



*In an ultra-nationalist act, Biserka Legradić, a Croat, urinated on the Serb anti-Fascist monument at Veljun in May. © Globus*

**IHF FOCUS: Elections; freedom of expression and the media; freedom of association and public assembly; judicial system; misconduct by law enforcement officials; conditions in prisons; secret services; religious intolerance; return of refugees and displaced persons; international humanitarian law; protection of minorities; social rights; women's rights.**

According to the Croatian Helsinki Committee, the overall human rights situation following the early 2000 elections could be defined as "less bad" than it was before the elections. Still Croatia's record was not good: it did not comply with its international commitments and the standards of democratic countries. However, some of the most severe human rights violations ceased with the end of the previous Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ) Government. Reforms started to take place and Croatia took important steps towards becoming a European democracy.

### **Elections**

Due to the bias of numerous influential media that were controlled by the former ruling party, HDZ, as well as due to irregularities in the electoral process itself, the previous Croatian elections held in 1995 and 1997 could not be considered free and

fair. Fearing that the 3 January 2000 parliamentary elections would be organised in a similar atmosphere, 140 NGOs initiated a major campaign under the name "Glas 99," with the Croatian Helsinki Committee as one of the founders. The motto of "Glas 99" was to "Get out and vote!"

The turnout rate of the elections was more than 78 percent. Some sociologists estimated that the "Glas 99" campaign induced up to 4 percent of the total voting population and 15-20 percent of the youth to exercise their right to vote. A coalition of six democratic parties won the elections. Their margin of victory came close to two-thirds of the parliamentary seats, thus allowing the new Government to pass constitutional changes, which moved Croatia from a semi-presidential system into a parliamentary system.

Following the parliamentary elections, a similar NGO coalition "Glas 2000" with

the same aim was formed for the presidential elections. It urged the candidates to define more clearly their positions on what powers and authorities they would use if they were elected President. By forcing the candidates to take clear positions on this issue, "Glas 2000" contributed to the establishment of a more parliament-oriented political system in Croatia. This change entered into force with the constitutional changes, which were passed by the Parliament on 10 November.

### **Freedom of Expression and Media**

Independent observers agreed that one of the most important plus points of the January elections was the new democratic atmosphere and its impact on the media. They marked the end of a 10-year autocratic government by the HDZ and its President Franjo Tuđman. During that period, freedom of expression was systematically restricted, and critical journalists were subject to various forms of pressure. The new daily *Republika* revealed that the close circle of President Tuđman held a monopoly on almost 80 percent of the media market in Croatia, causing a media war between the two most influential media outlets. Although the police investigation was still underway as this is being written, this scandal showed clearly three main problems existing in the Croatian media: secret and non-transparent media ownership, connections between media, politicians and different fractions of the secret services, and the manipulation of information.

After some initial hesitation, the first move of the new Government was to dismiss the rigid HDZ leadership of Croatian state TV (HRT) and to select new executives according to their professional merit, not party membership. Following the appointment of the new leadership, hate speech and usual attacks on critics of the party in power, the Serb minority and NGOs ceased on television. Moreover, television programmes with positive messages on reconciliation and mutual co-operation

between Croats and Serbs at the local level started appearing.

Yet state television continued to send numerous programmes on the activities of state authorities and the ruling party politicians. The transformation of the Croatian television from a one-party institution to a public institution has taken much too long. It took the new authorities six months to initiate public discussion and to draft a new proposal for the new law on Croatian television. The Croatian Helsinki Committee expressed several basic complaints regarding the draft proposal of the law. Among other things, it demanded a more precise definition of the role and influence of civil society on the editorial policy of the most influential media in Croatia.<sup>2</sup>

In April the Croatian Helsinki Committee urged that new authorities urgently revise and change all laws used by the former regime to restrict freedom of expression and the media, especially provisions of the Penal Code stipulating "verbal offence." However, the Government failed to abolish many such provisions, including those enabling hate speech. In addition, the law on telecommunications, which had served as an efficient instrument to give media concessions to the followers of the HDZ authority was not even discussed.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs rejected the requests by *Feral Tribune* and *Nacional* journalists to open the files compiled by the Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (SZUP) in recent years for inspection. These files were used for political manipulations by HDZ officials. Šime Lučin, the new Minister of Internal Affairs, rejected the request despite the fact that he had promised to open the SZUP files to all citizens.

