

13 February 2006

# Screening report

# Croatia

## Chapter 26 – Education and Culture

**Date of screening meetings:**

Explanatory meeting: 26 October 2005

Bilateral meeting: 17 November 2005

## **I. CHAPTER CONTENT**

The areas of education and training, youth and culture are primarily the competence of the Member States. The EC Treaty provides that the Community shall encourage cooperation between Member States and support and supplement their actions, while fully respecting their responsibility for the content of teaching, organisation of education and vocational training systems, and their national and regional cultural diversity.

In the field of education, training and youth, the *acquis* consists beside a directive on education of the children of migrant workers and the judgments of the European Court of Justice on cases related to non-discrimination between nationals of an EU Member State and other EU nationals, mainly in a cooperation framework. In the light of the Lisbon Strategy, an open method of coordination on education, training and youth policies has been established with a view to convergence of national policies and the attainment of shared objectives. The concrete future objectives of education and training systems endorsed in 2001, as well as the Copenhagen process for vocational training and the Bologna process for higher education, are providing directions for the improvement and development of the quality of education and training systems. This resulted in the work programme 'Education and Training 2010', which integrates all actions in the fields of education and training at European level. Common objectives have also been agreed for the EU youth policies. In addition, Member States need to have the legal, administrative and financial framework as well as the necessary implementing capacity in place to ensure sound management including financial management of all decentralised education, training and youth Community programmes (currently Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates and Youth and in future Integrated Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes).

As regards cultural policy, Member States need to uphold the principles enshrined in Article 151 of the EC Treaty and, in particular, ensure that their international commitments allow for the development and implementation of policies and instruments aiming at preserving and promoting cultural diversity. In accordance with these principles, the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, once ratified, will become a major element of the Community *acquis* in the field of culture.

## **II. COUNTRY ALIGNMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY**

This part summarises the information provided by Croatia and the discussion at the screening meeting.

Croatia indicated that it can accept the *acquis* regarding Education and Culture. Croatia indicated that it does not expect any difficulties to implement the *acquis* by accession.

### **II.a. Education, training and youth**

#### Cooperation in the field of policies

The main aims and principles of Croatia's national educational system are laid down in several strategic documents (in particular the Education Sector Development Plan 2005-2010), which are the result of regular discussions between various political, consulting and academic bodies as well as universities, NGOs and other institutes and organisations. The goal of these strategies is to contribute to the creation of a knowledge-based society and economy in order to raise Croatia's competitiveness and to improve opportunities for everyone.

Croatia stated that it carefully follows trends set forth by the EU, observes best practices in Member States and strives to incorporate them in its own practices. It is willing to achieve the common goals agreed by the EU for the future of the education and training systems as part of the broader Lisbon strategy. It takes part in the Education and Training 2010 process and has submitted a report in 2005 on its progress and national strategies towards the common goals.

Croatia's four level formal educational system (including 8 years of compulsory primary education) is currently undergoing changes with the aim of implementing EU policies as particularly the Lisbon Strategy; thus, focus lies especially on new educational standards and curricula, on an enhancement of quality assurance (systematic evaluation of the implementation of policy measures has not yet been established in the whole educational system) and on a definition and establishment of indicators and benchmarks (system of gathering statistical and qualitative indicators is still underdeveloped). Croatia intends raising public educational expenditure as a share of GDP from 4.4% in 2004 to 4.9% (approximately the current share in the EU) in 2010. In parallel with these changes, the state administration is in a process of decentralisation.

The legal framework for the reform of Croatia's tertiary educational system (in particular its 6 public universities and 5 public 'polytechnics') aimed at implementing the principles of the Bologna Declaration which Croatia joined in 2001, is provided for by the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education. Croatia is now addressing tasks such as implementation of the third study cycle, preparation of a new financing model, strengthening the administrative capacity of institutions like the Institute of Education and the Agency for Science and Higher Education, development of a quality assurance system and improvement to synergies between higher education and research.

Croatia has recently adopted two strategic documents (Strategy for Adult Education and Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy of Adult Learning in 2005), with a view to reducing the current fragmentation of the lifelong learning system. Nevertheless, it still faces several tasks, such as the need to adopt the relevant legislation on lifelong learning in order to implement the right to education of adults. Current percentage of the population between 25 and 64 participating in education and training is 2.3%, whereas the EU average is 9.9%.

The reform of the vocational and educational training is one of Croatia's political priorities following the priorities defined in the Copenhagen declaration. The institution in charge is the Agency for Vocational Education, which has also a coordination role with other stakeholders in the Croatian administration.

