*Madam President, Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*\*\* Following our Minister’s introductory speech, let me start with relevant information on COVID-19*

*(COVID-19)*

I will inform you about measures concerning digital society and right to information:

* on March 17, the Government established a central **website *koranavirus.hr,*** containing daily updated data;
* at the same time, new social media channels on **Facebook, Twitter and Instagram** were launched in order to provide platform for a two-way communication with the citizens, coordinated by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Interior;
* in April **digital assistant “Andrija**” was launched as a voluntary and anonymous application that, as a first line of defence, advises people how to diagnose suspected COVID-19 infection; it helps to the healthcare system by processing tens of thousands of requests on a daily basis; in July the Government launched **“Stop COVID-19” Application**, available for Android and Apple devices, which uses new data processing, aiming to enhance health protection and citizen awareness of an increased risk of infection. Its installation is voluntary. This tool notifies the user that his/her Application has been in contact with the Application of the person confirmed to be COVID-19 positive. I must say, that the Application is fully compliant with the relevant EU regulation related to the full protection of the right to privacy.

*\*\* Now, I would like to continue with regular human rights issues- thus, firstly on issues related to judicial reform…*

*(judicial reform)*

Croatia has made significant progress related to protection of human rights. In recent years **judicial reform** has aimed to increase the efficiency of the judiciary, strengthen accountability, transparency, independence, and professionalism in the judiciary. The criteria and procedures for appointing and promoting judicial officials, the President of the Supreme Court and the Chief State Attorney of the Republic of Croatia have been improved. Also, amendments to the laws have increased the efficiency in the work of the State Judicial Council and the State Attorney's Council, redefined training in judicial bodies, strengthened the role of the State School for Judicial Officials and changed the evaluation criteria for judicial officials.

The Judicial Academy organises **training for judicial officials** in various areas of protection of human rights, often in cooperation with ombudsperson and associations active in human rights protection. Such cooperation enables identification of topics related to human rights of certain vulnerable groups, such as children, and members of minorities and related to the human rights of women in different aspects.

The procedure for obtaining primary **free legal aid** is now maximally simplified. It can be provided in any legal matter. In relation to the secondary legal aid, the property criteria for exercising the rights have been relaxed, which expanded the circle of beneficiaries. Funds for financing the free legal system, especially funds for exercising the right to primary legal aid, have been gradually increasing since 2016.

As it has been said, **overcrowding in prisons** is no longer an issue and constant efforts to increase accommodation capacity and improve conditions are in place. Special attention is paid to the prevention of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, primarily through the education of the prison staff.

Persons deprived of their liberty are provided with all rights from the **compulsory health insurance** through the acquisition of the insurance status. Since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, measures and activities have been undertaken with the purpose of protecting the health of all persons deprived of their liberty and prison staff, and all newly admitted prisoners are accommodated in separate rooms for at least 14 days.

In relation to the improvements in the **criminal law**, the individual assessment of the victim was introduced with aim to determine whether there is a risk of secondary and repeated victimization, as well as intimidation and retaliation. The catalogues of rights of different categories of victims were expanded.

*\*\* I will continue with the issue of domestic violence……*

*(Domestic Violence)*

The Criminal Code introduced the criminal offense of **domestic violence** – as an independent criminal offense that includes more serious forms of violence in the family. It ensures more comprehensive protection for victims. Additionally, the penalties for the criminal offenses of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, domestic violence and rape were tightened and the concept of criminal offense of rape has been changed.

The new ***Act on Protection against Domestic Violence*** raised legal standards of victim protection, strengthening its procedural position and preventing secondary victimization. The later amendments determined clearer criteria for distinguishing offenses from this Act and criminal offenses against physical integrity committed against a close person.

Continuous **training of police** officers, who deal with cases of domestic violence as a matter of priority, has been conducted in practice in order to further raise their level of professionalism.

Through various programmes and media **campaigns**, citizens have been encouraged to report to the police any knowledge they might have of domestic violence. The online application *Red Button* was set up on the public website of the Ministry of the Interior for reporting on illegal internet content related to children. Additionally, with the aim to provide comprehensive support to victims the *National Call Centre for Victims of Criminal and Misdemeanour Offences* was also established. *Behind the Door Campaign* was launched during the first months of pandemic aimed at increasing social response and recognising violence against children, including in a digital environment. European Commission highlighted it as an example of good practice.