Toward the end of 2000, the leaders of the six-party ruling coalition became increasingly dissatisfied with the media's intervention in the political scene. Zlatko Tomčić, President of the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia, said that some media "want to be beyond the Government and to rule the entire political scene" and criti-

cised them for not being a “very good companion to the new authorities,” for offering irrelevant information and for carrying out investigative journalism.<sup>3</sup>

In late 2000, the Croatian Helsinki Committee reported other negative phenomena regarding the media. Although the illegal phone-tapping of journalists was finally stopped, the relationship between journalists and Secret Services continued. It appeared that the Secret Services leaked not necessarily truthful material to certain media outlets in order to defame some politicians - which were then spread as facts - and brought financial profit to the outlets.

In order to protect the citizens' right to receive accurate, truthful, objective and complete information, the Croatian Helsinki Committee initiated a project whose goal is establishing the office of a Media Ombudsman. His /her responsibility would be to protect citizens from media manipulation as well as journalists against the media owners' arbitrary decisions.

#### Annulment of Restrictive Legal Provisions

In April, the Government annulled notorious Article 18 of the Law on Internal Affairs under which the Ministry of the Interior had the power to decide which individuals would be phone-tapped by the SZUP. Under this provision numerous opposition politicians, journalists and other public figures and private persons had been monitored because they allegedly posed a “danger to the national security.”

On 10 May the Constitutional Court annulled the legal provision that protected the honour and reputation of five highest state officials: the Presidents of the Republic, Parliament, the Government and the Supreme and Constitutional Courts. Under that provision many independent journalists and publishers had been charged for critical reporting.

#### Revision of the Privatisation of Media

A parliamentary investigative commission, established by the new Government,

initiated investigation into the sale of newspapers during the previous Government.

◆ The first case was the purchase of *Vecernji list*, one of the most influential daily newspapers in Croatia, by an unknown holding company from the Virgin Islands in 1998. However, all the witnesses summoned to a hearing denied any responsibility and connection with the obviously illegal purchase. According to some newspaper articles, leaked tape recordings between former President Tudjman and his closest advisor, Ivic Pasalic, revealed that Pasalic had organised the *Vecernji list* take-over.

◆ The six-year-old case regarding the privatisation of the most successful daily *Slobodna Dalmacija* also came into focus. The company was given to HDZ tycoon Miroslav Kutle through illegal activities of the former Government. The Agency for Reconstruction and Development, headed by former Prime Minister, Zlatko Matesa then diverted *Slobodna Dalmacija* funds for his own use and ultimately brought the journal to bankruptcy. Kutle was eventually arrested for carrying out illegal business transactions and other criminal activities. Besides being charged with destroying *Slobodna Dalmacija*, Kutle will have to answer charges pressed against him regarding illicit business activities pertaining to the distribution and publishing house *Tisak*, which he also destroyed. *Tisak* served as a powerful instrument in the hands of the HDZ. The Government manipulated *Tisak* to destroy independent and critically oriented media through not giving the profits from sales to them. In March 2000 the new Government initiated the so-called bankruptcy procedure in *Tisak* in order to rehabilitate it financially.

#### Dropping Charges against Journalists

Charges against journalists were dropped and their complaints declared admissible.

◆ Charges against Davor Butkovic, editor-in-chief of the independent weekly *Globus*,

for allegedly slandering the HDZ were dropped. In his article of May 1996, Butkovic wrote that the HDZ leadership had composed a black list of state enemies and mentioned a few names on the list. Before the charges were dropped, Butkovic's statement was confirmed by Prime Minister Ivica Račan. In the second trial against Butkovic and his colleague Vlado Vurusic, criminal proceedings were discontinued because the Ministry of Defence dropped the charges.