Croatia has not yet been invited to take part in the open method of coordination in the field of youth and to submit a national report on its youth policy. However, it adopted a strategic document, the National Action Plan for Young People, which is based on the Commission's White Paper on Youth. Its policy includes promoting the participation of youth in the community, encouragement to youth employment and entrepreneurship, strengthening civil society and voluntary work, increasing mobility, informing and counselling.

Youth Councils have been established at local level and it is planned to establish a Youth Council as a coordinating body at national level. Work is on-going on the establishment of Youth Parliaments at local level and of Youth Commissioners in the ministries to ensure communication and coordination with the national Youth Council. Two annual national conferences have been held on Youth Voluntary Service and Croatia now envisages to adopt

a Volunteering Act and to organise info-centres and multifunctional centres at a regional as well as at a local level for better informing and coordinating youth policies.

#### Access to education for EU citizens

There is no specific legislation in Croatia concerning the education of children of migrant workers and current Croatian legislation does not foresee any specific provisions for these children. The Act on Primary Education regulates the obligation of schools to organize additional classes to help pupils with learning difficulties, but there is no obligation to educate teachers to work with children of foreign citizens. Concerning measures to help pupils learn their language and culture of origin, there are some schools which have classes in foreign languages, but tuition fees must be paid to attend such schools.

Education in primary schools is free of charge for all children and there is no discrimination according to citizenship. The Act on Secondary Education specifies a list of alternative criteria which allow a secondary school to enrol a foreign citizen. Although being a child of an individual holding a Croatian work and residence permit is one of these accepted criteria, being a EU citizen is not a criterion as such. Prior approval of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports for enrolment is required. The Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education stipulates that there should be no discrimination in the procedure for selecting candidates and foreign citizens shall enrol under the same conditions as Croatian. However, foreign students may be asked, following a decision of the competent state authority or the higher education institution, to pay a portion or the full amount of their tuition fees.

#### Community programmes

Croatia will not take part in the internal Community programmes Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci, which will expire at the end of 2006, but it benefits from the TEMPUS programme (especially aimed at supporting the development of the Croatian education reform) and participates as a third country in three out of five actions of the Youth Community Programme. Croatia intends to fully participate before its accession in the planned Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme (ILLP) and in the ditto planned Youth in Action Programme, which will succeed to Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth.

Discussions and consulting meetings on the structure of the future National Agency or National Agencies, then responsible for the implementation of the Community programmes, are currently carried out. So far, no decision has been made, whether there will be a common National Agency for both programmes, or one National Agency for ILLP and one for Youth in Action.

No decision has also yet been taken concerning Croatia's possible full participation in the Erasmus Mundus Programme before accession. Croatian universities have currently the status of 'third country' universities, i.e. they cannot at this moment be equal partners of a consortium. However, Croatia took some measures to facilitate a possible participation, such as launching a programme to eliminate obstacles to the development of joint studies, making a number of adjustments in its Scientific Activity and Higher Education Act and its Act on the Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications and introducing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and a diploma supplement.

### **II.b. Culture**

Croatia's current cultural policies are characterised by the following elements: tendency of further institutional decentralisation, support of private initiatives (e.g. private theatres, museums, galleries or restoration workshops), further reform of existing legislation,

especially of the laws and policies identified as crucial for the protection and promotion of cultural and media diversity (e.g. book policy, including the introduction of a fixed book price scheme). The main responsibility for developing and implementing cultural policies lies at the Ministry of Culture, which is provided with advice from several Cultural Councils.

European integration, international cultural cooperation and particularly support for mobility of artists and cultural professionals, are among the priorities of the current government. Priorities also include: greater investment in infrastructure and ensuring access to cultural programmes and activities. Croatia pays attention to cultural diversity by supporting programmes and continuously promoting policies for the protection and advancement of cultural diversity. The government is funding cultural activities for all 16 organised, officially recognised minorities.

Croatia has participated in the preparation of the draft of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (adopted on 20 October 2005) and supported the EU common position. It shall initiate the procedure of ratification as soon as the required technical activities are completed, most probably at the beginning of 2006. Consultations about future implementation of this Convention are envisaged for the beginning of 2006. Croatia is interested in the continuation of coordination of positions and policies with those of the European Commission and the EU Member States, both within UNESCO and other international fora. In addition, the Ministry of Culture is aware of the significance of other policies having a direct impact on cultural diversity, such as the market competition policy, intellectual property, tax and trade policy, and co-operates with other ministries so as to ensure that the adoption of new policies in these fields does not cause negative effects on cultural diversity.

Croatia plans to fully participate in the Culture programme as of 2007. It has already established a pre-cultural contact point (pre-CCP) at the Ministry of Culture. Its main role consists in promoting the programme, informing the public about the programme, assisting cultural operators in establishing partnerships and organising seminars on cultural issues.

