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**REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

**Statement by  
Ms. Tamara Šterk  
Office for Gender Equality  
Government of the Republic of Croatia**

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Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to contribute to this session on non-discrimination with the data about progress we have achieved in the Republic of Croatia in the field of gender equality during the last several years.

Let me start with the fact that Croatia has strengthened its gender equality machinery and developed new anti-discrimination legal framework aligned with the EU *acquis communautaire*. The national strategy for gender equality has been accepted at the highest level by the Decision of the Government and the Croatian Parliament.

Thanks to legislative and institutional changes, we witness daily progress in public awareness, judicial protection of women's human rights and higher participation of women in decision-making positions.

We can also report that more than 50% of those who received PhD diploma are women, and almost 60% of university graduates are female.

In addition, I would like to express my great pleasure with the fact that the Croatian prime minister is a woman. Furthermore, 25% of parliamentary seats are held by women. Women occupy approximately 41% of the highest ranked administrative positions in the public administration. However, despite the positive and significant achievements, gender equality is still far from being a reality.

In Croatia, like in the most European countries, women make the majority of unemployed, being concentrated in lower-income professions, like textile industry, catering

and trade services, education, etc. Women are generally paid less than the men for the same type of work, and are faced with the “glass ceiling” syndrome. Addressing women’s situation on the labour market, especially long-term unemployment, and the pay-gap, requires a multifaceted approach that should incorporate gender sensitive employment policy..

Having in mind that women’s employment remains a key to their economic independence, and their empowerment, and at the same time prerequisite for the development and growth of the society as a whole, Croatia is continuously working on strategies to reduce the unemployment rate and increase opportunities for the female entrepreneurship. So far, results are encouraging and indicate growth in number of women entrepreneurs. In addition, the Gender Equality Act and Anti-discrimination Act prohibit all forms of discrimination based on sex, and even stipulate clearly that: “The employer is obliged to pay equal pay to women and men for equal work and work of equal value”.

Among still existing areas of concern, such as violence against women, and gender unbalanced decision-making positions, special attention and focused activities are needed in the elimination of gender stereotypes. Awareness raising policies through number of public activities, and wide dissemination of basic national, EU and other international strategic documents, prove to be of great importance to combat gender stereotypes. Although we can agree that the process of change, leading to achievement of full equality of men and women, needs to be expanded throughout the entire society at all levels of private and public life, gender sensitive education is of utmost importance and further efforts should be invested in the school system free of prejudices and stereotypes.

We are convinced that the impetus of the changing process that is taking place in our country will combine synergies of all stakeholders in order to create society of equal opportunities for all.

Thank you very much for your attention.

## FACTS & FIGURES

In the recent five-year period, the Republic of Croatia has strengthened basic institutional machinery for gender equality and has introduced key new legislative amendments with a view to preventing gender discrimination and improving the policy of equal opportunities.

Two important new organic **laws** have been adopted in the area of human rights. In 2008, the Croatian Parliament adopted the new *Gender Equality Act* which is aligned with the provisions of valid international standards, and with EU legislation. Since the *Anti-Discrimination Act* which regulates procedures related to all grounds of discrimination came into force, collection of statistical data on court decisions, segregated by variety of grounds of discrimination, has become obligatory.

The *Free Legal Aid Act* was adopted in 2008, giving the opportunity to NGOs to become actively engaged in representing citizens before courts in civil and administrative disputes, and in counselling and raising women's awareness of legal protection mechanisms in the case of discrimination.

In 2006, Croatian Parliament adopted the *National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality* as the basic strategic document of the Republic of Croatia for eliminating discrimination against women and establishing real equality between women and men for the period from 2006 to 2010.

Apart from the number of gender responsive and gender transformatory measures such as protection of women's human rights, encouraging equal opportunities on the labour market, promotion of gender-sensitive education, equality in decision-making, measures for combating violence against women, improvements in women's health and strengthening institutional mechanisms, it also introduces measures related to cooperation with NGOs. One of the key priorities in the coming period is the development and adoption of the new National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality for the Period 2011-2015, which will be based on the achievements and evaluation results of the current National Policy and goals of the new European strategy for gender equality.

Measures aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering women are also included in other national strategies (related to *protection against domestic violence, equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, human rights and minority rights*).

Croatia has established strong **national mechanisms** on central and local levels (Ombudsman, Ombudsman for Gender Equality, Governmental Office for Gender Equality,

Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality, county and municipal commissions for gender equality and introduced coordinators for gender equality at the level of all ministries). Enhancing institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality at local levels through training, coordination, networking and legally regulated financial support is an example of the successful approach in promoting gender equality.

Many non-governmental organizations have a significant role in the comprehensive process of promoting and implementing gender equality policy and the advancement of women. The Government of the Republic of Croatia has established firm partnership with NGOs. Their activities raise public awareness, while their participation in legislation debates, as well as their advocating activities, influence public policies.

We register significant improvement in the area of **gender sensitive education**. With the new legislation in this area, the usage of gender neutral or gender sensitive language in the school textbooks became mandatory. However as stereotypes in education, and the media, still exist; additional efforts are needed to be invested in the process of changing attitudes and prejudices in the society.

At the same time, it is obvious that we are faced with a continuing growth trend in women's education and in the proportion of female graduates (60%), while the proportion of male graduates is falling. However students' choices of universities still reflect the division between male and female occupations. Women are more likely to choose the social sciences or humanities, art, law and the biological sciences, and are still the minority in the technical sciences.

