

VNR dialogue with the experts moderated by CEPA Vice-Chair

9 April 2019, 15:00-18:00

Today I will focus on two particular aspects of SDG 16: on target 16.2 (*End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children*) and target 16.5 (*Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms*).

Croatia has gained extensive experience in reaching high standards in this fields. Negotiations for accession to the European Union, that Croatia has successfully conducted in the period 2005 – 2011 significantly contributed to that. As the EU Member State, since July 2013, Croatia stands ready not only to continue important work in the fields covered by SDG 16, but also to share our knowledge and expertise with all others in need of that.

Target 16.2

In its Constitution, Croatia has embedded the institution of **the Ombudsperson**. Currently we have; 1) Ombudswoman for the promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms; 2) Ombudswoman for Children; 3) Gender Equality Ombudswoman; 4) and Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities.

The Ombudsperson submits a yearly report to the Croatian Parliament. In addition to analyzing and assessing the human rights situation and the phenomenon of discrimination, a report also contains recommendations for removing systemic problems in the areas of the Ombudsperson mandate.

The institution of ombudsperson is an independent body and cannot be called to account, put into custody or be punished for the expression of an opinion or performed activities within the competence of his/her work.

The institution of the **Ombudsperson for Children** was established in June 2003 as the first specialised institution of its kind in the Republic of Croatia, with the aim of protecting and promoting the rights and interests of children. The Ombudsperson for Children is appointed by the Croatian Parliament for a period of eight years, acts independently and autonomously, adhering to the principles of equity and morals, and no-one may instruct, order or interfere in any way in his or her work.

Main tasks: monitors i) implementation of laws and other regulations in the Republic of Croatia in the field of children's rights and interests; ii) implementation of provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international documents concerned with the protection of the rights and interests of children; iii) fulfilment of the obligations of the Republic of Croatia arising from the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international documents in this field; iv) violations of individual rights of children.

In addition to the aforesaid, Ombudsperson is responsible for i) undertaking of measures for creation of the coherent system of protection and promotion of the rights and interests of children; ii) prevention of harmful activities jeopardizing the rights and interests of children; iii) informs the public on the state of the children's rights and initiates and participates in public

activities aimed at the improvement of the position of children; iv) proposes measures to enhance the influence of children in the society.

Ombudsperson serves as the advocate for children, their voice and protector, and also as the mechanism of early warning. If ombudsperson finds out that the child is being subject to physical or mental violence, sexual abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, negligence or careless treatment, he/she will immediately lodge a report about it to the competent General Attorney Office, and warn competent centre for social welfare, and suggest the measures for the protection of the rights and interests of that child.

Results in numbers (since 2003):

- 16,600 individual cases;
- 14,000 different initiatives and activities with children and for children, recommendations, suggestions, meetings;
- visit to approximately 780 institutions for children;
- more than 570 general recommendations for the protection of children's rights;
- 323 proposals for amendments or adoption of laws and other regulations;
- organization of 140 conferences, press conferences, exhibitions, five international conferences, around 680 lectures and workshops for experts and students;

In the course of 2018, 1588 new applications, complaints, inquiries and requests related to the violation of individual rights of children were received. In order to improve the rights of children, the office of the ombudsperson for children has provided 76 general recommendations and it participated in the process of adopting or amending 41 regulations.

In the process of amending the Criminal Law, some of the suggestions that the office of the ombudsperson for children repeatedly presented were partially accepted. Sanctions for criminal offenses of sexual abuse and exploitation of the child became more severe. There is no time limit on prosecution for the serious criminal offenses of sexual abuse and exploitation of the child (if the criminal act resulted in the death of the child).

Target 16.5

Croatia has made considerable efforts to improve the anti-corruption framework. In this field the work is never done, there is always room for improvement. The bar is set at the highest point. Statistics:

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| Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International: | 48/100 (2018) |
| Government Effectiveness (from -2,5 to +2,5), World Governance Indicators by World Bank: | +0,58 (2017) |
| Control of Corruption (from -2,5 to +2,5), World Governance Indicators by World Bank: | +0,19 (2017) |
| Index of Economic Freedom by Heritage Foundation: | 61.0/100 (2018) |

Corruption (1=best, 7=worst),
Nations in Transit by Freedom House:

4.25 (2018)

Democracy Score (1=best, 7=worst),
Nations in Transit by Freedom House:

3.75 (2018)

In the field of law enforcement Croatia has centralized the fight against corruption under one organization, the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organized Crime (USKOK), with a broad political mandate to investigate, prosecute and prevent corruption based on its establishing legislation. In addition, there is a specialized unit within the police, the National Police Office for Suppression of Corruption and Organized Crime (PNUSKOK).

Other anti-corruption bodies include the Anti-Money Laundering Department; the State Audit Office; the Tax Administration and the Customs Department within the Ministry of Finance; Office for Public Procurements; the Commission for Prevention of Conflict of Interest in Performing Public Duties; and the Independent Anti-Corruption Sector in the Ministry of Justice.

The National Council for Monitoring the Anti-Corruption Strategy is a special parliamentary committee with the purpose of coordinating the implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan. It is charged with evaluating corruption risks and proposing and designing preventative measures.

One specific mechanism is Special court departments were established (in 2009) in four county courts, in four biggest cities in Croatia (Osijek, Rijeka, Split and Zagreb). These courts, known as "*Uskočki sudovi*", have subject matter and territorial jurisdiction of criminal cases under USKOK's competence. These special courts deal specifically with middle and high-level corruption and organized crime related cases.

Commission for the resolution of conflicts of interest was established upon the adoption of the Act on preventing of the conflict of interest in exercise of public office (in 2003). The Commission, first appointed in 2004, is composed of seven members appointed by the Croatian Parliament. Four members of the Commission are representatives in the Croatian Parliament, and other members are eminent public figures. President of the Commission cannot be a member of the currently governing party. Members of the Commission are elected for a term of seven years.