◆ The Zagreb County Court (as appeals court) rejected the complaint filed by the State Prosecutor's Office against the satirical independent weekly *Feral Tribune* for allegedly slandering former President Franjo Tudjman. The article was entitled "Bones in the Mixer." In it, *Feral Tribune* severely criticised former President Tudjman's idea of creating a common grave for all the persons killed during the Second World War – both victims and perpetrators. The complaint was considered untenable because Tudjman had died.

◆ The Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia declared admissible the complaint by journalists and editors-in-chief of the independent weekly *Nacional* about illegal surveillance and phone-tapping of its editorial staff in 1998. Earlier, two courts had refused to consider the complaint. The Supreme Court ordered the county court to continue proceedings against representatives of the Ministry of Interior for illegal phone-tapping.

The number of so-called media court trials also decreased: while in 1999 there were about one thousand such cases, by the end of November 2000 there had been a 5-percent reduction of law cases against publishers for compensation for causing "emotional distress". Still, the Municipal Court of Zagreb had dealt with 143 cases of "verbal offences" against journalists and editors-in-chief, a "crime" that still existed in the Penal Code.

Journalists continued to fall victim to harassment and maltreatment by unknown perpetrators.<sup>4</sup>

### **Freedom of Association and Public Assembly**

According to the Croatian Helsinki Committee, the freedom of public expression improved significantly after the January elections. In the more open climate the police were more tolerant towards participants in demonstrations. However, a few violent incidents were reported during a public demonstration of workers of Zagrepčanka in front of the building of the Government and some organisers of the demonstrations were still being summoned for interrogation at a police station, but in a more civilized manner than during the previous years.

The main problems were the formulation of the law on public gathering which prescribed that organisers of a demonstration had to inform the police about an event five days prior to it, and the decision of the city council of Zagreb that gatherings were forbidden at the three main public squares. These provisions allowed the police to forbid such assemblies of some groups "because of formal reasons."

A new law on associations was being drafted in order to enable free gathering of individuals and to decrease the influence of the state bodies on the establishing and the activities of associations. The Ministry of Justice consulted various NGO experts on legal issues and together with them participated in several public debates. The Croatian Helsinki Committee, in co-operation with other NGOs drafted a number of proposals for the improvement of the draft law. The NGOs primarily demand that the State (in accordance with European standards) facilitate the freedom of gathering and activities without any restrictions. They also stated that registration of the associations should be necessary only for the organizations that wish to gain the status of a legal entity but it should not be made obligatory.

## Judicial System

The Croatian courts were generally inefficient, with cases proceeding at a very slow pace. The right to a fair trial in reasonable time was frequently violated. The longest court proceedings involved labour issues.

Since the autumn of 2000, the post of state public prosecutor was vacant, creating additional problems. Also the question of the existence of the State Judicial Council remained unresolved. On the positive side, some constitutional changes were adopted which strengthened the independence of the courts and increased the power of courts.

Due to the increase of organised crime, drug dealing and corruption, the Government set up the Office for Combating Organised Crime, which should be defined by a law.

The Croatian Helsinki Committee was working on two projects regarding the independence of the Croatian judiciary and monitoring court procedures with the goal of assessing the legality of the court procedures and the independence of the judiciary. It also monitored the first criminal procedure against a "criminal organization" in Croatia with 14 defendants accused of making profit from selling drugs, money laundering and even killing people. The families of some defendants had asked the Committee to professionally and impartially look into the process taking into account that there were some complaints regarding the legality of the earlier measures and prison treatment of the defendants. The County Court of Zagreb decided that because of security and economic reasons the court proceedings be held in the sport hall of the district prison, a fact which became a major issue. For the first time in the Croatian legal history, the institution of the unknown "protected witnesses" and a "repentant" were involved in the case. However, their role had not been defined in detail by the Criminal Procedure Code. Particularly problematic was the question of the protection of witnesses.