*\*\* I will now take the opportunity to present to you the situation on national minorities which for the Republic of Croatia and its citizens represent an asset…..*

*(national minorities)*

The position of **persons belonging to national minorities** has been continuously improving through the implementation of international documents, the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and other regulations, such as *the Operational Programs for National Minorities (2017-2020).*

As a clear sign of the Government’s commitment to the advancement of national minorities position a new ***Operational Program for National Minorities (2020-2024)*** is in the final phase, however this time as an integral part of the Program of the Government of the Republic of Croatia in current mandate.

Through the Government’s Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities in the past five years, **significant resources** were allocated to umbrella associations of national minorities - in the amount of approx. **20 million €,** with a tendency of constant increase (+385% from 2016 to 2019). It has continuously supported the work and projects of national minority associations and strengthened the capacity of minority councils and representatives at the local level. At the same time, funds for targeted measures, provided by the implementation of the Constitutional Act, have also been increased - in the amount of approx. **25 million €** (+143% from 2016 to 2019).

It is important to emphasise that Croatia guarantees **national minorities members the right to representation:**

* Members of national minorities are entitled to **eight Members of Parliament,** who are elected in a special electoral constituency comprising the entire territory of the Republic of Croatia.

* The right of national minorities to representation in the representative and executive bodies of local and regional self-government units is guaranteed in **local elections** - in units which have the legally prescribed minimum share of national minority members in the overall population and in other units which have included that right in their statutes.
* On the local level, and in accordance with the *Act on the Election of National Minority Councils and Representatives (from 2019) that regulates* the elections in a comprehensive mannerthe **councils and representatives** are elected directly by secret ballot for a term of four years and regulates the elections in a comprehensive manner.

Regarding equality in the **use of the languages and scripts of national minorities,** Croatia publishes annual reports on the implementation of the *Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia* and continuously monitors equality in this area. To improve the data collection procedure, an e-System for monitoring its implementation was developed in 2016-2017 under the IPA project *“Support to efficient implementation of the Constitutional Act”.*

A special methodology to collect data about the exercise of the **right of priority in employment** of minority members, has been developed for both - state civil service and administrative bodies of local self-government units and was applied in 2019.

It should be pointed out that the ***Civic Education* program,** which is taught in elementary and high schools,contains teaching on national minorities.

*(Roma)*

Particular attention has been given to **Roma issues** and implementation of the *National Roma Integration Strategy 2013-2020.* Available funds has significantly increased too, and we may note important activities in the areas of education, housing, access to essential services, employment as well as inclusion into social life.

Furthermore, internationally recognized Croatian best practice project of collecting **baseline data** (from 2018), provided more than 350 variables for the monitoring of the implementation of the current Roma Strategy and sectoral analysis with recommendations for the development of the new Roma Integration Policy (2021-2027).

The social, economic and cultural factors in the lives of the Roma require respect for their uniqueness as well as adequate adjustment for **equalizing their opportunities** in order for each person to reach its full educational potential.

In the last two years the Government program provided **household** appliances to more than 1,600 Roma households, benefitting more than 30 % of Roma population. The program will continue in 2021-2024 with emphasis on providing housing to those in need. Finances allocated for the program have been increased.

*Madam President,*

*\*\* I will now add some information on LGBTI issue…*

*(LGBTI)*

The *Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Anti-Discrimination Plan (2017–2019)* sets out a number of activities aimed at preventing and combating discrimination, including those aimed at combating **discrimination against LGBTI persons.** Following the existing *Anti-discrimination Act*, Croatia will take additional efforts to further mainstream the LGBTI issues in different areas of intervention.

With regard to criminal provisions concerning hate crime and hate speech, particular attention is given to the protection of LGBTI persons, by organising **seminars** for judges, lawyers, state attorneys, police officers and representatives of CSOs.

In line with the national legislation, the Ministry of Science and Education have instructed all primary and secondary schools, as well as higher education institutions on procedure for issuing updated certifications and diplomas for **transgender persons**, on demand. As of 2018, it is common practice in educational system and applicants are obtaining updated documents in regular procedure.

