

## The Closure and Restructuring of OSCE Field Operations: The Case of the OSCE Mission to Croatia<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

The closure of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, the first large OSCE post-conflict field operation in the Western Balkans to come to an end, and the establishment of its successor, the OSCE Office in Zagreb, deserve to be studied carefully because of the various challenges that were met during the process. Key aspects include setting standards for evaluating whether a mission's mandate has been fulfilled, the creation of political forums to facilitate dialogue with the host country on the implementation of its commitments and, in operational terms, a well co-ordinated closure and restructuring implementation plan and after-action review process to help ensure that lessons were learned and fed into institutional memory.

It is difficult to define exactly when the work of downsizing and closing the Mission began given the many phases of its transformation since being created in 1996 (from the withdrawal of the Police Monitoring Group in Eastern Slavonia in 2000 to the closing of co-ordination centres in the field in 2002). The Croatian authorities began advocating the Mission's closure as early as the beginning of 2000, following parliamentary and presidential elections that represented a shift from the previous Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) dominated government. If a single trend needs to be identified, it can be said that Croatia's move towards European integration influenced the progressive transformation of the Mission and its gradual downsizing. A critical phase definitely occurred in the autumn of 2004, when Croatia was granted candidate status by the European Commission and consequently started negotiations for European Union accession.

One could contend that the Mission's gradual closure was intimately linked to the start of negotiations for EU accession, as this implied the fulfilment of certain political criteria, such as the establishment of a stable and mature democracy and respect for fundamental human and minority rights. In fact, the OSCE Mission to Croatia, with its broad human-dimension mandate, had always promoted the fulfilment of OSCE standards and commitments in the field of minority rights, election legislation, war-crimes prosecution, refu-

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<sup>1</sup> The views presented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the OSCE Secretariat or OSCE participating States. The authors would like to thank their colleagues John Crosby, Operational Support Officer, CPC/OS, for his valuable input on operational planning, and Pascal Heyman, CPC Deputy Director/Policy Support Service, for his comments, as well as other colleagues in the OSCE Secretariat for their assistance with this contribution.

gee return, and policing, as well as the strengthening of civil society. Most of the values and commitments supported by the Mission's work in assisting the host country coincided with the Copenhagen criteria.<sup>2</sup> This, however, does not mean that the OSCE Mission was merely a service provider working on behalf of the EU. Rather, it was an actor that pragmatically built a solid partnership with EU institutions over the years, mainly on the basis of its comparative advantages, such as its extensive field presence and institutional expertise on post-conflict issues.

On 21 December 2007, the OSCE Permanent Council decided to close the OSCE Mission to Croatia and to establish the OSCE Office in Zagreb. The following section explores, from the Mission's perspective, the various phases that can be identified in its progressive downsizing and some of the instruments and procedures that were used to ensure that the assessment of the mandate's completion was carried out properly. These included the creation of "Platforms" – political forums for meetings between the Mission and the host government (as well as other relevant international actors) to discuss and agree on specific benchmarks for completing programmatic activities as determined in the Mission's mandate. Verification of the implementation of agreed benchmarks was also a feature of the downsizing and closure process. In operational terms, the closure of the OSCE Mission to Croatia and its restructuring as the OSCE Office in Zagreb was a well co-ordinated and collaborative effort between the Mission and the OSCE Secretariat.<sup>3</sup>

### *Progressive Downsizing of Thematic Activities*

Following the example set in 2001, when the first mid-term review of the OSCE Mission to Croatia was produced, the Mission embarked on a similar exercise in 2006 by outlining the progress made in all its six programmatic areas: political affairs/electoral reform, strengthening of civil society, media reform, police reform, rule of law, and refugee return and integration. The 2006 mid-term review formulated joint objectives that were agreed by the Mission with the host government. The review also listed specific tasks still to be fulfilled by the government and gave timelines for their completion.

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- 2 The Copenhagen criteria are the core requirements that need to be met by any country wishing to join the EU. First outlined by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 and reinforced by the Madrid European Council in 1995, they cover the following areas: political – stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities; economic – existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; acceptance of the Community *acquis* (the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic, and monetary union).
  - 3 Additional information on the closure of the OSCE Mission to Croatia and the establishment of the OSCE Office in Zagreb can also be found in the *OSCE Magazine*, June-July 2008 (see for example the article by former Deputy Head of Mission Todd Becker, Closure and Completion, Mission to Croatia, 1996-2007); and in *The Courier: Newsletter of the OSCE Office in Zagreb*, January 2008.