## Misconduct by Law Enforcement Officials

The Croatian Helsinki Committee recorded several serious violations of the police procedure despite the fact that the police apparently made serious efforts to transform themselves into a correct and civilised service. It also seemed that the number of cases of misconduct decreased towards the end of the year.

The reported misconduct involved minorities, individuals living in war stricken regions, and, to a significant extent, the Roma population. Also, in Vukovar, the police looked inactively as the returnees took the law into their own hands and forcibly evicted people from their apartments in plain view of the police.

## Conditions in Prisons

Numerous prisoners contacted the Croatian Helsinki Committee and complained about illegal and abusive behaviour by fellow prisoners or, in some cases, the prison employees. The Committee established that prisoners' rights had indeed been violated: most cases involved physical and sexual abuse. The fact that aggressive prisoners were not isolated from the rest of the inmates increased the problem: the "survival of the fittest" prevailed. Most of the victims were inmates who in one way or another were different from the rest of the prison population (e.g. ethnicity) or expressed differing opinions.

Prisons often also lacked adequate medical care, good nourishment and satisfactory hygiene conditions.

◆ In September, Croatian Helsinki Committee activists visited the district prison in Šibenik after five inmates had brutally tortured a new prisoner.

According to prison guards, in bigger penal institutions there were cases of organised corruption inspired by the high authorities. Sporadic suicides evidenced the potentially traumatic atmosphere in these institutions.

### Secret Services

Immediately following the two elections, the new Minister of Internal Affairs, Šime Lučin, revealed that to his knowledge secret services had opened files on 95,000 cases during the past decade against individuals and groups in Croatia. The fact that there were nine secret service organizations in Croatia showed the strength of the repressive apparatus of the Tudjman regime.

In March the weekly *Nacional*<sup>6</sup> published a series of articles on the activities of the Military Secret Service SIS and other secret services aimed against the Croatian Helsinki Committee, "Glas 99" and other NGO's and international organizations working in Croatia. These activities carried the code name "Cameleon" and were officially carried out in 1998. However, the SIS continued the operation and increased its depth just before the January elections and, among other things, infiltrated into "Glas 99" central offices to find information on its funding by American organizations or financial irregularities of any sort. Finally, after public concerns raised about the SIS's operation, the state prosecutor initiated in May an inquiry into the death of Darko Jurišić, the program co-ordinator of "Glas 99," who died in a traffic accident on 14 December 1999. The findings of the inquiry were still pending at this writing. However, the early results have clearly shown an incredible degree of infiltration of the secret services in the work of NGO's and civic initiatives as well as unacceptable encroachments on the basic rights of many citizens of Croatia. Furthermore, the secret services had still not undergone a full reform, which would limit their activities to those allowed by law and improve the quality of internal controls of the secret services.

### Religious Intolerance

According to the Croatian Helsinki Committee, the main reason for religious intolerance could be attributed to inappropriate legal regulations. They hindered the

punishment of xenophobic incidents and the promotion of inter-religious tolerance.

A new law on religious communities was under preparation. The Croatian Helsinki Committee criticised that the draft law distinguished religious communities as "traditional Christian" and "other religious communities" and thus violated the constitutionally guaranteed equality of all religious communities before the law (Article 41 of the Constitution). Moreover, the draft law did not explain why it used the criteria of one hundred years of existence of a certain religious community in order to recognise its status as "traditional," and not the 50-year criteria often used in the legal regulations on many other rights. According to the Committee, such a formulation would cause divisions and pave the way to a policy of discrimination in the field of, for example, law, policy, finance and education, and would not help at all in re-shaping Croatia into a contemporary and democratic State. The Committee stated that the law should recognise, register and guarantee the already existing rights and the acquired legal personality, which various religions possessed. Moreover, due to the so-called division into "adopted" and "recognised" religious denominations dating back to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, many religious communities had not been able to register at all although they could do that in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia after 1945. The Committee asked that the criteria of historic origin be entirely dismissed as archaic, undemocratic, unjust and discriminatory. In its opinion, such a criteria was unconstitutional.

### Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons

#### Returnees

Problems regarding the return of refugees and displaced persons remained one of the main human rights concerns. In spite of the fact that the central authorities often emphasised their readiness to support the programme of return of refugees to pre-war homes, post-war ethnic animos-

ity was still wide-spread at the local level, and the economic problems and unemployment added to the difficult situation for the refugees.

Since the change of the party in power, the entire atmosphere regarding the return of the refugees changed to a more positive one. However, returnees still faced serious problems in getting back their rightful property. The main obstacle was the obstruction by the housing commissions to the whole process and the failure of the local authorities to implement positive decisions.

◆ The situation was very serious in Plaški, where the housing commission had not resolved positively one single case of the return of property although, as of March, 173 cases of persons had submitted a request.

#### Knin

According to official data, 15,000 elderly Croatian citizens of Serb ethnicity returned to the wider area of Knin to their devastated houses or were accommodated in their relatives' houses. The Croatian Helsinki Committee believed that the figure was exaggerated. According to the Committee, the most current problem in this area was the numerous unresolved requests for the return of property to their rightful owners: only ten percent of property had been returned. The Knin housing commission stated that it had resolved almost 60 percent of the requests, but that figure referred only to cases where the owner had to pay the temporary user in order to move back into his/her house.

Returnees with pre-war tenancy rights were in the worst possible situation because their cases had not been resolved at all in Knin. The issue concerned mostly urban Serbs who were forced to wait for their cases to be solved in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

#### Vukovar

The return of Serbs to the Croatian Danube region and the city of Vukovar pro-

ceeded at a very slow pace. The Croatian Helsinki Committee regional centre in Vukovar reported that only those Croats and Serbs returned who did not have any other place to go. At the same time, the process of Serbs leaving the Danube region continued.

The greatest obstacle to the return of both Croats and Serbs was lack of employment because the economy of the region was devastated. The housing commission did not implement the governmental "Return Programme" but was even involved in cases of forcible evictions. It advised those who could not find accommodation to move into "someone's empty flat" – which led to the prosecutor filing a complaint and issuing large fines.

Additional inter-ethnic tensions in the Danube Region were further inflamed by the published lists of neighbours who had allegedly been accused of war crimes. In this way thousands of persons were accused in an illegal manner, instead of letting the state prosecutors exercise their duty.

#### Protection of Refugees and Immigrants

In the treatment of refugees – particularly on the local level - ethnicity still played an important role: no refugees were cared for properly, but non-Croat refugees were particularly discriminated against. Procedures before the administrative bodies, social assistance, medical protection and temporary accommodation were less available for non-Croats. They did not obtain material help in reconstruction and renovation of their homes and it was almost impossible for Muslim and Serb refugees to find a job. Therefore, they often left the country and sought employment abroad.

◆ One hundred Croatian citizens of Serb ethnicity in the town of Gvozd (Karlovac-Sisak County) sent a petition to the Croatian Helsinki Committee and sought help regarding the return to their houses and apartments. They were embittered and disillusioned because they had not re-

ceived their property back after awaiting for several years. The Serb houses that were given to Croat settlers for temporary use after the military operation "Storm" in many cases were not used at all or were given to Croat returnees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not a single request by Serbs from Gvozd regarding return or renovation of their houses was resolved. The greatest obstacle to the return of Serb property was the head of the municipality, Mirko Putrić, who demanded that the Serbs first have to apologize to Croats before they would deal with Serbs.

