



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE POLICY MEETING

Pula
29th September 2016

Objectives of the meeting:

The Policy meeting was held on 29th September and gathered representatives from 5 local self-governments (Pula, Bogdanovci, Pakrac, Gračac and Čakovec), representatives of the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, and the CoE Project team.

The objectives of the Policy meeting were to inform participants on Key recommendations of the CoE monitoring bodies for Croatia namely the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML); to inform participants on the results achieved by the small grant implementation in Croatia; and to make recommendations based on the small grant projects' results, recommendations from the meeting and the latest findings of the CoE monitoring bodies.

The recommendations are based on the concrete evidence in municipalities showing how reforms can work in practice and how they could be integrated into a broader policy spectrum. They are utilizing the minority protection standards based on the local action plans, national legislation and in particular recommendations of the FCNM and ECRML.

Results from the meeting:

The participants were further familiarized with the relevant provisions of the FCNM and ECRML and the latest recommendations on Croatia of the CoE expert bodies monitoring the implementation of the two instruments. The participants have increased their understanding of the connection between the small grants and the CoE standards and recommendations; exchanged experience of implementation of projects and shared the lessons learned. The conclusions and policy recommendations have been articulated based on insights from project implementation in individual municipalities.

The main topics discussed at the meeting were culture, in relation to the projects in Kneževi Vinogradi and Pakrac, media in relation to the projects in Bogdanovci and Pakrac, official use of language and script in relation to the projects in Pula and Pakrac, education in relation to projects in Čakovec, Gračac and Pakrac and effective participation in political life (Gračac, Pakrac).

The results of small projects which demonstrate the cooperation between minorities and their association with the majority population in the quest to develop and implement better policies for everyone living in those areas are a positive example for all. The projects in Kneževi Vinogradi and Pakrac initiated inter-cultural dialogue within the local community. The Bogdanovci project raised awareness about members of Rusyn and Ukraninan minorities. The Pakrac and Gračac projects facilitated the greater role of Council of National Minority members in the political life of the local community. The Čakovec project

contributed to the education of Roma women and raised the most sensitive issue regarding the Roma – lack of education and Croatian language proficiency. The Pula project indirectly affirmed the Italian language and culture while directly, through bilingual street signs and municipal documents, increasing the status of the Italian national minority in the city.

The short term results are: the supply of the machinery to improve the infrastructure, (Pakrac), provision of the equipment needed to implement the programs, (Bogdanovci, Gračac and Kneževi Vinogradi), equipment of the facilities which provide legal aid and facilitating the growth of local social capital through a series of trainings (Gračac, Pula and Čakovec) and education and cultural events (Kneževi Vinogradi and Pakrac).

On the long term, the results will empower members of minorities through continuous programmes such as libraries in Kneževi Vinogradi, Internet Radio Bogdanovci, Italian language courses Pula, which will, with the earlier mentioned infrastructure, communal tractor in Pakrac, machine in Čakovec, legal aid office in Gračac, sustain their cooperation and networking, primarily in these six municipalities.

All projects have also contributed to rising awareness among the municipal administration, media and civil society of the role of the minority policies for inter-community relations which can be classified as a long term change. The situation is expected to improve through joint activities, among minority representatives, local authorities, majority and governmental organisations along, with the recognition and implementation for good practices.

The discussion at this policy meeting confirmed that the problems which members of different minorities face are, more or less, similar. It is expected that, through the media and joint meetings, representatives of other municipalities will be introduced to the results and will recognize identify those which they themselves will advocate and use in the future. The results which are recognised like good practice examples could be used in near future in the other municipalities.

Compliance of the Small Project Results with the last findings of the Framework Convention for protection of National Minorities (FCNM):

The Small projects relate to several articles of the FCNM: Article 5 (projects in Kneževi Vinogradi and Pakrac), Article 6 (projects in Bogdanovci, Kneževi Vinogradi and Pakrac), Article 10 (projects in Pakrac and Gračac), Article 11 (projects in Kneževi Vinogradi, Pakrac and Gračac) and Article 12 (project in Čakovec).

Project cultural events in Kneževi Vinogradi (Serbs, Hungarian, Germans) and Pakrac (Serbs, Italian, Czech and Hungarian) initiated intercultural dialogue in local community to support the preservation and development of national minority identities and culture. Especially in the way that events were created for all minorities, not particularly one.

Local authorities, together with representatives of national minorities, in Bogdanovci, Kneževi Vinogradi and Pakrac mainstreamed the tolerance and intercultural dialogue through small project results: common education on future journalist, inter cultural evenings, common cookbook. Members of the majority population were regularly invited to all those events in order to recognize and promote diversity as an asset.