These agreed objectives and tasks were the first steps in the development of the benchmarks that needed to be fulfilled for the completion of the Mission's mandate.

The benchmarks were the result of close working-level consultations between the Mission and the host country. They were subsequently endorsed in the Platform meetings between ministers and their representatives and the head of the OSCE Mission. The form and content of the benchmarks varied greatly from case to case. Some required the adoption of specific legislation, while others concerned the implementation of existing legislation through the adoption of action plans and specific instructions, or the earmarking of specific funds to improve the functioning of domestic institutions. To address outstanding refugee return and integration issues, one benchmark required the resolution of a specific number of housing-care cases for former occupancy/tenancy rights (OTR) holders<sup>4</sup> through the allocation of apartments. Benchmarks in the field of war-crimes prosecution involved a complex mix of legislative changes, reviews of proceedings, and capacity-building activities.

The Mission's extensive network of field offices was utilized to verify that the agreed benchmarks had been fully achieved at municipal and local levels. Local and municipal implementation of benchmarks was the primary challenge that the Mission faced, since progress reached at the national level was not necessarily translated into action in the country's smaller subdivisions. By mid-2007, however, the Platform model was also being applied in the field, with the involvement of local officials to ensure proper implementation at municipal and county levels.

The 2006 mid-term review, which was presented to the OSCE Permanent Council in June of that year, outlined the substantial progress that had been achieved towards meeting benchmarks in four out of six fields, where only a few additional corrective efforts by the government were required. Activities in these areas were hence considered to be completed from the point of view of the Mission and the participating States. The first concrete steps towards downsizing the OSCE Mission to Croatia were taken at the end of 2006, when, in consultation with the OSCE Secretariat and the Belgian Chairmanship, it was decided to close four of the six programmatic areas of activity: political affairs/electoral reform, strengthening of civil society, media reform, and police reform.

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4 Occupancy Tenancy Rights (OTR) refers to a former Yugoslav legal procedure governing the tenure of socially-owned property (apartments) by tenants, who were known as occupancy-tenancy rights holders. OTR holders enjoyed more rights than lessees (with regard, for example, to the exchange of apartments and the delegation of their tenancy rights to a successor) but they could not be characterized as property owners. Croatian Serbs who left Croatia – whether voluntarily or involuntarily – at the start of the armed conflict had this right cancelled in court proceedings in light of allegedly “unjustified” six-month absences from their apartments. Serbia claims compensation for former OTR holders on an individual basis, while Croatia offers a housing care programme.

The decision to close these four areas was not only taken on the basis of progress achieved in general, but also specifically because they were the most advanced in terms of adopting corrective legislation. The Croatian government had made a special effort to meet the benchmarks that would enable the closure of these programmatic units.

These benchmarks had been agreed upon in the course of further Platform meetings, this time with the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They dealt with the following in particular: establishment of a stable electoral system with a permanent supervision body; the adoption and implementation of a set of laws and strategies relating to civil society and the development of this sector and its co-operation with the government; the adoption of amendments to the Law on Croatian Radio Television and the Law on Electronic Media, combined with the decriminalization of libel for journalists and the resolution of the conflict-of-interest issue concerning the ownership or co-ownership of local print and electronic media by local authorities; and the institutionalization of an efficient, modern police system through the introduction of community policing and the streamlining of procedures for handling interethnic incidents.

Although the Mission had closed the relevant units and drastically reduced the number of staff working on these issues in the field by the end of 2006, questions related to electoral reform, freedom of the media, and the conduct of the police in minority return areas continued to be scrutinized on an *ad hoc* basis in order to verify the sustainability of the commitments agreed to by the Croatian government.

#### *Enduring Post-Conflict Challenges: Refugee Return and Rule of Law*

As can be evinced from the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Croatia, issues related to the return of Croatian Serb refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the legal framework for the protection of national minorities, and the entrenchment of the rule of law (including the establishment of an impartial and accountable system for the prosecution of war crimes, regardless of the ethnicity of the perpetrators) have always been at the core of the activities of the OSCE field presence in the country. The complexity of these issues and their regional ramifications in terms of post-conflict rehabilitation and reconciliation made the identification of benchmarks and the verification of implementation more difficult.

