovic also met with Deputy Governor of Shaanxi Province Hong Feng and held a lecture at the Chinese Institute for International Studies entitled "Croatia and China-Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century".

On March 25th Minister Jandrokovic participated in Belgrade in an international conference on the displaced persons and refugees. He said that meeting all the benchmarks in dealing with the problems of refugees and displaced persons is among the top priorities of the Croatian government, and that Croatia had set up a system enabling the return of all who wanted to return. Minister Jandrokovic participated in an informal meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of EU Member States and candidates for full membership to the EU (the so-called, Gymnich meeting) in Cordoba, Spain. Minister Jandrokovic also attended quadrilateral meetings of ministers of foreign affairs from Hungary, Serbia and Greece in Budapest, on March 29 and 30. He held talks with his Hungarian and Serbian counterparts, Peter Balazs and Vuk Jeremic, respectively discussing regional cooperation between the three countries. Minister Jandrokovic said that Croatia supports all regional initiatives aimed at bringing the three countries closer and strengthening their cooperation. He reiterated the Croatian government's readiness to advise all SEE countries during the EU entry negotiations.

KICK-OFF REGISTRATION FOR THE 2010 SUSAN G. KOMEN GLOBAL RACE FOR THE CURE



Source:komen.org

Croatian Ambassador Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic participated at the kick-off registration for the 2010 Susan G. Komen Global Race for the Cure, which will be held on June 5 on the National Mall in Washington,DC. In her remarks the Ambassador said that she is honored to be here and help to shine the light on this global

cancer crisis. She stressed the importance of womens' role in today's world. She said that the Croatian government, with a woman Prime Minister, is systematically working on resolving the issues which most affect women, especially domestic violence and human trafficking as well as participation of women in political, business and public life. She also talked about the Croatian National Strategy for the prevention of breast cancer. Representing the U.S. government, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero noted that the Administration is committed to women's health, and the work of Susan G. Komen for the Cure is a model for outreach and positive change in international health care. Ambassador Nancy G. Brinker, who is the founder of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, said that where a woman lives should not determine whether she lives. "We can stem the tide of the growing crises, we can share what we have learned, we can end breast cancer forever, all around the world".

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CROATIAN SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Croatian Scholarship Fund celebrated its 20th anniversary on March 13, 2010 in Sacramento, California. The Croatian Scholarship Fund was established in 1989 in the San Francisco Bay Area by a group of Croatian Americans for the purpose of providing university scholarships for Croatian students who could not otherwise afford a higher education. Deputy Chief of Mission Vice Skracic who participated in the celebration on behalf of the Croatian Embassy, congratulated the CSF for the excellent work that the Fund has been doing for the last 20 years. He stressed that the Republic of Croatia took and is taking important steps towards becoming a "knowledge-based society", and that the Croatian government placed education as one of its priorities and has given its full support to the changes in the education system because quality education is a precondition for a successful society.

25th Anniversary of Croatian National Home "Cardinal A. Stepinac"

On February 27th and 28th Ambassador Grabar-Kitarovic participated in the 25th anniversary of Croatian National Home "Cardinal A. Stepinac" in Cleveland. Ambassador congratulated the community for the successful promotion of Croatian heritage and identity over the last 25 years and wished them every success in their future activities. Archbishop Cardinal Josip Bozanic and U.S. Congressman Dennis Kucinich were also present.

No visa requirement for Mexico from April 25, 2010

The Government of the United Mexican States has decided to suppress the requirement of visas for tourists, transmigrants and visitants (business persons) holding passports of the Republic of Croatia when entering the United Mexican States from April 25, 2010. Croatian tourists and visitants on business purposes will be authorized to stay in Mexico for 180 days from the date of arrival while transmigrants will be granted a 30 day long stay. This step is another token of friendship, understanding and dialogue between two states.

Francophonie 2010 Festival



The Croatian Embassy participated for the first time at the Francophonie 2010 Festival in Washington, DC. The Republic of Croatia was among 30 other countries which represented themselves with traditional meals and drinks, handicrafts and promotional materials. Around 1,500 visitors showed special interest for the Republic of Croatia. This year Francophonie was dedicated to the memory of those who lost their lives during Haiti's recent earthquake, and to the rebuilding efforts of those who survived.