Regarding the concerns that the police does not provide the proper legal qualifications of the incidents against LGBTIwe would like to remind all that if a certain punishable **incident against LGBTI persons** contains elements of a misdemeanour offence, it cannot be qualified by the police as a criminal offence and *vice versa* – due to legislation that clearly distinguishes the elements of a criminal and a misdemeanour offence. Otherwise, the State Attorney’s Office and competent courts, would reject criminal charges or indictment by stating that the incident was not properly qualified.

*\*\* Furthermore, couple of words on trafficking in human beings….*

*(THB)*

Croatia had ratified international instruments relevant for combating  **trafficking in human beings**, transposed EU legislation and established comprehensive system of coordination.

The National **Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinator** coordinates all activities connected with combating of trafficking in human beings and chairs the Operational team of the National Committee on regular basis. **National Referral System** includes activities from the moment of identification of the victim of trafficking to its full integration/reintegration in the society.

*\*\* Let me also inform you on the hate crime issue…*

*(hate crime)*

In relation to **hate crime,** we have adopted firm anti-discrimination legislative and policy framework, stretching from constitutional provisions to strategic documents. The provisions aimed at combating discrimination are integrated horizontally in all other important pieces of legislation.

**The Criminal Code** closely follows the EU approach in regards to defining hate crime. Criminal offense of public incitement to violence and hatred is also prescribed. Since legislative and policy framework does not always guarantee efficiency, cross-sectoral **training** for relevant stakeholders is recognized as a model for successful integration of policy recommendations into practice.

**New protocol for data collection** **on hate crime** is prepared and it will govern procedures for more nuanced classification of data, including separate classification of hate crime and criminal offense of public incitement to violence and hatred, as well as disaggregation of data based on bias motivation.

**Condemnation of hate speech in public space** and social networks and strengthening prevention activities (through public campaigns, media literacy) is clearly emphasized in the Government’s programme for 2020-2024.

*\*\* Allow me to add some facts about Holocaust and Anti-Semitism*

*(Holocaust)*

Learning about the **Holocaust** is an integral part of the Croatian school curriculum, and is being constantly upgraded. It is taught in its historical context in primary schools (in 8th grade) and in gymnasiums. Since 2005, over 750 teachers have attended national and international education programs on that topic in order to maintain the quality of teaching.

Also, the UNESCO Handbook „*Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education“* as well as the Yad Vashem's ready to print exhibition *How was it humanly possible?* were translated into Croatian language.

From the last school year, we have reserved funds in the State Budget for organization of educational school trips to *Jasenovac Memorial Site* and many schools in Croatia participated in this programme. Furthermore, issues of Holocaust and Roma genocide are embedded in the university education for history teachers. Also, the initiation of Judaic studies at the Faculty of Humanities in Zagreb is an important step further.

*\*\* On fight against corruption – allow me a couple of words…*

*(corruption)*

**Fight against corruption** is one of our priorities.

The adoption of the ***Act on the Protection of Reporters of Irregularities,*** in 2019, created a system of effective reporting and adequate protection of the integrity of whistle-blowers and strengthened the network of anti-corruption institutions.

In accordance with this Act, the Ombudsperson has been assigned as the competent **external body** to examine reports of irregularities.

Also, allow me to mention the work of the ***Commissioner for Information* and the *Commission for Conflict of Interest****,* both as examples of good practices.

*\*\* Finally, I would like to present our efforts in prosecuting war crimes…*

*(war crimes)*

Croatia continues with thorough investigation and prosecution of **war crimes** and concrete measures have been taken to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of criminal proceedings and to strengthen the evidentiary process. One of the measures is the establishment of 4 courts specialized for war crimes cases.

Considering that in war crimes proceedings defendants, witnesses and evidence in general are mostly located in the region, agreements have been initiated on the **direct exchange of evidence** and assistance between neighbouring countries to collect data faster and better, in order to prosecute perpetrators.

**As it has been said earlier - 648 persons have been convicted of war crimes.** War crimes are prosecuted based on clear and objective criteria and international standards, regardless of the ethnicity of the perpetrator or the victim and including members of Croatian military and police.

**Thank you for your attention.**