



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

**Statement by
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Thank you Mr. Chairman,

At the outset I would like to thank for the opportunity to address this human dimension session and to exchange information on the question of national minorities, in particular the Roma minority, and other relevant issues. In this respect allow me to acquaint you with some of these issues in the Republic of Croatia.

Croatian Government considers national minorities as a richness and a bridge towards neighboring countries in understanding and building tolerance. With a view that "ethnic and multicultural diversity, the spirit of understanding, mutual respect and tolerance contribute to the enhanced development of Croatia", the Government continues to implement the commitments, ensuring rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

The legal basis for regulating the rights and protection of national minorities is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities. With the support of all minority representatives, the Croatian Parliament has adopted changes and amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities on 16th June 2010.

The most significant Constitutional change is found in the Preamble. Previously, there were ten national minorities enumerated in the Preamble, and now, after this change, there are twenty two.

Most significant changes in the Constitutional Law on the Rights on National Minorities are the following ones:

- All national minorities which represent more than 1.5 % of the population of the Republic of Croatia are guaranteed at least three seats in the Croatian Parliament, on the basis of the universal suffrage.
- In addition to the universal suffrage, national minorities comprising less than 1.5 % of the population of the Republic of Croatia are guaranteed five seats in the Parliament on the basis of the special suffrage through elections in a single electoral unit, comprising the whole country. The Roma minority belongs to this category.
- Elected national councils of minorities now have a legal personality, and they are also assuming the role of national coordinators for respective minority councils.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia pays particular attention to the rights of the Roma national minority, and continuously undertakes measures in order to enable them to enjoy the same rights as other citizens of Croatia. Support for this policy comes from the highest levels of government, since the Prime Minister is also the president of the Commission for the Implementation of the National Roma Program, and the National Coordinator of the Roma Inclusion Decade.

All these policies and measures are conducted with the participation of the Roma community, in accordance with the principles enshrined in numerous documents, such as: the OSCE Action Plan, 10 Common Principles on Roma Inclusion and European Council Conclusions on Advancing Roma Inclusion.

According to the data available from various ministries and other institutions, there has been a considerable progress in all areas since the National Roma Program and the Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion have been adopted.

In the field of education:

- Recent improvements of the educational framework include improvement of the legislative framework in July 2010, regarding learning of Croatian language and formation of school classes. National Framework Curriculum, also from July 2010, enables more flexible organisation of classes and easier monitoring of individual pupil's educational achievements.
- The number of children included in preschool education increased more than twofold between 2005 and 2009. Moreover, in 2009 the Government decided to cover the share of costs usually paid by parents for preschool education in integrated classes. This will further enhance the educational opportunities for Roma children in particular.

- With regards to the primary school education the number of Roma pupils has increased fourfold in the same period.
- All high school and university students, members of Roma national minority, continue to receive monthly scholarships: in comparison to 2006, there were two times more students in high schools and almost three times more university students in 2009.
- The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports has established a database, enabling effective monitoring of key data related to educational achievements of Roma children.
- In December 2009, the National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education has established a commission for development of models and methodology for regular assessment of education quality of Roma children in Croatia. Results are expected in October 2010. External evaluation of the educational achievements further strengthens capacities for policy and operational development.
- Steep rise of the number of Roma children involved in education on all levels also indicates that they, and their parents, feel encouraged by these and other positive measures of the Croatian Government to declare themselves as members of the Roma national minority.

In the area of health, there are systemic efforts to increase the vaccination coverage of Roma children, and reports of the Ministry of Health and Social Care for 2009 note that progress is visible, reaching in most places the vaccination coverage rates of the rest of population. More data is becoming available through research on key health indicators and main health concerns among children, and this data also feeds into local activities focused on health education of parents.

A huge task has been successfully completed in the area of housing: all 13 counties with a significant number of Roma now have their Roma housing improvement programs. There are continuing efforts for the legalization of illegally built houses. Most of the necessary space planning has been conducted; many local detailed urban plans have been developed. These are also preconditions for improvements in infrastructure, and EU pre-accession funds are making great impact in this area. The works in three more settlements were opened in 2009 in Medjmurje County, while the remaining settlements in this County, comprising the largest number of Roma, are expected to have their infrastructure improved by 2012. In addition to EU funded projects, with significant co-financing of the Croatian Government, many projects of a smaller scale were implemented in 2009 throughout Croatia, mostly developed through

cooperation of local self-governments, local Roma councils and NGOs.

The Republic of Croatia has regulated the issue of acquisition and cessation of citizenship by introducing the Law on Croatian Citizenship (with subsequent modifications). The Law is based on some of the basic principles and standards recognized in international legislation, such as the principle of the legal continuity of citizenship, the principle of prevention of statelessness, the principle of exclusivity of Croatian citizenship, and the principle of equality of marital, extramarital, and adopted children.

State bodies are providing considerable legal aid to all members of national minorities, making access to their rights easier, and informing them on conditions and ways to acquire Croatian citizenship. They are also helped to regulate their stay on the territory of Croatia. Further changes were introduced in 2009, with fewer conditions for certain categories of aliens to regulate their temporary or permanent stay in Croatia on humanitarian grounds.

Subsequently, measures have been taken by the Republic of Croatia to encourage minorities to use the available procedures for the acquisition of citizenship of their country of residence and to become integrated in society. For instance, if we look at the example of the Roma minority, immediately after the National Roma Program was introduced, mobile teams were formed in all counties with the Roma minority, providing help in acquiring status rights. Mobile teams normally consisted of representative(s) of the Roma community (one or more), local welfare office, police, and state administration. In our experience, it is extremely important to develop cooperation of minority members not only with the state institutions, but also with their own minority representatives from minority institutions, NGOs etc.

Thank you.