



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 2988th meeting

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Chair: Ms. Shepherd

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention (continued)

Combined ninth to fourteenth periodic reports of Croatia (continued) (CERD/C/HRV/9-14; CERD/C/HRV/Q/9-14)

1. **Ms. Tlakula** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would like to receive information on measures taken by the State party to prevent State officials, opposition politicians and influential public figures from engaging in racial attacks and racist hate speech in public discourse and from using inflammatory language, and would like to know whether any action had been taken in such cases. She wished to hear about steps taken to ensure the effective implementation of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Government and Certain High Ranking Officials and the Code of Ethics for Members of the Croatian Parliament and whether there were any plans to adopt similar measures for public officials at the regional and local levels. It would be interesting to learn about measures implemented to address online racist hate speech and to combat negative stereotypes and prejudice, particularly against members of the Roma community, Serbs and non-citizens. The Committee had learned that senior government officials, including the President, had reportedly participated in events commemorating and even glorifying war criminals and that the President had called into question the facts surrounding the Srebrenica genocide. The delegation might wish to comment on those reports and inform the Committee of measures taken to investigate and combat such acts.

2. It would be useful to hear about measures taken to improve the accessibility and availability of legal aid, particularly at the local and regional levels, and to raise awareness among people vulnerable to discrimination of the availability of such assistance. The Committee would welcome further information on the legal aid services provided to national minorities.

3. She would be interested to learn about measures taken in line with general recommendation No. 25 on gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination and general recommendation No. 30 on discrimination against non-citizens, with the aim of eliminating discrimination against refugees and displaced persons in working conditions and employment regulations and practices. She would also appreciate further information on results achieved in the implementation of the Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Who Have Been Granted International Protection for the period from 2017 to 2019 and on efforts to develop a new action plan that would also cover beneficiaries of temporary protection. The delegation might wish to inform the Committee of measures taken by the Government to provide regular and continuous Croatian language courses of an adequate number of hours and at an appropriate level to effectively facilitate the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and how it planned to extend the right to language learning to persons under temporary protection. It would be interesting to learn about any measures implemented to combat acts of racial discrimination targeting migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons and to raise their awareness of available remedies. The Committee would like to know whether the State party was aware of reports of regular and often violent pushbacks of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants to Bosnia and Herzegovina before their asylum applications and protection needs had been assessed and whether any steps were being taken to stop the practice. It would be helpful to the Committee to receive updated statistics on the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, including children, and on the number of stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness in Croatia.

4. She would be grateful to receive information as to whether the State party was planning to develop a procedure for determining statelessness. It would also be useful to hear about measures taken to strengthen access among stateless persons to the rights referred to in articles 5 (d), (e) and (f) of the Convention and in general recommendation No. 30 and general recommendation No. 34 on racial discrimination against people of African descent. The Committee would also welcome information on steps taken by the State party to adopt migration and integration policies and on how the State party planned to ensure that undocumented children could gain access to education, obtain diplomas and sit official examinations. The delegation might also wish to provide an update on the situation of

stateless persons belonging to the Roma and Serbian communities and on efforts to address their situations.

5. Lastly, she would welcome information on measures taken to give effect to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and on any measures or policies implemented in connection with the International Decade for People of African Descent.

6. **Mr. Balcerzak** (Country Task Force) said that it was his understanding that respondents to the 2021 population census had not been able to indicate more than one ethnic affiliation. He would like to know whether it was the official policy of the State party that individuals could not have multiple ethnic identities.

7. It would be helpful to hear about the main objectives of action plans for the implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, the Operational Programmes for National Minorities and the special operational programmes for seven minorities, as well as the achievements and shortcomings of the State party's efforts to support minorities over the previous decade. Further information on the Operational Programmes for National Minorities covering the period from 2021 to 2024 would also be appreciated, especially regarding the resources allocated for their implementation and the question of whether a monitoring mechanism was in place. The Committee had received reports that some of the local authorities had impeded the implementation of special measures and policy frameworks. Accordingly, the delegation might wish to provide specific information on how the State party ensured that measures, laws and policies concerning the rights of national minorities were duly implemented at the regional and local levels.

8. The Committee would appreciate information and updated statistics on the representation of ethnic and national minorities, particularly members of the Serbian and Roma minorities, in the national Parliament, the Government, the public sector, public administration, law enforcement and the judiciary, including at the regional and local levels.

