



COUNCIL OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
FOR CROATS OUTSIDE THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Zagreb, December 19, 2017

CONCLUSIONS
OF THE FIRST PLENARY SESSION OF THE SECOND COUNCIL
CONVOCAION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
CROATIA FOR CROATS OUTSIDE THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

At its session held on September 7, 2017 the Government of the Republic of Croatia passed the Decision on establishing the Council on Croats outside the Republic of Croatia and on nominating its members. This advisory body serving a four-year term provides assistance to the Government of the Republic of Croatia in creating and implementing the policies, activities and programmes related to Croats outside the Republic of Croatia.

Inaugural session of the second Council convocation of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for Croats outside the Republic of Croatia (hereinafter the Council) was held in Zagreb from 17 to 19 December 2017.

Besides the members of the Council, representatives of state bodies and institutions, academia, scientific institutions and other institutions as well as representatives of Catholic Church and Croatian Radiotelevision (hereinafter HRT) also participated in the plenary session of the Council. Promotion of the cooperation between the Republic of Croatia and Croats outside the Republic of Croatia was discussed and the following positions were taken and recommendations made:

1. Acquisition of Croatian citizenship

The Council supports the activities of the competent state bodies with the aim to improve and facilitate the procedure of acquiring Croatian citizenship for Croatian nationals and their descendants. As the preparation of Amendments to the Law on citizenship is of high priority a working party has been formed which is to start its activities in January 2018. Therefore the Council recommends the following:

- to simplify and adjust the tests for assessment of Croatian language proficiency in the procedure of Croatian citizenship acquisition
- to raise age limit of children born abroad from 18 to 22 or above for the acquisition of Croatian citizenship by registering them as Croatian citizens in the Register of citizens

- amend the provisions which require the parent to have Croatian citizenship at the time of the child's birth so that the new provisions do not require the parent to have Croatian citizenship at the time of the child's birth
- restrict the duration of the procedure for acquisition of Croatian citizenship to a maximum of six months
- increase and enhance the efficiency of consular offices of the Republic of Croatia.

2. Acquiring the right to vote – Exercising the right to vote

Acquiring the right to vote and participation of Croats outside the Republic of Croatia both in the election process and political representation in the Republic of Croatia are of the utmost importance. Council members emphasize that the amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia made in 2010 hamper the Croats residing outside the Republic of Croatia to effectively exercise their right to vote as they can do it solely in diplomatic and consular offices of the Republic of Croatia.

Therefore the Committee suggests that activities should be performed and measures introduced that would enable Croats residing outside the Republic of Croatia to effectively exercise their right to vote and to participate in the political life of the Republic of Croatia. Those activities and measures cannot be introduced prior to making amendments to the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Croatia so as to provide the Croats residing outside the Republic of Croatia with the following:

- facilitate access to voting
- increase the number of representatives to the Croatian Parliament in XI constituency
- increase the number of polling stations
- enable to apply mail ballot voting model

3. Register of Croatian nationals outside the Republic of Croatia

The Council reached the conclusion that the Register of Croatian nationals not residing in the Republic of Croatia needs to be compiled as soon as possible in order to create comprehensive database that would comprise contact details of Croats who live outside the Republic of Croatia thus providing networking and efficient communication, and the collected data would be useful for all government bodies and their relevant activities.

4. Identity, tradition, culture and language

Preservation and nurturing of Croatian identity of Croats living outside their homeland is one of the most important aims and activities that both the Government of the Republic of Croatia as well as Croatian communities worldwide should engage in. The Council supports improvements and activities made so far as well as the initiatives taken by the Central office for Croats Abroad

and other state institutions in 2017 and also proposes engagement in more specific and intensive activities and gives support to:

- Agency for Science and Higher Education to speed up the process of recognition of higher education qualifications acquired abroad
- Ministry of Science and Education in ensuring and increasing the number of teachers and coordinators involved in teaching Croatian language and culture especially overseas.
- diplomatic-consular representative missions of the Republic of Croatia in bilateral activities related to Croatian language learning abroad (especially in certain countries where *Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian* language is learned)
- ensuring special entry quotas at study programmes at the University of Zagreb and other universities in the Republic of Croatia for members of Croatian minority and descendants of Croats from European countries and overseas.
- establishing cooperation between the University of Mostar and the universities in the countries where members of Croatian diaspora and Croatian minorities live as well as establishing student exchange programmes

