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REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

**Statement by
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Working Session 1: Tolerance and non-discrimination I
National minorities
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Mr Moderator,
I will address the agenda item National Minorities.

Since the very beginning basic principles of the minority rights in Croatia were conceived to go beyond mere principle that persons belonging to a national minority will enjoy the same rights and have the same duties of citizenship as the rest of the population. The premise that integration with respect for diversity is a process that participating States can and should promote by designing the appropriate institutional and legislative framework and effectively implementing targeted policies in several policy areas are properly reflected in Croatian national documents dealing with national minorities. 22 constitutionally recognized national minorities in Croatia is unique example within the European as well as the OSCE framework

Entry of Republic of Croatia to the EU is further assisting in protection and promotion of minority rights. For example, national minorities from Croatia are starting to fully use the benefits of cross-border programs, and this can be also considered from the aspect of the 2008 Bolzano Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations and the 2012 Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies.

We are also further developing our system of protection of human and especially minority rights. Croatian National Programme for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights for the period 2013 - 2016 represents Government's strategic document, as a result of Croatia's obligations deriving, among others, from United Nations' 1993 Vienna Declaration on drafting of national action plans on the protection of human rights. This document defines 30 priority fields and measures to be implemented on local, regional, national and international level aiming at protection, promotion and improvement of human rights in Croatia, as well as at raising public awareness on the importance of exercising human rights.

Number of other strategic documents, e.g. refer to minority rights in a special context. E.g. the National Policy for Gender Equality for the Period 2011-2015 dedicates specific attention to the improvement of social status of women members of national minorities, with a focus on Roma women.

Similarly, Croatian National Roma Inclusion Strategy 2013-2020, brought by the Government in November 2012 and accompanying Action Plan (April 2013) are not only aligned with EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies, but go beyond four areas suggested in the EU Framework (employment, education, housing and health), and cover inclusion in social and cultural life, status issues, anti-discrimination, social welfare, and environmental protection. The National Roma Inclusion Strategy 2013-2020 has been brought in a wide consultative process involving Roma civil society, regional and local authorities, independent experts and relevant state bodies. Another example of an important international initiative in which many international organisations also participate is the Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. Republic of Croatia presided over the Roma Decade between July 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013. Full Roma participation is the core value of the Decade.

We can also note that financing of minority needs from the state level has remained stable through last several years while we were witnessing budget cuts in many other areas. However, some challenges remain, and some new challenges are inviting our further response. Thus, for example, internet and social networks, in addition to obvious benefits, are also occasionally providing platforms for xenophobia, or even hate speech. We should mention that extreme nationalism and xenophobia, when they appear, are publicly condemned by all Croatian institutions.

Of course, we were not alone in achieving these milestones. It is a pleasure to make a grateful acknowledgement of contribution of many institutions, including ODIHR and OSCE in assisting the Republic of Croatia in improving its framework. I would like to commend EC and ODIHR for successfully implementing the MB IPA 2010 project Best Practices of Roma Integration in accession countries and the Republic of Croatia.

Finally, Mr Moderator, the respect and protection of national minorities represent one of the main pillars in democratic societies and there is a constant challenge for all OSCE participating states in this regard. Republic of Croatia will continue with its advance policy enabling national minorities full participation in political, economic and social life.

Thank you.