Nonetheless, the 2006 mid-term review also defined benchmarks and joint tasks in these areas, specifically in reference to the housing of refugees, the infrastructure of minority-return areas, the implementation of the Constitutional Law on National Minorities (CLNM), the strengthening of domestic human-rights institutions, the prosecution of war crimes, and the transfer of

ICTY Rule 11 *bis* cases.<sup>5</sup> The review anticipated that the Croatian government would need to make a major effort to fulfil the mandate of the OSCE Mission in the areas of refugee return and rule of law during 2007.

It was in these two areas that the OSCE Mission to Croatia had established a solid reputation and built its own institutional memory. With regard to refugee return, the Mission's activities focused on the provision of adequate housing to the returning minority population (including repossession of private properties, reconstruction of war-damaged residential properties, and the implementation of the housing care programme for former occupancy/tenancy rights holders), the restoration of citizenship and social protection rights to returnees, and the improvement of the communal infrastructure in minority-return areas (electrification, water supply, and roads).

For many years, the Mission's activities in the area of rule of law focused on the adoption and implementation of the CLNM, monitoring all war-crimes proceedings taking place in the country (including the Rule 11 *bis* cases), and monitoring civil and criminal proceedings involving basic rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and refugees and IDPs. It also carried out extensive work to strengthen domestic human rights institutions (constitutional court and the ombudsman's office).

In both these remaining areas, the Platforms had given a certain impetus to the dialogue taking place between the Mission and the Croatian government. Nonetheless, the slow pace at which corrective legislation was adopted and the even slower implementation of regulations at the local level (which was diligently and constantly verified by OSCE staff) were preventing further progress. In addition, the wide variety of different interlocutors, ministries, state offices, and local self-government agencies involved in these areas complicated the dialogue between the Mission and the government. For example, in its effort to ensure the adequate representation of national minorities in the public administration, judiciary, police, and local self-government agencies, the Mission had to work with a highly diverse pool of institutional actors at ministerial, county, and municipal levels, primarily in the context of already existing complex internal arrangements within the Croatian public administration.

#### *The Concept of "Platforms" to Facilitate Dialogue on Commitments*

The concept of the "Platform", as discussed above, did not grow out of a blueprint. It rather emerged pragmatically and under a different name in the course of 2003 when the Mission felt the need to organize ministerial-level

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5 Rule 11 *bis* of the ICTY Rules of Procedure and Evidence governs the transfer of war-crimes cases in which the ICTY issued an indictment, but the case had to be passed to the domestic judiciary in accordance with the ICTY completion strategy. An OSCE/ICTY agreement of 2005 mandates the OSCE to monitor those proceedings.

meetings to enhance its dialogue with Croatia's then centre-left government. The OSCE Mission therefore took the initiative to organize *ad hoc* meetings with the then Minister of Public Works and Reconstruction, Radimir Čačić, on issues pertaining to the refugee-return portfolio.

In addition to the OSCE Head of Mission, Peter Semneby, participation in the meetings was also extended to the Head of the European Commission Delegation, the US Ambassador, and the UNHCR Resident Representative. These meetings thus provided an opportunity for the international community principals to speak with one voice, articulating their views and requests in a coherent manner and according to their respective mandates and strategic interests (the European Commission with regard to EU accession conditionality; the US in connection with NATO political conditionality; the UNHCR with respect to its operational mandate on refugee return; and the OSCE Mission with regard to the fulfilment of its mandate by the host country). While these meetings were *ad hoc* at first and conformed to no more than a general agenda agreed by the participants, they eventually became more structured with the introduction of annotated agendas and talking points agreed jointly between the international community principals.

When the meetings started in 2003, their main topic was the legal and administrative design of the housing care programme, which had been adopted by the Croatian government in June that year. They were extended to cover other issues of particular interest to the international community representatives, such as property repossession, reconstruction, re-electrification, and the Sarajevo process on refugee return. Over the years, the Platform also gained a more complex structure, with preparatory working groups focusing on the analysis of inputs coming from the field and their articulation in the form of requests to the central government. The Platform concept thus emerged as a forum that the international community could utilize to deliver technical and political *démarches* to the host country. It was, in particular, a crucial mechanism with regard to delicate technical issues that could not easily be solved at the working level.