### **International Humanitarian Law**

In July the Croatian Helsinki Committee published the report *Military Operation Storm and its Aftermath, Part 2, the Former Sector North*. The report was based on the data collected for several years during field investigations in the territory of the former UN Sector North.<sup>6</sup> The territory included the former municipalities of Duga Resa, Dvor, Glina, Hrvatska Kostajnica, Karlovac, Ogulin, Petrinja, Sisak, Slunj, Vrginmost (Gvozd) and Topusko. The Helsinki Committee activists visited 160 villages in the area and interviewed about 300 witnesses of the events during and after the military operation "Storm" on 4-7 August 1995. The Committee established the deaths of 267 but it believed that in total more than three hundred had died. Among the 267 civilians who were killed or disappeared in the above-mentioned region, 76 had died in refugee camps while 191 were killed in or disappeared from their houses. In the region of Glina and Dvor, a great number of refugees got killed in cross fire between the two enemies. Individuals from the Croatian army units, which were situated in that region, killed numerous people in villages in the Karlovac, Duga Resa, Gvozd, Vojnić, Petrinja and Slunj municipalities. However, the V Corps of the army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serb paramilitary formations were most likely responsi-

ble for most of the crimes, particularly men under the command of Serb war criminal, Željko Ražnjatović (Arkan), committed cruel murders of Croat civilians who lived in Dvor. Members of the V Corps slaughtered ten civilians. In Donji Skrad, in the Duga Resa municipality, members of the Croatian army slaughtered several civilians of Serb ethnicity, who remained in their houses. Some villages were burnt down, for example Paukovac in the territory of Dvor.

The former Government ignored the Helsinki Committee's reports about the above incidents. The new Government reopened discussions on this issue and some procedures referring to the former Sector North were reinitiated.

### **Protection of Minorities**

The January elections brought relief to members of minority groups: the atmosphere among the public and in the media grew more tolerant towards them. The authorities in all their public appearances emphasised the equal rights of all Croatian citizens regardless of their ethnicity and the respect of their rights. The Parliament amended the Law on the Use of Language and the Letters of Ethnic Minorities and the Law on Education and Upbringing. Changes of the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of Ethnic and National Communities were adopted on condition that the authorities in the period of six months create a special model of autonomy acceptable for the most numerous ethnic minorities in Croatia. The November amendments to the Constitution introduced positive discrimination against the minorities regarding their voting rights: the minority members shall be given one more ballot to vote for both a candidate in general voting lists and another on the lists of the ethnic minorities.

However, at the local level, the animosity towards the Serb and Muslim minority members was still common. Roma – numbering about 60,000 - faced most intolerance and the state authorities tended



to turn a blind to such cases. Almost 90 percent of the Roma youth were unemployed and forced to support themselves by performing humiliating work such as gathering rubbish, begging, prostitution and working on the black market. Only 10 percent of Roma children attended obligatory elementary schools and a minimal number of Roma attend high schools and universities. In some schools they were subjected to segregation.

- ◆ The school principle of the settlement of Strmec near Varaždin decided that Roma pupils were put into a special department and had to attend special courses.

- ◆ In a suburb of Zagreb a restaurant had a sign on its walls saying: "We do not serve drinks to Roma people!"

A number of physical attacks and assaults – particularly by skinheads - against Roma were reported.

### Hate Speech

The victory of the democratic opposition in the January elections did not bring the expected more responsible behaviour regarding minorities on the part of the media and various individuals and institutions. The already notorious promoters of hate speech, such as well-known MP Ante Djapić, continued with their threats in public speeches directed against Serb minority members. On Independence Day, Djapić publicly told the Serbs of Vukovar:

*"...The former authorities may have given you before, or these authorities may give you hundreds of laws on pardon, hundreds of laws on reconstruction, but when we come to power, we will show you!"*

- ◆ In May, during a commemoration of a massacre committed by Ustashas on Serb civilians during WW II in the village of Veljun, near Slunj, Biserka Legradić urinated on the tombstones of the victims of Ustashas.