Although Croatia is currently not participating in the Active European citizenship programme and has not yet taken a decision concerning its possible full participation before accession, it tries to promote active European citizenship through a number of activities, including on the regional and local levels.

### **III. ASSESSMENT OF THE DEGREE OF ALIGNMENT AND IMPLEMENTING CAPACITY**

Overall, Croatia has a good level of preparation for implementing the *acquis*. In order to make best use of the pre-accession period in terms of preparing for the full application of the *acquis* under this Chapter, Croatia will need to establish the relevant structures for the management of the future integrated lifelong learning programme and Youth in action programme as well as for the monitoring and control of their implementation and to build up their capacity. Croatia must take measures to guarantee that the principle of non-discrimination between EU and Croatian nationals is implemented by the date of accession. Furthermore, Croatia needs to ratify the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

#### **III.a. Education, training and youth**

##### Cooperation in the field of policies

Croatia is willing to participate in the EU cooperation framework, including the open method of coordination and to work towards the fulfilment of common objectives by exchanging good practices and present reports on its policies. Croatia is committed to strengthen cooperation with the European Commission and EU Member States in this regard, in order to ensure that relevant EU policies and objectives continue to be integrated in its policy priorities. Croatia already takes part in the Education and Training 2010 process.

No particular difficulties are expected as far as Croatia's full participation in EU education and training policy is concerned by the time of accession. Croatia is willing to achieve the ambitious set of goals and objectives agreed upon by the EU as part of the broader Lisbon Agenda envisaging to make Europe the most competitive knowledge based economy by 2010. Nevertheless, it should develop its work on the common indicators and benchmarks.

Within the last few years, Croatia has been undertaking major changes to its whole educational system, with a considerable level of stakeholder consultation. But in some levels of the educational system, further endeavours and reforms are necessary to meet Croatia's primary objective to raise the quality of education, such as in the tertiary educational sector and in adult education (e.g. to raise the level of participation in lifelong learning). Education should remain a strategic priority for the development of Croatia.

Despite some ongoing challenges, such as the need to improve coordination and communication between youth organisations, Croatia's youth policy is already largely in line with the common objectives established at EU level following the Commission's White Paper. Croatia is ready to participate in the open method of cooperation in the youth field when it is invited to do so.

#### Access to education for EU citizens

Croatia has not yet started to implement the directive on the education of children of migrant workers and also has no specific relevant national provisions in place. However, there are no legal provisions in Croatia which would forbid the provision of such kind of education.

In primary education, the non-discrimination principle is fully implemented. In secondary education, although being a child of an individual holding a Croatian work and residence permit is one of the accepted criteria for a foreign pupil to be enrolled, being a EU citizen is not a criterion as such. Restrictions for EU citizens for access to secondary education will have to be removed. In higher education, the potential discrimination of EU citizens and Croatian citizens regarding tuition fees will also have to be removed. A timetable for alignment should be presented.

Related issues such as residents' permits for foreign students will be treated under Chapter 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights).

#### Community programmes

As regards the planned Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme and the Youth in Action Programme (the successor programmes to Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth), Croatia needs to take a decision concerning the future National Agency or National Agencies and to establish the legal, institutional and administrative framework in which the National Agency will be operating and will be monitored and controlled. Croatia also needs to train the staff of the National Agency and build up its administrative capacity to fulfil its tasks related to the management of the programmes' decentralised activities satisfactorily, including the organisation of the project selection, contracting, payments to beneficiaries, project

monitoring and reporting to the Commission. These preparations will be monitored by the Commission.

No difficulties are expected concerning the Erasmus Mundus programme, which is centrally managed and for which there are no requirements to establish structures such as a National Agency and a National Authority.

### **III.b. Culture**

Croatia is committed towards the objectives set up by the Treaty and is willing to promote culture and the development of cultural policies in accordance with the provisions of Article 151. It is also committed to participate in the EU policy cooperation framework in the field of culture, including the creation of instruments aiming at preserving and promoting cultural diversity, and to strengthen cooperation with the Commission and EU Member States in order to ensure that relevant EU policies and objectives are integrated in the Croatian cultural policy priorities in the best possible way.

Following its signature of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Croatia must now present its plans for ratification, which will be monitored by the Commission.

No difficulties are expected concerning Croatia's participation in the Culture 2000, Culture 2007 or citizenship programmes, as these programmes are centrally managed and no requirements to establish structures such as a National Agency and a National Authority exist. Croatia intends to fully participate in the future 2007 Culture programme from the beginning, and has already taken measures to promote the programme.