

Council of Europe - Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Cohesion, Moscow, February 26-27, 2009

„Investing into Social Cohesion: Investing in Stability and Well-being of Society”.

Madams and Sirs,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and our delegation, allow me to express our profound pleasure with participating in this Conference. At the same time, I salute the selection of the topic which is of utmost significance for sustainable and economic development of many countries, especially in times of global economic crisis. At the opening of the third millennium, despite of highly developed technology, achievements in science and a high level of social well-being, we are facing a crisis of the welfare state and a large population living on the edge of poverty and social exclusion in specific areas. I am convinced that signing of the Declaration can contribute to strengthening of rights-based social cohesion, in so far as this approach is accompanied by social and economic policy measures that provide effective and equal access for everyone, especially for anyone who lives in, or is at risk of, poverty and social exclusion. Accordingly, social and economic policy must result from a successful reign which requires democratic functioning of institutions and integrated active policy that includes different government levels, a civil society and the private sector as essential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Social policy in Croatia is focused on creation of incentive conditions for economic growth and development, active employment policy and development of human resources. Development plans and programmes, which are based on analysis and evaluation of the existing social policy system (pension scheme and healthcare system, education and employment system, family policy and social protection) and which follow European Union standards, include measures for upgrading the overall institutional frame, with special emphasis on improvement of position of the most disadvantaged part of the population.

By the 2006 – 2013 Strategic Development Framework as the most important element of social cohesion and social justice, the government of the Republic of Croatia is accenting its inclination towards cooperation and ability to solve unavoidable social disputes in a just and efficient manner.

In this regard, Croatia’s position is very demanding. On one hand, there are common values and a developed feeling for social sensitivity and solidarity. A sense for social justice is reflected in relatively major redistributions towards protected groups that take place through the state budget. Situation as such is accepted as default, and on the other hand, ways to increase efficiency of the social assistance transfer system through reforms are looked for, so that the money would reach those that really need it in order to prevent misuse and reduce the risk of poverty. It is the risk of poverty and the lack of “the opportunity for changes in life” that disable social inclusion and participations in society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the course of preparations for accessing the European Union, over the last couple of years, the Republic of Croatia has prepared two national documents in the field of social policy and employment in cooperation with the European Commission, aimed at social inclusion and social cohesion upgrade. Their preparation was based on highly-participative approach with participation of a wide spectrum of social stakeholders.

Those are the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion of the Republic of Croatia (JIM) and the Joint Assessment of Employment Policy Priorities of the Republic of Croatia (JAP).

JAP, signed by the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the European Commission in May 2008, defines a set of objectives in employment policy which are necessary for upgrading labour market transformation and preparation for EU accession, especially the adjustment of the employment system to European systems.

JIM was signed by the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the European Commission in March 2007. The objective was to prepare joint analysis of trends, challenges and political answers, including identification of priorities with a view to perform in line with European goals in the field of employment and social inclusion and policy harmonisation.

Preparation methods and implementation of both documents are based on similar principles and procedures.

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is the coordinator of pre-accession activities on cooperation between the Republic of Croatia and the European Union in the field of social inclusion, resulting in preparation and implementation of JIM itself, and evaluation of progress achieved in its implementation in the Republic of Croatia from March 2007 till June 2008. Although the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare as the central body for coordination is in charge of implementing JIM measures, the responsibilities for implementation and reporting have been divided among other relevant ministries too. The need for strengthening vertical and horizontal management and inclusion of all stakeholders in implementation of JIM has been recognised in that sense.

Allow me to briefly address the experience in preparation and current implementation of JIM as a process which in social inclusion micro-plan reflects challenges of a wider macro-plan in social cohesion improvement. At the moment of signing the stipulated document, Croatia and the European Commission have agreed on not only the key challenges standing in a way of social protection and social inclusion upgrade, but on priorities, measures and analysis to be implemented in the process upon signing JIM, all aimed at preparing Croatia for future participation in the Open Method of Coordination in the field of social protection and social inclusion. JIM serves as a framework for the programming process of pre-accession aid in the field of developing human potentials, and within the consolidated IPA programme (Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance).

Approximately 120 relevant stakeholders of Croatian society participated in JIM preparation: representatives of ministries, of local government bodies, of social partners, of academic institutions, organizations of the civil society and other, which proved to be extremely useful with a view to future activities of JIM measures implementation process.

Upon JIM signing, Croatia entered the phase of converting challenges into implementation measures and their follow-up, having in mind the priorities defined within JIM, but also the

new European Union framework for social protection and social inclusion. Within JIM follow-up activities, further links between measures undertaken in specific fields and social inclusion strategies and other policy field have been designated, along with the link to projects financed from external sources such as IPA, UNDP and similar.

According to feedback received from the European Commission, the progress in JIM implementation process was achieved in general identification of current and future JIM implementation process needs, reporting strategy has been upgraded, and the report comprised most questions of stakeholders included in the implementation.

Special emphasis is given to transparency of JIM implementation process which was achieved by means of feedback from social partners and civil society on the Implementation Report, noting that this process require further efforts in order to strengthen even more their contribution in attained added value in the process of defining policies by participating in preparation of own action plans. Moreover, it is necessary to continue developing a coherent system of monitoring and evaluating, which would encompass all social protection and social inclusion fields with information availability thereof on relevant web pages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With JIM, the Government of the Republic of Croatia induced a process which includes democratic inclusion of different stakeholders and provides many with initial support and legitimacy to estimate the possibilities of their contribution to society. Further challenges lay in strengthening the inclusion of all stakeholders, as well as strengthening of the overall institutional capacity to follow-up the implementation of such a process, whilst Council of Europe's instruments for social cohesion upgrade represent major support to each member state in following their own efforts towards social inclusion and social cohesion.