As of mid-2005, following a proposal from Ambassador Jorge Fuentes, the newly appointed Head of Mission, these meetings were convened on a monthly basis. The aim of this was to keep a closer eye on the implementation of various programmes in the area of refugee return.

At the beginning of 2006, two additional Platform formats were created – one at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), regrouping all six thematic areas – and one at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), specifically devoted to war-crimes prosecution, where the OSCE was joined by the Delegation of the European Commission and the ICTY Liaison Office. These two additional Platforms also had their pros and cons: The MFA Platform brought together such a large and varied team of local interlocutors on various issues that its meetings could become bogged down. While the Platform at the MoJ had the advantage of being more focused, it suffered from the fact that it could only

advocate and articulate demands to the Ministry of Justice and to the chief state prosecutor. This meant it had no influence on the work of local and county courts, where most of the problems with regard to war-crimes prosecution were observed by OSCE monitors.

### *Regional Initiatives and Mission Closure*

Croatia has been a partner in the two OSCE facilitated regional initiatives – the Sarajevo Process<sup>6</sup> on refugee return, which was launched in January 2005, and the Palić Process,<sup>7</sup> which started at the end of 2004 to facilitate inter-state co-operation at the level of practitioners and eliminate the remaining legal barriers to inter-state judicial co-operation on war-crimes trials.

While these two initiatives added a regional dimension to the Mission's mandate, the nature of the mandate itself remained unchanged. However, the creation of these multilateral forums in which regional co-operation was supposed to stimulate the adoption of certain measures in the field of refugee return and war-crimes prosecution increased the number of activities the Mission staff were required to perform at a time when the debate over the downsizing and closing of the Mission had already achieved a certain momentum.

In addition, the Sarajevo Process, which was a more political and probably more controversial initiative for Croatia, as it is the country of origin of most refugees in the region, was considered a test of Croatia's ability to fulfil its commitments in the field of refugee return. While co-operation on refugee return within the context of the Sarajevo Process was expected to be completed by the end of 2007, its first phase – the adoption of the road maps (with agreed benchmarks and commitments regarding the removal of the remaining obstacles to refugee return) by the various signatory states – has still not been finalized. However, it has to be stressed that Croatia has progressively met most of the requests made by the international community and

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6 The Sarajevo Process stems from the January 2005 Sarajevo Declaration, in which Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia (joined by Montenegro in 2006) agreed to remove remaining obstacles to regional refugee return through the compilation of national road maps and a regional matrix. Two issues remain to be resolved before the road maps are adopted: lost occupancy/tenancy rights in Croatia and the so-called convalidation issue. The Sarajevo Process is facilitated by the OSCE, the UNHCR, and the European Commission.

7 The Palić Process promotes inter-state judicial co-operation in war-crimes proceedings between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro, focusing in particular on issues such as the extradition of nationals and the transfer of judicial proceedings. It originally stemmed from expert-level meetings facilitated by the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre in 2004 and progressively gained a political dimension through the convening of ministerial meetings. The Palić Process has so far functioned successfully at the expert level, pending a political summit that should facilitate the removal of the remaining legal barriers. It is facilitated only by the OSCE but enjoys the external support of the EU and the ICTY.

other signatory states, the one major exception being the issue of compensation for former OTR holders who do not wish to return to Croatia.

Similarly, the Palić Process, conceived as a technical forum for experts to discuss inter-state judicial co-operation on war-crimes trials, was a partial success. In particular, it succeeded in catalysing co-operation among prosecutors from all the signatory states. Nevertheless, it has not come close to bringing about the necessary legislative changes that would result in the removal of barriers to the extradition of each signatory's nationals and the transfer of proceedings. However, on the whole, Croatia can be said to have played an active role in the Palić Process. The absence of political progress can be ascribed to the lack of adequate mutual trust between political elites in the signatory states.

The Sarajevo and Palić processes had an impact on the consultations over the closing of the Mission, as some OSCE participating States regarded progress in these processes as a test of the authenticity of the commitments and pledges made by the Croatian government. A number of participating States also used a lack of progress, particularly in the Sarajevo Process, to insist that the closure of the Mission would only be possible under conditions of full mandate completion. Since the Palić Process was seen as less polarizing, its impact on the negotiations on mission closure was more limited.