A number of activities are being carried out in the Republic of Croatia to increase the participation of women in the process of political decision making. A woman has been leading the Croatian government since 2009. Furthermore, 25% (38 out of 153) of seats in the Croatian parliament are held by women, and 21% of women carry out the duty of presidents of parliamentary working bodies/committees. A woman is a President of the Supreme Court, while approximately 41% of women hold the highest -ranking administrative positions in the public administration.

The results of the last local elections showed that there has been an increase in the share of women on the candidate lists, as well as the increase of their share after the elections in representative bodies at the local level, amounting to 21% on average. Although we cannot be completely satisfied with the pace of these increases, it is a fact that the representation of women is continuously growing if we compare the results of the local elections conducted in 2001, 2005, and 2009.

The Council of Europe definition which states that “a significant imbalance of one gender in bodies of public and political decision making exists when the representation of this gender is under 40%” has been included in the new Gender Equality Act. The timeframe to achieve these limits is the period of three electoral cycles when, if not complied with the Act, political parties who do not take into account the balanced representation of women and men on electoral lists face financial sanctions.

*The Act on Political Parties* motivates the political parties by provision of 10% additional financial support for each elected member of the under-represented gender.

**The economic crisis has also left its trace on women's economic positions.** The unemployment rate of women is for the last several years higher than the rate for men, as is their share in unemployment. Nevertheless, the participation of women in self-employment increased from 37.8% in 2007 to 38.7% in 2009.

In 2010, the government adopted the *Women's Entrepreneurship Development Strategy 2010 – 2013* with the idea to increase the number of female entrepreneurs and create the conditions to involve a larger number of women in the labour market and reduce their rate of unemployment.

Ministry of economy, labour and entrepreneurship and local governments continuously, from 2006, provide financial support through a separate project entitled “Women’s entrepreneurship”. The beneficiaries of these funds are small and medium-sized enterprises, trades and crafts, cooperatives, and institutions, which are owned by women. The stimulating measures include the procurement of IT equipment and business software, help in business loans, consultancy services concerning registration and establishment, coverage of part of the business registration costs, development of a business plan, investment studies, a marketing plan, etc., and additional entrepreneurship training and IT training. Women have also had the opportunity to participate in other projects such as “Education for Entrepreneurships”, “Strategic Entrepreneurship”, and in the “Creating an Existence” project.

To combat **violence against women** and strengthen the existing and creating a new legal, educational, social and institutional system of protection for victims of domestic violence, Croatian Government adopted the *National Strategy for Protection against Family Violence for the period 2008 to 2010*. Measures are directed at the training of experts working in this field, the development of psychosocial treatment for the perpetrators of violence, the analysis and implementation of laws, the development of shelters and support for victims of domestic violence, improving the status of victims in proceedings, and raising public awareness of this issue. Special attention in the National Strategy has been given to women

with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence.

In conformity with the measures included in the National Strategy, the governmental bodies have organised various training programmes, lectures, forums and round-table discussions for a number of judges, judicial officials and police enforcement.

Since 2005, great progress has been achieved in the area of criminal law protection for the victims of family violence and trafficking in human beings. The number of counselling centres and shelters for victims of domestic violence has increased. According to the data of December 2009, psychological counselling and legal assistance to victims of domestic violence was offered by civil society organisations, social welfare institutions, and religious institutions.

Financial support from the public funds to projects led by NGOs has also helped to improve protection and assistance to victims of domestic violence. A number of projects related to fight against domestic violence have tripled since 2004.

National priority is the adoption of the new Strategy for Combating Domestic Violence for the Period 2011-2016, an action plan to eliminate all other forms of violence against women and a Protocol on Response to Sexual Violence.

The **harmonisation of family and professional responsibilities**, including raising public awareness of the need to share household duties between men and women, is encouraged by providing new preschool facilities, introducing single-shift classes in as many schools as possible, and through the process of changing attitudes of the public through media reports and NGO activities. The percentage of children included in public preschool education in the past two years has significantly increased thanks to the support of the World Bank. The *Act on Maternity and Parental Benefits* has been in force since the beginning of 2009, which, among other things, promotes the inclusion of fathers in the life of the family, and the balanced presence of both parents in the labour market. While in 2005 only 1% of fathers were using the benefits of the parental leave, further increase is noticed as a result of promotional activities and the positive attitude spread by the media.

Numerous public campaigns have been implemented on the national and local level, including those against domestic violence, on women's health, and political participation of women. All these actions led to increased public awareness about non-equality between women and men and on necessity to further support the implementation of equal opportunities policy. These findings have also been confirmed by the recent results of different gender researches in the field.

**Future challenges:**

The implementation of the gender equality policy in practice requires a mix of measures and special actions, accompanied by the evaluation of existing legal acts, and other programmes and policies aimed at faster and more efficient progress in eliminating gender discrimination. To achieve *de facto* equality it will be necessary to invest additional efforts in order to attain equal economic independence and prosperity between men and women, to reach a balance between work and private life, to promote equal representation in the decision-making process, to abolish gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings, and to eliminate gender stereotypes in various social areas, while continuing to improve statistical analyses and gender surveys.

Although improvement in gender sensitive statistics is evident, it is necessary to continue working on raising the awareness of state administration bodies and especially of the private sector related to the need to disaggregate all data by gender. It is necessary to point out that exercising the right to equal opportunities and the right to the same quality of services for women and men does not imply what is called a “neutral approach”, but involves aligning services to the specific features of the different needs of women or men. This especially concerns the field of labour and employment and the field of social protection and the fight against poverty. Women members of national minorities, elderly women living alone, and women living in villages are particularly vulnerable groups on whom precise statistical data must be improved.