9. Key infrastructure in the State party was still underdeveloped in some regions, including those inhabited by the Serbian minority, and regional disparities persisted. He was therefore keen to learn about measures taken to create conditions for sustainable development in Croatia, including the development of infrastructure projects and any efforts made to eliminate disparities. He would also welcome information on the results achieved in the implementation of the Strategy of Regional Development of the Republic of Croatia until 2020 and the action plan for its implementation over the period from 2017 to 2019.

10. The delegation might wish to comment on the observations of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, who had noted that the intensity of prosecutions of war crimes and the number of trials in the presence of those accused of such crimes had decreased and that progress in investigating and prosecuting war crimes appeared to have stalled. It would be helpful to receive explanations on reported shortcomings in court proceedings and on the State party's limited engagement in judicial cooperation and exchange of information, including in cases where Croatian police and military personnel were being investigated by prosecutors in other countries. The Committee would appreciate an update on the number of investigations carried out and prosecutions and sentences handed down in relation to war crimes, along with a breakdown of the ethnic and national origins of the alleged perpetrators. In that connection, clarification on alleged differences in treatment of perpetrators of Serbian and Croatian origin would be welcomed.

11. He would like to know whether there was a general sentiment in Croatia that reconciliation between the Croatian and Serbian peoples had been achieved.

12. **Mr. Diaby** said that he would like to hear more about the State party's efforts to enact legislation on racial discrimination, including racist hate speech, in the context of sporting events. He wondered whether the State party was aware of the extent of football hooliganism in Croatia, the repercussions of which had been felt in other countries, and whether there were plans to investigate the recent killing of a supporter of Greek nationality at a football match involving a Croatian team and to punish the perpetrators. He also wished to know whether the State party had developed a national plan in line with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024. If not, did it have plans to do so?

13. **Mr. Guissé** said that he would be interested to hear whether the State party had drawn any lessons from its experience in addressing the challenges faced during the 2015 migration crisis. He would like to receive information on any measures taken to combat xenophobia and exclusion in Croatia. In addition, he would welcome clarification on the fears of the unknown that had been mentioned by the head of delegation in his introductory remarks. Were such fears connected to xenophobia?

14. A number of non-governmental organizations had informed the Committee that their members had been subjected to intimidation and harassment, and sometimes taken to court, for allegedly aiding illegal immigration, simply because they had observed illegal collective deportations carried out by the authorities. He would like to hear about steps taken by the State party to cooperate with organizations working to support people in distress.

15. **Mr. Balcerzak** said that he would like to know the outcome of the State party's comprehensive reform of school curricula. The Committee would like to know whether measures had been taken to implement the recommendations issued by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, which had called for an evaluation of civics education and for educators to be trained in the teaching of human rights. He would also like to know whether the teaching of civics was compulsory in all schools, what format it followed and how it addressed racial discrimination.

16. He would appreciate the delegation's comments on the case of *Mile Novaković v. Croatia*, in which the European Court of Human Rights had issued a judgment in 2020. He wondered whether the treatment of Mr. Novaković, a Croatian national of Serbian origin dismissed from his teaching job for giving classes in the Serbian language, was an isolated case.

17. **Mr. Payandeh** said that the complex nature of racial profiling, the difficulty of identifying and tackling the phenomenon and the reluctance of police leaders in many States to acknowledge its existence meant that civil society and the courts often played a crucial role in exposing and addressing the problem. He would like to know whether racial profiling had given rise to any civil society protests or been a factor in any court decisions in Croatia.

The meeting was suspended at 10.45 a.m. and resumed at 11.05 a.m.

18. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Council for Human Rights included three members of civil society organizations, who were elected by a public process announced by the Council for the Development of Civil Society. A question raised at the previous meeting had pointed to the plight of families in crisis situations in Novi Vinodolski and the failure of the local authorities to provide housing for them. Families facing crises had received compensation enabling them to rent accommodation.

19. The working group for monitoring hate crimes was composed of representatives of academia, civil society organizations and other institutions responsible for combating hate crime. Since June 2021, the Serb National Council, the Jewish Community of Zagreb, the Roma Association in the Republic of Croatia (Kali Sara), Zagreb Pride and the Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights (in Osijek) had been members. Its mandate included coordinating the collection of hate crime data, monitoring and analysing the occurrence of hate crime, coordinating interdepartmental cooperation and developing recommendations to help combat hate crime. In 2022, the police had recorded 55 potential cases of hate crimes, 17 of which had led to prosecution and 7 to sentencing; at the same time there had been 25 cases of public incitement to violence and hatred, 7 of which had led to prosecution and sentencing. There had also been 111 misdemeanour cases related to hate crime, resulting in sentencing in 20 cases.