#### *Negotiations on the Closure of the Mission and the Opening of the OSCE Office in Zagreb*

Negotiations on the closure of the OSCE Mission to Croatia and its possible restructuring began following a visit by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos to Dubrovnik on 6-8 July 2007. During his participation in the Croatia Summit 2007 on "Europe's New South", and in talks with Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and Foreign Minister Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, the Chairman-in-Office announced his support for the closure of the Mission by the end of 2007. At the same time, he also called on the authorities to work closely with the Mission to fulfil the remaining obligations and responsibilities.

The process that resulted in the adoption of OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 836 stipulating the closure of the OSCE Mission to Croatia and the opening of an OSCE Office in Zagreb lasted until the end of 2007. The Mission started by setting concrete benchmarks that the Croatian government had to fulfil by the end of the year, thereby demonstrating considerable progress on the two remaining mandate-related areas – refugee return and the monitoring of war-crime proceedings. With regard to refugee return, the Mission developed concrete and verifiable benchmarks, such as the physical allo-

cation of 1,400 apartments to former OTR holders who had applied for the housing care programme.<sup>8</sup>

An innovation introduced in 2007 was the transfer of the Platform format to the field in Benkovac, Sisak, Vukovar, Gospić, and Knin, which aimed to ensure that local authorities there would also have knowledge of commitments taken on by the central government with regard to the outstanding refugee-return and rule-of-law issues. The Platforms, organized in the form of information sessions, took place in some of the most sensitive areas affected by the war with the participation of ministers and state secretaries and several representatives of the Zagreb-based diplomatic community.

It is difficult to assess the impact of these Platform meetings in the field. Even if they did not add anything new to the debate over the outstanding issues, they assisted in crystallizing and reinforcing local authorities' understandings of the political commitments agreed on at national level, particularly with regard to refugee return and minority issues.

During the first few months of 2007, the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) had already begun to draft background papers on several possible options for the follow-up to the OSCE Mission to Croatia. These reflected the different views that existed among participating States, which, on the one hand, were concerned with ensuring mandate completion, particularly with regard to the two outstanding areas, but, on the other, also favoured a considerable reduction in the Mission's size. The options proposed ranged from the creation of a follow-on office to the establishment of a mixed body of national and international legal experts to oversee the monitoring of war-crimes proceedings on an *ad hoc* basis.

Negotiations on closure and a successor office were conducted by the Spanish Chairmanship following the Ministerial Council Meeting in Madrid in late November. The most contentious issue in the discussion among participating States was whether to include refugee return within the mandate of the Office in Zagreb, which was something the host country opposed but was considered essential by a number of delegations. Consensus on the final text of Permanent Council Decision No. 836 was reached in the Permanent Council session of 21 December 2007, at which participating States agreed on a "housing care formula" that allowed the OSCE to retain a significant part of the refugee-return portfolio without the regional aspect of the Sarajevo Process. The new Office would be based in Zagreb and would have no field offices.

On the monitoring of war-crimes proceedings, Permanent Council Decision No. 836 stipulated that the Office would continue to perform this func-

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<sup>8</sup> According to the road map drafted in the context of the Sarajevo Process, Croatia is to construct 7,000 apartments for former OTR holders who have applied for housing care by 2009. Croatia committed itself to building 1,400 apartments in 2007, and the remaining 5,600 in the two years to follow.

tion with regard to cases that were under domestic judicial authority, those initiated by the ICTY and transferred to Croatia, pursuant to Rule 11 *bis*, and “Category II” cases.<sup>9</sup> The Office also retained its mandate over aspects of inter-state judicial co-operation on war-crimes prosecution related to the Palić Process. This issue was particularly crucial to address, as it is anticipated that it will take at least five years to deal with the remaining war-crimes cases outside the ICTY referral context.<sup>10</sup>

### *Operational Aspects of Mission Closure and Restructuring*

On 21 December 2007, the Permanent Council decided to close the OSCE Mission to Croatia and establish an OSCE Office in Zagreb with a focus on issues related to war-crimes monitoring and reporting on the residual aspects of the implementation of the housing care programmes in Croatia. The Office’s duration was one year (until 31 December 2008), with extensions and possible changes of its mandate subject to new decisions of the Permanent Council, as is the case for all OSCE field operations.

