

## **CROATIA**

Presentation of the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report to the sixty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Opening statement by Ms Helena Štimac Radin, Government of the Republic of Croatia, Office for Gender Equality, Head of Office, at the consideration of the Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report of Croatia

15 July 2014, Geneva

Madame Chair

Distinguished members of the Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen

As head of the delegation for Croatia, it is my great pleasure to present the introduction for a constructive dialogue with the members of the Committee on the Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report of Croatia under the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (hereinafter: CEDAW).

Let me start by introducing the members of the Croatian delegation:

Ms Davorka Hajduković, Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture; Ms Nataša Zorić, Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Health; Ms Sabina Morosini Turčinović, Senior Expert Advisor of the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth; Ms Kornelija Bojanić, Senior Expert Advisor of the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth; Ms Višnja Stanić-Šajatović, Senior Advisor and Specialist of the Ministry of the Interior; Ms Ana Kodrić, a police officer from the Ministry of the Interior; Ms Kristina Alerić, Assistant Director of the Croatian Employment Service; Ms Ingrid Jurela Jarak, Head of Department of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports; Ms Marija Knežević Kajari, Head of Sector of the Ministry of Labour and the Pension System; Ms Tamara Poljarević, Head of Unit of the Ministry of Justice, Mr Branko Sočanac, Director of the Governmental Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities; and Ms Vanja Popović, Division for Human Rights and Regional International Organizations and Initiatives, of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

Madam Chair, distinguished members of the Committee,

There is no doubt that CEDAW represents the most important charter of women's human rights. Its subsequent systematic implementation represents a permanent challenge to all signatory countries with the aim of a more rapid prevention of the violation of the human rights of women across the world.

The reporting process of our Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report and the preparation of Replies to a list of additional questions included all relevant ministries and other state administration bodies, and were co-ordinated by the Governmental Office for Gender Equality (hereinafter: OGE). Both documents also contain information on numerous projects

and activities implemented by NGOs separately or in co-operation with state administration bodies, and also notes on the activities of the Parliament.

The OGE prints and disseminates the most important international and national documents in the area of gender equality, including CEDAW. The promotion of CEDAW and the Beijing *Platform for Action* has been included as a separate measure in our *National Policy for Gender Equality*. A thousand copies of the printed edition of CEDAW were distributed to members of parliament, ministries, government offices, local gender equality commissions, non-governmental organisations, universities, and also at various seminars, workshops and conferences. Earlier this year, on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and *Platform for Action*, we also published a leaflet with the text of the Beijing Declaration with a circulation of 1,500 copies.

Madam Chair

Since the last report, Croatia has introduced a significant number of important changes in the implementation of policies related to gender equality.

The most significant social circumstances that marked Croatia in the last ten years were the long-lasting negotiations on accession to the EU, which started in 2005 and ended in 2013, and the beginning of the economic crisis and recession in 2009. These circumstances have also significantly influenced the course of the implementation and promotion of gender equality policy.

Despite the strong political will to build gender equality into all aspects of national policies, it will be necessary to further develop the existing institutional framework in order to ensure the effective implementation of legislation and the *National Policy for Gender Equality*. It will be particularly important to strengthen the financial, personnel and organisational resources of all mechanisms, especially the OGE as the main Government body for the implementation of the demanding tasks defined by the Gender Equality Act (hereinafter: GEA).

During negotiations on accession to the European Union, national gender equality legislation was aligned with the EU *acquis*. In the Common Position on Negotiating Chapter 19: Social Policy and Employment, the EU assessed that with the adoption of the new *Gender Equality Act* in 2008 alignment had been mainly completed. The GEA protects and promotes gender equality as a fundamental value of the constitutional order, and regulates protection from discrimination on the basis of gender and the creation of equal opportunities for women and men in all areas of society. Discrimination on the basis of gender is defined as *de facto*

inequality in all the forms it takes, in line with the definition in CEDAW. All forms of gender discrimination are also prohibited by the *Anti-Discrimination Act* which came into force in 2009. Anti-discrimination provisions have also been included in many other acts and, as we have already mentioned in earlier reports.

Madam Chair

The results of the empirical research on attitudes of the public towards gender discrimination, entitled “Perceptions, experiences and attitudes concerning gender-related discrimination in Croatia”, undertaken in 2009, show that 58% of citizens believe that women and men are not equal.

Widespread violence against women; their less favourable position in the labour market; and their underrepresentation in the decision-making process - are the most important indicators of gender inequality. There are still different and important critical areas which require co-ordinated action. They should target the obstacles which prevent faster changes in social relations in order to achieve real equality between women and men.