20. The reproductive health of Roma women was still characterized by relatively infrequent gynaecological examinations, frequent teenage pregnancies and a high rate of spontaneous abortions. Over the course of the previous year, nearly half of Roma women, and a large percentage of females in the age range between 16 and 29 years, had undergone regular gynaecological examinations. On average, Roma women gave birth four times, but the number was higher in deprived areas, and specifically in spatially segregated settlements. Of those Roma women who gave birth, 10 per cent experienced the death of a fetus, 5 per cent the death of a newborn and 6 per cent the death of an infant. The total rate of abortions

and legally induced terminations was between two and three times higher in the Roma population than in the population as a whole. The frequency of legally induced terminations increased with age, but the only predictive factor for those terminations was the number of times a woman had given birth. There were plans to begin a series of educational activities and workshops on reproductive health in 2025 targeting Roma women and young Roma men. Funding was already being provided to health workers to visit Roma settlements and give medical advice to residents.

21. **A representative of Croatia** said that, as at 31 December 2022, there had been 1,652 judges and 644 State attorneys in Croatia. Under the Constitution, if members of a national minority constituted at least one third of the population of an administrative area, their language and script were given equal status. As the size of the Serbian national minority in Vukovar had, according to the 2021 census, dropped below that threshold, use of the Serbian language and script was no longer mandatory there. The questions on ethnic affiliation in the 2021 census had been optional and worded to accommodate open-ended responses. If respondents had stated a regional, religious or other affiliation, or indeed opted not to answer at all, the interviewer had been obliged to record that information accordingly. The term “Istrian” referred to a regional affiliation, not an ethnicity.

22. **A representative of Croatia** said that the case of *Mile Novaković v. Croatia* related to events that had taken place in Vukovar immediately after the end of the armed conflict in Croatia in the 1990s. The situation was now quite different; there were now no similar cases.

23. The National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma 2013–2020 had enjoyed its greatest success in promoting the educational inclusion of Roma children. The National Plan for Roma Inclusion for the period from 2021 to 2027 recognized the problem of segregation of Roma children in primary schools, which was primarily due to the existence of segregated Roma settlements. Generally, all pupils in Croatia had the right to be enrolled in the primary school nearest their places of residence. An action plan for the period from 2023 to 2025, which was intended to provide equal access to quality and inclusive education for Roma children, included a measure to reduce the proportion of Roma children who attended compulsory preschool and primary school in classes where most or all of the pupils were from the Roma community. Funding would be allocated to provide transport to bring Roma children and students living in isolated and segregated settlements to integrated schools. Over the previous 10 years, the average dropout rate for Roma children had been 2.9 per cent at primary school and 15.3 per cent at secondary school. Data were not collected on the ethnic minority status of teachers. There were 24 Roma assistants who had been employed to support Roma pupils.

24. **A representative of Croatia** said that anti-discrimination measures had been included in a law regulating sporting events and that the same law made organizers and clubs responsible for maintaining order and authorized them to empty and close a stadium or arena if necessary. Clubs could also be subject to fines. Dinamo Zagreb had been subjected to penalties on a number of occasions. The regulations of the Croatian Football Federation also allowed heavy fines to be imposed on clubs in the event of disorder, including in cases related to discrimination.

25. A derisive photo of Canadian football player Milan Borjan posted on Facebook at the time of the 2022 World Cup had been intended as a reminder of the period immediately after the armed conflict in the 1990s, when a number of Serbian citizens and members of the Serbian minority had left Croatia on tractors. An investigation had been initiated into the postings, but much of the material had been uploaded indirectly. Because the investigation depended on the legal framework and legislation of the United States of America, where Facebook was based, it was difficult to obtain information about the identity of the owners of the offending images.

26. The Croatian authorities, in collaboration with the Greek police, had immediately begun an investigation into recent events in Athens involving football hooligans affiliated with Dinamo Zagreb. The authorities were aware of hooliganism in sport but they needed to comply with the legal frameworks and procedures for addressing the problem.

27. **A representative of Croatia** said that the waiting time required for the processing of appeals against decisions on the provision of secondary legal aid had been shortened, as

vacancies had been filled in the department of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration responsible for handling such appeals.