As a consequence of being restructured and downsized several times over a number of years, at the time of its closure in 2007, the OSCE Mission to Croatia comprised a Mission headquarters (in Zagreb) and five field offices (in Sisak, Knin, Zadar, Vukovar, Osijek) with a total staff of 108. A revised 2008 unified budget proposal that reflected the financial implications of the establishment of the OSCE Office was also presented to the participating States by the Secretary General at the end of 2007. Collaborative planning between the Mission and the Secretariat began informally in the summer of 2007, including a visit to Croatia by representatives from the CPC Operations Service, and the Secretariat’s Departments of Human Resources and Management and Finance. Following the Permanent Council decision on 21 December, formal planning commenced with the publication of a joint OSCE Office and Secretariat implementation plan on 18 January 2008.

The participating States discussed the size, staff composition, and budget of the Office in the Advisory Committee on Management and Finance (ACMF) in the context of the discussion on the 2008 unified budget. The Office’s total staff, which was one of the more difficult issues to negotiate, was finally set at 34.

Within the Secretariat, the CPC’s Operation Service acted as the main coordinator of closure and restructuring activities involving the Mission/Office,

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9 “Category II and III” war-crimes cases are those that the ICTY fully (Category II) or partially (Category III) investigated but is not able to bring to prosecution due to its completion strategy. These cases have been transferred to local judicial authorities as a result.

10 The monitoring of war-crimes proceedings refers to the single ICTY-referred war-crimes case and the numerous other cases the Mission has been following for over six years. The monitoring of war-crimes trials by the Mission, and now the Office, occurs within the framework of the OSCE-ICTY 2005 Co-operation Agreement.

the CPC's Policy Support Service, and other departments of the Secretariat (Management and Finance and Human Resources). An "Implementation Plan for the Closure of the OSCE Mission to Croatia and the Establishment of an OSCE Office in Zagreb" was drafted collectively. The implementation plan foresaw two phases, considering the closure of the OSCE Mission and the subsequent establishment of the OSCE Office as distinct events. However, the two events were linked in terms of administrative arrangements to enable the smooth evolution of the OSCE's presence in Croatia.

Phase 1 started immediately following the Permanent Council decision of 21 December, although some informal preparations had already commenced in anticipation. Phase 2, the establishment of the OSCE Office in Zagreb, started on 1 January 2008, when the Office became an entity with a formal status. Both phases dealt with an array of issues related to the closure and the establishment of a different type of field presence – including staffing requirements, contracts, severance pay, archiving of files, assets, and ICT-related matters. An after-action report on the implementation of the closure and the establishment of the new Office was also produced in mid-summer 2008, co-ordinated by the CPC's Operations Service. The after-action report assessed the planning, preparation, and execution of the closure and restructuring. Both the implementation plan and the after-action report were key elements in the operational planning of the closure.

#### *Concluding Thoughts: Lessons Learned and Best Practices*

The closure of the OSCE Mission and its subsequent establishment as an Office has been significant in terms of lessons learned and best practices, both at the political level and in terms of the administrative, operational, and technical dimensions.

Politically, there was general agreement that closing down an OSCE field operation must be a success for both the host state and the Organization. Setting conditions for the closure by means of dialogue and the transparent exchange of information with the host government and other international interlocutors was crucial. Creating appropriate mechanisms for assessing the completion of the Mission's mandate – such as the Platforms – both at national and local levels, and setting concrete benchmarks were also important, as was the monitoring of implementation, in particular from the field.

In the decision-making process, the excellent relations between the Chairman-in-Office, the host government, other participating States, the Secretariat, and the Mission, which were based on openness, mutual consultation, and close co-operation, also contributed to a successful closure and restructuring process that included so many political and administrative challenges – from staffing composition, to the content of a new mandate, to budgetary and technical issues.

Operationally, the implementation plan and the after-action report provided a well thought-out and much appreciated road map for the Mission/Office and the Secretariat. They ensured that joint action was co-ordinated and planned inclusively and that Mission members were kept informed and involved to the greatest extent possible given the uncertainties surrounding the entire process. They also constituted a major endeavour on the part of the OSCE Secretariat toward identifying lessons learned and best practices that cover the entire spectrum of operations involved in the closure of a field operation and its establishment as a new structure. Thus, from the perspective of institutional memory, the change-management practices adopted in Croatia in late 2007 and early 2008 are truly a benchmark for similar operational activities elsewhere within the OSCE area.