- ◆ In the morning programme of an independent radio station in Zagreb, one of the

journalists said on 9 November in a "satirical" talk show during his commentary on the raising of the level of the river Sava: "The water wave will flood the Roma settlements down the river." When asked where these Roma settlements were, he replied: "near Jasenovac," referring to the largest Ustasha concentration camp during WW II where, among other people, thousands of Roma were killed.

- ◆ On 5 November, the daily *Slobodna Dalmacija* depicted on its front page a picture of a parliamentary assembly with a title: "Among 45 SDP members only four are Catholics." In the article itself all the SDP members of the Parliament and the Government were listed according to their religious conviction. The article ended with the words suggesting that Croatian society was threatened by de-Christianisation.

### **Social Rights**

In 2000, the majority of cases the Croatian Helsinki Committee dealt with were related to social rights, particularly the right to employment, severance pay and pension, failure to register workers as well as harassment at work and prohibitions on joining trade unions. The situation was aggravated by the great number of bankruptcies. The unemployment rate increased by the end of December to 22.4 percent.

- ◆ Sixty employees of the Zagreb Service Centre (ZUC) had been illegally employed and worked without working contracts, registration at social security and pension authorities. The ZUC employers also committed a whole series of other violations and criminal acts which were investigated by the State Inspectorate, the financial police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The situation of the employees only worsened after the whole process: the executive board put serious pressure on those who dared cite irregularities.

Another large group who sought help at the Croatian Helsinki Committee were

refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who had become Croatian citizens while they obtained their rights to pension in Bosnia. Their pensions were paid by the Croatian Pension Fund until an inter-state agreement was signed between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding social and pension insurance. After that, they had not received any payments.<sup>8</sup>

### Women's Rights

The Croatian legislation did not contain any provisions to define or punish discrimination against women although Croatia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992. In principle, it was legally possible to file a complaint of gender-based discrimination against anyone, but it was very difficult to enforce it in practice.

Women's unemployment was one of the most serious concerns, especially of women aged between 40 and 50. Single mothers were in a particularly bad situation. Nearly 32 percent of women had looked for a job for over two years, the vast majority of them being over 45. In addition, employers were reluctant to hire women because of their right to maternity leave.

According to a research, 49 percent of men and 35 percent of women agreed that "a woman's place was primarily at home."<sup>9</sup> According to the same research mothers spent 90 percent of their free time doing something for the family, and only 2 percent for themselves. Economic dependence influenced decision-making within the family.

Some 86 percent of Croatian women were very or quite interested in politics, a figure which surpassed the interest of the average man in Europe. However, women's interest in politics extended well beyond their real political participation: in the House of Representatives, only 21 of the representatives were women. From the members of Government, there were 13 percent women.<sup>10</sup>

The Criminal Code did not specify violence within the family and the law stipulated it as a criminal act of violence in general. A criminal procedure could be initiated through a private complaint, or as a disturbance of public order and peace. In practice, the majority of women did not seek police protection out of fear or because they could not afford the costs of legal proceedings. Violent behaviour was punishable by a maximum of 30 days imprisonment.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Based on the *Annual report 2000* of the Croatian Helsinki Committee.
- <sup>2</sup> For details, see the Croatian Helsinki Committee demands regarding a Draft Law on HTV, June 14, 2000.
- <sup>3</sup> *Novi list*, 20 May 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> The Croatian Helsinki Committee Statement No. 124 on physical attack on journalist Goran Flauder, 28 September 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> 16, 23 and 30 March 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> It represented a follow-up of the previous report (former Sector South), which was published in April 1999.
- <sup>7</sup> The Croatian Helsinki Committee Statement No. 119, 1 June, 2000.
- <sup>8</sup> The Croatian Helsinki Committee Statement No. 113, 19 January, 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> Inga Tomić-Koludrović and Suzana Kunac, *Risks of modernization; Women in Croatia in '90's*, March 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> Women's Informing Office, (Ženska infoteka) "Risks of Modernization: Women and Elections 1999," 1999.