28. The total funding set aside for the provision of free legal aid in 2023 amounted to more than €1 million and had increased quite substantially – sometimes more than doubling – between 2022 and 2023, especially for primary legal aid and for the remuneration of experienced legal aid providers. In 2023, priority funding would be granted to providers who worked directly with certain social groups, such as members of national minorities, members of the Roma community, unemployed returnees, displaced persons, victims of trafficking in persons, victims of discrimination and persons seeking international protection. Financing would also be prioritized for legal aid providers who offered their services not only at their headquarters and branch offices but also in earthquake-stricken areas, rural or isolated districts and less developed communities. In order to give primary aid providers greater stability and help them improve their capacities and availability, three-year project financing arrangements had been introduced for the period from 2023 to 2025. Changes were also due to enter into force in September 2023 for the funding of secondary legal aid, for example increasing payments for lawyers and interpreters by 60 per cent. Information about free legal aid was available on the website of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. The website listed providers, set out the eligibility criteria for potential beneficiaries and indicated email addresses where citizens could send enquiries. In addition, authorized providers could publish information about free legal aid on their own websites. There were also plans to make information leaflets available by the end of 2023 in institutions such as social welfare centres.

29. The administrative bodies of the counties and the city of Zagreb were authorized to provide primary legal aid in the form of general legal information, legal advice and submissions in proceedings before administrative bodies.

30. The points-based system used to calculate the fees paid to providers of free legal aid had been amended in the light of the complex legal situations of some beneficiaries. The changes would boost the proportion of such aid that was provided in the form of free legal advice, which currently stood at less than 3 per cent. That would hopefully help better inform individuals about the possibility of exercising and protecting their rights in court, thus lowering the number of unnecessary proceedings.

31. Between 2019 and 2022, funding had been provided to a project run by the Serb National Council aimed at providing free legal aid to members of the Serbian national minority and other persons in need in the counties of Šibenik-Knin and Zadar. The project addressed subjects such as the reconstruction of houses damaged during the armed conflict, the provision of housing and the convalidation of work experience, as well as the procedure for regulating the status of returnees.

32. Eight members of national minority groups had been elected to the Croatian Parliament, and members of national minorities were also serving in representative and executive bodies at the local and regional levels. In 2022, national minorities had accounted for about 3 per cent of State employees and employees of local and regional administrative bodies. Serbs were the most strongly represented national minority among civil servants, followed by Italians, Bosnians, Hungarians and Czechs. The levels of representation of national minorities might in reality be higher, since some local and regional administrations did not keep records on the nationalities of their employees.

33. A new centralized digital platform for employment in public administration bodies was under development and scheduled to be implemented in 2024. One of the aims of the new platform was to help change negative public attitudes towards the preferential employment of national minorities. Under the Constitution, members of national minorities were entitled to claim a right of priority in public employment, based on their national minority status. However, since relatively few people had invoked that constitutional right when applying for vacancies, measures were being taken to raise awareness of it. It was mandatory for public bodies to draw up a recruitment strategy detailing the number of positions already filled by members of national minorities and a plan for recruiting the necessary number to achieve representation in line with the constitutional provisions. Those plans were published on the website of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration and in the Official Gazette, and the Ministry monitored all announcements and advertisements of

public competitions for permanent employment to ensure that the right of priority in employment was duly mentioned.

34. **A representative of Croatia** said that a number of measures had been taken during the reporting period to combat structural discrimination against Roma people. In 2020, the Government had launched the “Start the Wheel of Knowledge” campaign to raise awareness among Roma parents and children of the value of education and to inform the public about the barriers preventing Roma children from succeeding in school. The campaign, which had been disseminated through print media, television, radio and the Internet, had made a considerable impact, and there were plans to relaunch the initiative in 2024.

35. Also in 2020, the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities had organized a series of public discussions on research into the inclusion of the Roma community in Croatia. The aim of the research had been to gather information about the experiences of Roma people on a variety of subjects, including discrimination, education, employment, health care, social welfare and spatial planning, housing and environmental protection. A total of 707 people had participated in the discussions, which had been primarily intended for civil servants involved in drafting new policy measures and activities benefiting the Roma community.

36. The Operational Programmes for National Minorities 2021–2024 had been adopted as part of the Government’s efforts to uphold the social, economic and cultural rights of national minorities. The first part of that document concerned the overall population group consisting of the 22 national minorities listed in the Constitution, while the second part included targeted actions designed to meet the needs of the respective national minorities. All the programmes had been devised in collaboration with the members of Parliament representing the national minorities in question. Between 2020 and 2022, the equivalent of almost €27 million had been allocated for the implementation of programmes and projects aimed at protecting and promoting the cultural, national, linguistic and religious identity of members of the Serbian national minority. Among other things, those funds had been used for the acquisition and maintenance of real estate for community centres, sport clubs and cultural facilities.