5. Investment opportunities in the Republic of Croatia and assistance to investors

The Council supports the activities undertaken by the Republic of Croatia in order to enhance the frameworks for production, business operation, legal security, competitiveness and investment. Apart from increased efforts of the members of the Council of the Republic of Croatia who live worldwide to network and encourage investing in the Republic of Croatia, the Council proposes the following:

- increasing the availability and visibility of information on investment opportunities in the Republic of Croatia
- intensify activities and participation of the Agency for Investments and Competitiveness in numerous forums in Europe and North America
- initiating networking activities of entrepreneurs and business people of Croatian origin throughout the world and boost their interest in investing in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, primarily in areas where Croats represent the majority
- creating a lobbying strategy: the members of the Council will propose a lobbying strategy to enhance economic or any other cooperation in accordance with their abilities and business opportunities thus contributing to the prosperity of all Croats as well as encouraging cooperation and partnership between the Republic of Croatia and Croatian nationals outside the Republic of Croatia
- simplifying and facilitating administrative and other processes regarding investment in Croatia, which will encourage investing in the Republic of Croatia.

The Council emphasises that mere availability and visibility do not suffice.

6. Dual taxation – Taxation of foreign pensions

Within the overall tax reform carried out by the Government of the Republic of Croatia, through the amendment of the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Rules, tax rates by tax brackets have been lowered for foreign pensions and the obligation of advance income tax payment has been removed. The Council approves this significant improvement vis-a-vis returnees and the issue of foreign pension taxation. This is why the Council supports and recommends those activities within the overall tax and fiscal reforms that focus on lowering taxes and increasing competitiveness of the Croatian economy, which would further encourage Croats outside the Republic of Croatia and their descendants to return to Croatia.

7. Position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The key foreign policy priority of the Croatian government is supporting the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the EU and making sure that the position of Croats, as one of the three constitutive nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is equal to that of the other two nations, with Croatia's policy focusing on creating closer ties with Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This policy has received the Council's full support.

As 2018 is the year of general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (elections are to be held in October 2018), the Council emphasises that **amendments to the Electoral law are imperative** in order to establish a fair election system that will result in choosing legitimate representatives of all the three constitutive nations, i.e. in order to have the elections held in the first place and their results implemented. Namely, it is still uncertain whether it will be possible to implement the results of the elections scheduled for October 2018 unless new provisions on how members of the House of Peoples of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina are elected, as the provisions which were in force previously were declared null and void by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which created a legal gap in the electoral law.

The Council concluded that the present position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is dependent on political, societal and social circumstances, is very difficult so the work of the Council will focus particularly on finding ways of changing this position, with all members of the Council making additional efforts to enable Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina to achieve full constitutiveness and equal rights to those of the other two nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

8. Position of the members of the Croatian minority

Council members support the improvement of the relationship and collaboration of the Republic of Croatia with neighbouring and other countries where Croatian nationals reside. Support will be given to further activities of the Central State Office for Croats Abroad through the work of the Joint Intergovernmental Commissions (MMO), which are of special importance for members of the Croatian minority as they represent a solid mechanism for improving their status and dealing with unresolved issues at a bilateral level.

The Council proposes the following:

- additional efforts focusing on the improvement of the position of the Croatian minority in the Republic of Serbia through all state institutions
- additional efforts focusing on defining the status and strengthening the position of the Croatian minority in the Republic of Slovenia
- Support for the Minority SafePack initiative, the purpose of which is to improve the position of minorities in all European countries.

8. Work of the Council

It is necessary to develop a model of communication between the members of the Council and introduce more transparency in order to inform the Croats they represent about their work and the work of the state institutions on the issues of importance to Croats outside the Republic of Croatia.

The Council expresses its satisfaction resulting from the cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Croatia and all its bodies involved in the work of the Council and wishes to emphasise that they expect results from working together on setting up and implementing projects focused on creating stronger ties between the Croatian homeland and Croats outside Croatia.