With the purpose of eliminating discrimination against women and establishing true gender equality, every five years the Croatian Parliament adopts *The National Policy for Gender Equality* as a basic strategic document.

This year, in co-operation with other ministries, representatives of NGOs and independent experts and local gender equality commissions, my office shall start drafting the fifth *National Policy for Gender Equality* for the period from 2016 to 2020.

The current *National Policy* consists of seven key action areas, and obliges Croatia to include gender mainstreaming in all policy areas. Number of measures are related to: 1) promoting human rights and gender equality; 2) creating equal opportunities on the labour market; 3) improving the introduction of gender-sensitive education and training; 4) advocating a more balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making; 5) eliminating all forms of violence against women; 6) promoting international co-operation and gender equality outside Croatia; and 7) further strengthening institutional mechanisms and methods of implementation.

In addition to the legislative foundation, the provisions of the *National Policy for Gender Equality* confirm the content of gender equality guarantees which are an integral part of CEDAW. I would like to highlight here that all the Committee’s Concluding Observations from 2005 were included in our previous national strategies as priority goals and measures.

Every two years, the Office for Gender Equality submits to the Government a very comprehensive report and analysis of the implementation of the *National Policy*.

The last analysis has shown that the majority of measures were implemented within the set deadlines. Such a high degree of implementation implies the significant involvement of all competent stakeholders.

It is also important to say that the *National Policy* has directly influenced the adoption of other important strategies, plans and programmes, as well as a number of legislative changes. It has also significantly contributed to raising public awareness on gender equality and to the use of gender sensitive language.

**Madam Chair,**

### **Combating violence against women**

Violence against women is the most severe form of violation of human rights of women. In the reporting period, the Croatian Government has put a lot of effort into the elimination of violence including domestic violence. A lot of campaigns, conferences, seminars and workshops were continuously organized. Three strategies for combating domestic violence were adopted and a new (the third in a row) Law on Protection against Domestic Violence is in preparation phase.

In the past few months, very important legal amendments have been introduced, while the implementation of campaigns and many other activities have continued.

Recently, a new provision was included in the *Amendments to the Criminal Code*, stipulating that a criminal act of domestic violence is an independent crime. Such a solution enables a clear distinction between a crime and a misdemeanor.

The *Criminal Proceedings Act* and the *Criminal Code* were aligned with the EU *Directive on Setting Minimal Standards, Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime*.

In March 2015, the Croatian Parliament adopted the *Rights of Victims of Sexual Violence in the Homeland War Act* proposed by the Ministry of War Veterans. It defines sexual violence in the Homeland War, regulates the rights of victims of this form of violence and also the proceedings for the exercise of these rights, the improvement of co-operation between the competent institutions in the prosecution of crimes, the restoration of the dignity of victims, and an improvement in the quality of their lives by ensuring psychosocial, medical and financial assistance. I would like to mention here that the Deputy Director of UN Women,

Yannick Glemarec, welcomed the adoption of this Act and invited our Minister of War Veterans to present this law at the UN Women's conferences in Beijing and Istanbul.

This month, the *International and Temporary Protection Act* entered into force, overruling the previous *Asylum Act*. It also contains a special category of vulnerable groups of asylum seekers which also includes persons with disabilities, pregnant women, single parents, victims of trafficking in human beings, and victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including female genital mutilation.

Since 2013, the Office for Gender Equality together with its partners, two NGOs, has conducted the campaign "My Voice against Violence", co-financed by the European Union. The main objective of the project is to raise awareness of the fact that any kind of violence against women and girls is unacceptable and to send a clear message of zero tolerance of all forms of gender-based violence. As part of this project, various educational activities regarding sexual violence and implementation of the *Protocol to Conduct in Cases of Sexual Violence* have been carried out, including various public lectures, workshops and training events. Part of the project includes dissemination of the Croatian edition of the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, signed by Croatia in January 2013.

There has been continued implementation of the national preventive campaign "Living Life Free of Violence", organised by the Ministry of the Interior in co-operation with the United Nations' Development Programme and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (hereinafter: MSES) for elementary and secondary school pupils, teachers and parents. This project received the *European Award on Crime Prevention* in 2013 for the best primary prevention project in Europe.

### **Political participation of women**

Concerning political participation of women, several facts are to be emphasized.