37. In addition to financing made available under the Operational Programmes for National Minorities, the Council for National Minorities was tasked with distributing funds from the State budget for cultural autonomy programmes. The equivalent of almost €6.5 million had been distributed to associations and institutions representing national minorities in 2022.

38. **A representative of Croatia** said that it was stipulated in the legislation governing the media that all content related to the exercise of the right to public information, the right of national minorities to be informed and the promotion of tolerance and cultural dialogue was considered to be of public interest. Programmes in the languages of national minorities were broadcast by Croatian Radio and Television addressing issues such as the rights of national minorities, political participation, employment, activism and education. The Fund for the Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media also supported media content promoting cultural diversity and special cultural projects. On a more general note, the Government was developing a network of fact-checkers tasked with verifying the accuracy of the information that appeared in the media in order to combat disinformation and discrimination.

39. **A representative of Croatia** said that important legislative reforms aimed at reducing social and economic disparities had included the adoption and subsequent amendment of the Act on Regional Development, which provided for the creation of the development index. Since 2017, all local and regional self-government units with a level of development below the national average had been classed as assisted areas. The development index was also used to help select the projects that received assistance under programmes funded by the European Union. Between 2015 and 2020, a total of €113 million had been provided from the European Regional Development Fund to support 3,133 projects in Croatia. Furthermore, the Programme of Integrated Physical, Economic and Social Regeneration of Small Towns in War-affected Areas alone had received over €100 million from the European structural and investment funds. The long-term budget of the European Union had earmarked even greater

investment in assisted areas and hilly and mountainous regions for the period from 2021 to 2027. As far as exclusively State-funded projects were concerned, since 2018 the equivalent of around €14.5 million had been invested in almost 500 infrastructure projects in areas traditionally inhabited by national minorities and a further €3.5 million had been allocated to those projects in the national budget for 2023.

40. **A representative of Croatia** said that specific measures to improve the electricity infrastructure in areas inhabited by national minorities had been taken under the Operational Programmes for National Minorities. As a result of those activities, many private houses and larger community facilities, including a Roma cultural centre, had been connected to electric grids. While 94 per cent of the population had access to the public supply of drinking water, the Government's aim was to eliminate altogether the need for private water sources. People living on islands and in rural and isolated areas, migrants and refugees were classed as vulnerable groups for the provision of water. In recent years, the equivalent of €2.2 million of public funds had been invested in improving the water supply in Roma settlements.

41. **A representative of Croatia** said that a mixture of State and European funding was being used to support infrastructure projects in the areas classified as being of special State concern. The equivalent of €3.9 million had been provided in grants over the previous eight years for projects designed to raise standards of living and improve the availability of goods and services in such areas. The objective was to contribute to more even development throughout the country's different regions. Nine projects had been implemented using funds received under the Regional Housing Programme, the aim of which was to provide sustainable housing solutions for vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons. Under the Programme, over 3,500 houses that had been damaged during the conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia had been repaired, in many cases through the donation of building materials.

42. The Act on Housing Care in Assisted Areas had been adopted in order to ensure that persons in areas of special State concern had access to housing solutions. Measures had been taken in cooperation with civil society organizations defending the rights of national minorities to inform beneficiaries of their rights and the opportunities available to them under the Act. Information was also provided about the status of returnees, which applied to former tenancy right holders and members of their families who had filed a request for housing care and who had returned to Croatia. The conditions for acquiring that status and the rights that derived from it, such as financial assistance and health care, were legally regulated. Legal regulations in the field of housing care were the subject of ongoing reforms. The most recent amendment of the Act on Housing Care in Assisted Areas had entered into force the previous month.

43. **A representative of Croatia** said that there had been shortcomings in the first investigations and prosecutions that had been initiated by the Croatian authorities in relation to war crimes allegedly committed during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. International standards had not been applied during those early investigations, and the authorities had shown a reluctance to prosecute members of the Croatian military and police. During the period under review, specific measures had therefore been taken to remedy those procedural shortcomings. The State Attorney's Office had established clear and objective standards for the prosecution of suspected perpetrators of war crimes, regardless of their nationality. The judiciary had subsequently carried out a comprehensive review of all existing cases concerning war crimes. In many cases, retrials had been ordered, including for cases processed in absentia. All the new cases had been tried with the application of objective criteria, without regard to the nationalities of victims and perpetrators.