Project Internet Radio Bogdanovci completely follows the recommendations of radio and television broadcasting in minority languages. It is important to say that the local authority deeply supports this project. The Pakrac project, through cooperation with local cultural institutions which bring together the entire local community, such as the town museum,

town library and the local newspaper, raised the proportion of minority related subjects in the local media.

The Pakrac and Gračac projects advocated the use of minority language on local level through training for education in the minority language. Language rights are one of the main pillars of preservation of national identity. The right of children who are members of the Serb national minority to receive supplementary education in minority language and script is especially affirmed in Pakrac. It should be noted that the Advisory Committee opinion from above specifically mentions that an individual approach, tailored to each municipality, can be taken through local statutory directives in order to truly achieve advanced levels of language rights instead of just catering to statistics.

The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to raise awareness amongst the public of Croatia's international and national legal obligations towards national minorities, and to promote close consultations among local authorities with representatives of minorities and the majority regarding the display of bilingual or trilingual signposts as a demonstration of the diverse character of the region, traditionally and at present. The projects have shown that this issue was tackled in different ways in different municipalities at the beneficiary level. The Pula project tackled this issue and has achieved the results to show for it. The Pakrac and Gračac projects are advocating the implementation of this recommendation within their municipalities. Only the Kneževi Vinogradi municipality already had the (best possible) solution – trilingual signposts as a demonstration of the diverse character of the municipality.

The Čakovec project dealt specifically with the education and empowering of Roma women. It was concluded that their education path is hindered due to insufficient Croatian language proficiency and generally low levels of elementary education. The issue and need for Roma education and training of educators directly working with Roma minority as well as educating the majority population about Roma population and culture have been raised by this project.

Compliance of the Small Project Results with the last findings of the ECRML¹

The projects are clearly related to a number of recommendations of the Committee of Experts and the Committee of Ministers: continuing efforts to promote awareness and tolerance vis-à-vis the regional or minority languages and the cultures they represent as an integral part of the cultural heritage of Croatia, both in the general curriculum at all stages of education and in the media – projects in Pakrac and Gračac had the purpose to educate and raise awareness among the local Serb minority on the importance of using Serbian in speech and writing; taking measures to ensure that speakers can use in practice their regional or minority languages in relations with the relevant branches of the State administration – Project Pula organised courses in the Italian language for municipality officers/existing staff.

Main Strategic and institutional framework dealing with minorities in beneficiary

- The main act related to minorities is the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia with Constitutional Act on the Rights of National minorities.
- An Action plan for more effective implementation of this Constitutional Act covering the period 2011-2013.
- National Programme for the Protection and the promotion of Human Rights 2103-2016.

¹ ECRML Application of the Charter in Croatia (5th monitoring cycle , 15 April 2015)

- National Plan for the Roma and Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.

The institutions responsible for minorities are first of all Government of Croatia with Governmental Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities; the Council for National Minorities on State Level and the National Minority Organisations and Councils of National Minorities.

Compliance of the Small Project Results with the minority policies in beneficiary

The projects are fully in accordance with the acts/regulations on the protection of rights of national minorities (which to a significant extent aim to implement the above FCNM and ECRML standards).

The Action Plan for Implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities from 2011 to 2013 contains the following sections:

- *Official and public use of national minority languages and scripts*; which included project results in Gračac (education on importance on minority language), Kneževi Vinogradi (local statute translated in three languages), Pula (importance of using minority languages)
- *Education in national minority languages and scripts* complied with Pakrac project results: interest for additional education for Serbian national minority
- *Representation of persons belonging to national minorities in representative and executive bodies at the central and local governmental levels* is complied with project results in Gračac and Pakrac: minority representatives showed interest in participating in local government.

It must be pointed out that this Action plan was agreed on in order to more efficiently implement the Constitutional law on minority rights. The Constitutional law on minority rights complies with the Croatian Constitution as well as the recommendations of FCNM and ECRML. The legislative framework for the protection of minority rights in Croatia is good, but its practical implementation should be reinforced with additional plans and strategies.

National plan for Roma, with a purpose to improve living conditions of the Roma people and their access to rights, significant efforts were continuously made within numerous, various programs and projects, and special efforts were invested in the education of Roma children by ensuring preschool education and the highest possible enrolment rates in the primary and secondary education, reducing dropout, etc., is complied with results in Čakovec. These results call for Roma education as an absolute priority. Educated Roma will have more opportunities and means to recognise their rights and ensure their implementation and promotion within the community.

Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations are the means to replicate the results achieved through the projects and make them sustainable. This is a job for both the local authorities and minority representatives who should address it jointly at the national level. That can all be handled by the existing coordination where the local levels (National Minority Councils and local authorities) and the national levels (Government's Office for Human Rights and Government's National Minority Council) are linked through County human rights coordinators. The coordination only needs to start functioning properly and requires no additional means or funds.

By implementing the recommendations, the minorities will raise awareness of their position in the society and be empowered. They will then be in a better position to have their rights recognised and secured. The legal framework is entirely supportive and the examples of good practices, especially from Pula and Kneževi Vinogradi, are encouraging. The biggest issue is lack of funds. There are two ways of handling that: by either applying to local and national calls or by lobbying when national and (especially) local budgets are created to make sure more means are allocated to minorities and their activities. The process of creating the budget should be participatory.

Seeing that representatives of local authorities, such as heads of municipalities and their deputies, attending the meeting in Pula, and that they expressed interest, it is expected that they implement the recommendations as they hold the power. It is important to point out that everyone involved must work together to fulfill the recommendations. The consultancy process at the local authority level should be advanced and links to national authorities and CoE should be strengthened to make sure they are implemented. It is good that the legal framework for that to happen already exists.

Recommendations for the relevant institutions in the beneficiary

1. Focus on Roma integration through education: regarding the Roma community this refers primarily to an emphasis on learning Croatian in order to empower members of the Roma community to communicate, participate in mainstream education, ensure that they can have their rights respected and facilitate their integration. At the same time, educate the majority population about the specifics of Roma culture and tradition in order to make integration desirable and acceptable on both sides.

Local authorities should:

- Raise the capacity of the municipality staff for implementing projects which pertain to additional education for the Roma, especially regarding learning the Croatian language
- Build partnership between the municipality and schools with the aim of educating teachers on working with the Roma and educating Roma assistants to provide support in classes.
- Build partnerships with media and NGOs who are engaged with the issues of social exclusion in order to promote diversity and educate the majority population.
- Increase the transparency in the allocation of funds from municipalities to Roma community organizations and NGOs dealing with Roma integration.

National authorities should:

- Continue implementing the measures to integrate the Roma (especially in education) as set out by the National Plan for Roma and Action Plan for Roma. Financially, this is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport and the Education and Teacher Training Agency.
- Increase the allocation of funding to the communities

2. Ensure additional education for national minority representatives on capacity building for preparing and implementing projects

Local authorities should:

Ensure the sustainability of projects and project results. This can be done by allocating the necessary funds from local budgets and opening local calls for projects.

National authorities should:

- Continue opening calls for projects aimed at educating members of minorities

- Secure funds for those calls by re-allocating them from the existing budget and through European funds

This is primarily the responsibility of the Government's Office for Human Rights and its National Minority Council.

National and local authorities should:

Encourage and advocate the networking of everyone working with minorities on these issues in order to facilitate the implementation of this recommendation

3. Raise awareness among the representatives of minorities and educate them on the values minorities contribute to the society and minority rights to make sure they are continuously supportive, involved and proactive in facilitating the integration of minorities.

Local authorities should:

- Continue implementing the positive framework for minority policies.
- Support minorities in implementing the positive framework.
- Support minorities in their efforts to ensure their rights.
- Initiate and support a participatory approach to budget talks and adoption at local levels to ensure sufficient funds are available for implementing minority policies.

National authorities should:

- Continue promoting measures aimed at more efficient protection of minority rights
- Attempt to secure sufficient funds in state budget for projects which would raise awareness among minorities and educate them

This is mainly the responsibility of the Croatian Parliament's Human Rights and National Minority Rights Committee, The Government's Office for Human Rights and individual ministries such as the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of European Funds and Regional Development.

4. Make sure that all relevant local and national institutions are continuously kept up to date about each and every incident of hate speech and hate crime and reminded of their duty and mission to process such occurrences in order to reduce their incidence and ultimately result in a more welcoming society.

Local authorities should:

- Educate their employees on the provisions of Anti-discrimination legislation and hate speech legislation.

At the local level this should be the responsibility of the County coordinator for human rights and the funds should be secured from the local budgets.

National authorities should:

- Secure the means for relevant education in local communities through available funds from the state budget.

In addition to the earlier mentioned institutions, the offices of the Ombudsman and the Gender Ombudsman should be involved in this.

5. Local councils are encouraged to follow the example of good practice from Pula where language pluralism and intercultural dialogue are promoted through a new form of communication – a visual city walk.

Local authorities should:

Allocate funds from local budgets to implement this recommendation.