At the presidential elections in January 2015, the majority of voters for the first time elected a female president. The President of Croatia, Ms Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, is a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, the former Croatian Ambassador to the United States of America, and after 2011 was the Assistant General Secretary of NATO for Public Diplomacy. As you are well aware, it is a fact that today there are only 11 women in the world serving as state presidents.

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia from 2009 to 2011 was a woman.

We almost reached parity in 2014 when total of 45% of the Croatian members elected to the European Parliament were women. In 2013 that number amounted to 50%.

At the moment, 26% of the members of the Croatian Parliament are female. The current Government has two female deputy prime ministers, and 20% of ministers are women, while 25% of the deputy ministers and 50% of the assistant ministers are women, as are the general secretaries of ministries. The General Secretary of the Croatian Government is a woman. The Minister of Foreign and European affairs is a woman, and generally in this ministry women predominate as officials and in other management positions.

The new 2012 *Local Elections Act* provides for the obligation of parties to take into account the gender balance on lists of candidates in accordance with the *Gender Equality Act*, which since 2008 has prescribed quotas of a minimum of 40% representation of one gender on electoral lists. A very important step forward is the adoption of the new *Act on Amendments to the Election of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament Act*, which contains a provision according to which lists of candidates that do not comply with the above-mentioned requirements will not be regarded as valid. We expect this change to also bring about an increased number of female members of parliament in the next elections, which are planned for the beginning of next year.

However, despite the progress reached in this area, low share of women in the local government levels is still a great concern which needs attention.

### **The position of women on the labour market**

Since 2009, due to the recession and negative economic trends, unemployment has risen.

Out of 1 million 300 employed persons, 46.5% are women. The overall registered unemployment rate in June 2015 was 17.1% (19.3% for women and 15.0% for men). In June this year, unemployment decreased by 14.7% compared to the same month in 2014. However, out of the total number of unemployed persons, the share of women is still high and amounts to 54.3%.

Employment remains a critical problem for women in Croatia. The gender pay gap is about 10%, but women are confined to less lucrative occupations, in which they constitute the majority.

Women are also significantly more exposed to various forms of discrimination and stereotypes both when seeking work and in the work place. Another major problem they face

is the impossibility of breaking through the glass ceiling in professional advancement. The results of research show that women are very much aware of all the various forms of their less favourable position on the labour market.

Bearing these difficulties in mind, the Croatian Government has taken a number of measures for their prevention, the most notable of which are projects aimed at improving the position of women on the labour market, their economic empowerment, and incentives for women entrepreneurs.

Reducing female unemployment and empowering women on the labour market is part of a large number of national strategies or action plans in which women are singled out as an especially vulnerable group. Various projects have been implemented to improve their economic position. They are mostly funded from national public sources in combination with EU funds.

Croatia is one of the few countries which have a special strategy for female entrepreneurship. Last year, the Government adopted the *Strategy of Development of Female Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2014-2020*, which was the second in a row, and which contains priorities and measures for strengthening women's entrepreneurial activities. Female entrepreneurs' associations in Croatia are very active, and examples of good practice in Croatian female entrepreneurship have also been recognised in certain projects at the international level.

The Croatian Employment Service introduced this year, among other employment promotion measures, a special package of measures for women. A public call for proposals for this package was published in January.

In the new Operational Programme "Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020", financed mostly from the European Social Fund, women are included in the majority of investment priorities as a special beneficiary group.

*The Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of an Active Employment Policy in the Republic of Croatia 2015-2017* were adopted by the Government in December 2014 on the basis of an analysis of the situation and EC recommendations. Under the first priority, concerning an increase in the employment rate, one of the main objectives includes increasing the participation of women in the labour market.

Madam Chair



Gender mainstreaming has been introduced in all foreign policy activities within the framework of participation in international and regional organisations and fora, and in development aid to third countries provided by Croatia, particularly in efforts invested in the educational and economic empowerment of women in Afghanistan. Next year, Croatia assumes the chair position in the Equal Futures Partnership initiative, which was established in 2012 by the US as a forum for exchanging best practice for the empowerment of women.

In the ongoing debate on how the post-2015 development framework can ensure effective progress towards gender equality, Croatia strongly supports gender equality and the empowerment of women as a stand-alone goal, and an integration of gender equality principle into all the goals of the new development framework.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that despite of all confirmed achievements, we are fully aware that there is still a lot of room for improvements. In this context, Croatia highly values constructive co-operation with the CEDAW Committee. Therefore, we are looking forward to your questions and remarks and an exchange of views.

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