44. As part of a number of measures taken to promote integrity and efficiency in bringing criminal proceedings for war crimes, the Government had established four specialized courts, presided over by eminent judges, with exclusive jurisdiction over war crime cases. As to war crime trial and conviction rates in Croatia, from 1993 to 2023 the judiciary had initiated criminal proceedings against more than 3,500 persons and convicted more than 700. By comparison, the ad hoc criminal tribunals established by the United Nations – the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, which had superseded the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since

1991 – had, over a similar period, initiated criminal proceedings against just 161 persons and convicted only 91. The criminal proceedings in Croatia had been initiated irrespective of ethnicity: of the 350 defendants convicted in 2017 and 2018, 46 per cent were Serbian, 41 per cent were Croatian and the remaining 13 per cent were of other ethnicities.

45. As more than 30 years had passed since the war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, witnesses' memories were fading or disappearing and time was increasingly of the essence to ensure accountability for war crimes. The Government had therefore made efforts to enhance bilateral cooperation for the prosecution of war crimes. Unfortunately, not all such efforts had been successful. The Government had still not received a response from the Government of Serbia regarding the establishment of a joint commission on the prosecution of war crimes.

46. **A representative of Croatia** said that the principles and goals of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action were reflected in national legislative reforms. The Anti-Discrimination Act, which had entered into force in 2009, provided a legislative framework for regulating issues of discrimination. The Government had adopted a new National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination for the period until 2027 and an action plan for combating discrimination specifically for 2023. An action plan to combat discrimination for the ensuing two-year period, in 2024 and 2025, was currently under development.

47. **A representative of Croatia** said that amendments to the Act on International and Temporary Protection, which had entered into effect in April 2023, had made improvements to the status of applicants for international protection, persons benefiting from asylum or subsidiary protection status and persons under temporary protection. Regarding migration and integration policy, the Ministry of the Interior was awaiting the results of an analysis conducted by the International Organization for Migration of the integration of third-country nationals in Croatian society. Those results would form the basis of possible amendments to the legislative framework for integration; inform coordination mechanisms to be established at the national and local levels; and support the design and development of a “one-stop shop” digital platform for monitoring and evaluating activities relating to the integration of third-country nationals. The analysis should be completed by June 2024.

48. A working group had been established in December 2022 to develop a document on immigration policy. It was focusing on measures to facilitate third-country nationals' access to information and to support Croatian language acquisition.

49. **Ms. Tlakula** said that the delegation was yet to answer several of the Committee's questions concerning racist hate speech, incitement to racial hatred and racist hate crimes. She would be particularly grateful to hear about measures taken by the State party to ensure that its national legislation dealt adequately with the relatively new phenomenon of online racist hate speech. The issue was challenging, as perpetrators of such acts were often unidentifiable. In that respect, the State party might consider the option of holding digital platforms accountable for the content they published.

50. **Mr. Balcerzak** asked whether persons choosing to declare their ethnicity in the national census could declare more than one ethnicity.

51. **A representative of Croatia** said that a person could declare only one ethnicity in the census.

52. **Mr. Diaby** said that he would be grateful if the delegation would provide detailed information about how the State party had dealt with complaints of the violation of the rights of human rights defenders who had assisted persons belonging to minority groups.

53. **A representative of Croatia** said that the country's national legislative and regulatory framework for the integration of third-country nationals had been evaluated, and it had been found that the experiences and recommendations of third-country nationals had not been sufficiently considered in the drafting of the framework. As a result, the Government had established an advisory group for third-country nationals, which had been consulted as part of efforts to draft an updated national framework. The implementation of integration policy at the local level was now supported by integration coordinators. To further integration efforts at the local level, plans were in place to establish dedicated local government units and

programmes. The evaluation had also shown that persons granted international protection were often unable to enjoy their rights, owing to language barriers. Under the updated framework, there were plans to establish a centralized system for coordinating and financing a translation and interpretation network for the languages most commonly spoken by persons granted international protection in the country.

54. **A representative of Croatia** said that the delegation would provide replies to the questions that had not been addressed during the dialogue by submitting the answers in writing.

55. **Ms. Tlakula** said that she wished to thank the delegation for its openness about the State party's efforts to implement the Convention and the challenges it faced. She looked forward to receiving its written responses to the Committee members' questions.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.