



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NATIONAL REPORT – REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

1. Introduction

A strategic goal of Croatia is to evolve into a knowledge based society, to create a basis for the prosperity of Croatian people and to bring its economic development as close as possible to the standards of the developed countries of the world.

The present state of higher education in Croatia partly facilitates but partly also impedes these processes. Croatian higher education is characterized by the following paradox:

On the one hand, the newly established state with barely 4.5 million inhabitants is in the process of setting up its sixth university, at the moment there are also 13 'polytechnics' in Croatia (which correspond to German *Fachhochschule*) and 6 private schools of professional higher education. Out of about 4,000 university professors, some 15 percent are internationally recognized, and about 5 percent regularly contribute to internationally renowned professional publications and take an active part in international research projects.

On the other hand, Croatia is at the lower end of European qualifications scale, with only 13 percent of working population with a higher education degree. To make things worse, the period spent studying is unjustifiably long resulting in a costly and inefficient studying process.

In order to realize its strategic goal Croatia has taken it upon itself to promote education intensively, with an emphasis on higher education: (a) The acceptance of European standards in the area of scientific research and higher education has initiated significant changes within Croatian science and higher education, the aim of which is to raise a level of efficiency in these areas and thus facilitate Croatian integration into ERA – European Research Area and EHEA – European Higher Education Area; (b) An increase in the number of students will alter the percentage of university and college educated citizens and thus provide Croatia with human resources necessary for its development; (c) The planned changes will be made feasible by financially strengthened science and higher education. For this purpose, following the Government's decision of the 28th November 2002, in the next eight years the budgetary investment into these areas should increase by at least 10 percent annually, as compared to each preceding year.

2. The present situation

Facts

Today Croatia has five universities: the University of Osijek, Rijeka, Split, Zadar and Zagreb, and the sixth, the University of Dubrovnik is going to start working soon.

The University of Zagreb is the oldest and the largest. It has 60,000 students, about 3,500 teachers and teaching assistants as well as 2,000 administrative staff. It consists of more than 30

faculties, 3 art academies and one university study programme. The University of Zadar is the most recently established and the smallest.

The five universities include 59 faculties (30 in Zagreb, 10 in Rijeka, 9 in Split, 9 in Osijek, a departmental organization in Zadar), 4 academies of arts (3 in Zagreb, 1 in Split), 3 university departments at traditional universities (1 in Osijek, 2 in Split), one university study programme (Zagreb), and one professional school within the university.

Vocational studies are carried out by 7 'polytechnics', including 25 departments, 6 independent higher schools of vocational training, 1 teacher training college and 8 teachers' schools of professional higher education, as well as 11 private higher schools of vocational training.

Altogether, Croatian higher education system has a total of 88 public higher education institutions.

The annual enrolment is about 35,000 students, which makes more than a half of all high school graduates. There are actually about 140,000 students: approximately 105,000 at the university, 23,000 at 'polytechnics' and 12,000 at private and public higher schools.

Problems

In Croatia, the period spent studying is too long, and only a small percentage of those who have enrolled at a higher education institution actually finish it. This makes studying not only too expensive but also inefficient.

In Croatia the university is a voluntary association of faculties, which retain the right to make their own decisions on key issues regarding their activity and their finances. Therefore, the autonomy of the university guaranteed by Croatian Constitution turns into the 'autonomy of faculties', which results in fragmented studying and research programmes, and makes it impossible to establish the university as an integral organization of any kind.

The present model of financing education with barely 4 percent of GDP is not sufficient either for the support of the existing system or for its expansion. An increase in science and higher education allocations will be utilized for investments in the infrastructure and in the equipment needed for scientific research and didactic purposes. A special attention will be paid to ICT (information and communication technology).

Due to financial difficulties, or to be more precise, due to years-long administrative freeze on hiring new staff the average age of teachers has risen significantly. Almost 2,300 junior researchers and postgraduate scholarship holders represent a renewed basis of personnel, from which the science and higher education system will hire the best.

3. The application of the new Act

The characteristics of the Act

The Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education, adopted in mid-July, introduces into Croatia a legal obligation to observe the European standards for science and higher education. The application of this Act introduces the Bologna Process as a method of organizing studies.

In view of the fact that science and higher education are almost inextricably intertwined, a single law was enacted for both 'areas'.

However, for the sake of operational efficiency the system is managed by two national bodies, one responsible for science and the other responsible for higher education, which are both under an obligation to meet at least once a year in order to make decisions, i.e. put forward recommendations of strategic importance.

The National Council for Higher Education is a professional and advisory body responsible for the development and quality of the overall system of higher education, which together with the National Science Council submits to the Government of the Republic of Croatia recommendations on the allocation of budgetary funds.

Our legal system observes and regulates the freedom of scientific research and the autonomy of the university. The financial aspect of this autonomy will be carried out through financing the programmes in the form of a lump sum budget of the university.

The law stipulates organizational integration of the university through functional integration, in 3 aspects: (a) studying programmes become university programmes; (b) all components function financially and legally through the university; and (c) the University Senate may put a suspensive veto on the decisions of Faculty Councils when they are contrary to the interests of the university. A full legal integration (by which the faculties will lose their legal identity) should be introduced by the end of 2007.

Application

The new Act will become effective this autumn. Based on its provisions new national bodies for science and higher education will be formed, which will propose to the Government and to the Parliament a medium-term plan of the development of the network of higher education institutions.

A major part of public scientific institutes, of which there are twenty seven in Croatia, is to be reintegrated into universities. Thus the institutes will become a part of their 'natural environment' and their projects will be interlinked within a broader framework, while at the same time the universities will gain new teaching staff and researchers and acquire new premises and equipment.

4. The planned changes and the application of European standards

4.1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees [also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement]

The new Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education provides prerequisites for organizing the services for monitoring and recognition of individual teaching courses and final qualifications acquired abroad.

The Croatian Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications is now in its final stage of enactment. It is expected to become effective in September or, at the latest, in October this year.

In the spirit of this law preparations have been made for the ENIC/NARIC office to start working this autumn. Apart from its primary task, the ENIC office will organize and supervise seminars for the training of the staff within university services for issuing diploma supplements in Croatian and English language.

4.2. *Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles*

A three-cyclical system of studying has been planned from the very beginning. The first cycle is being widely discussed: at polytechnics, within professional associations and university senates. The discussions focus on the following topics:

- a) the curricula of the first cycle and their relation to the second one,
- b) the qualifications gained by the first cycle,
- c) the flexibility of duration of the first and the second cycle (3+2 or 4+1)
- d) the relation between university and polytechnics studies.

Following the new law, the preparations for the introduction of the three-cyclical system of studying into the entire higher education in Croatia are about to start this autumn. Aware of the fact that some institutions are likely to adopt the new system faster and more easily, while for the others it will be a more difficult and slower process, we opted for the flexible approach: the majority of universities and schools of professional higher education will start to implement the three-cyclical system of studying in the academic year 2004/5, while the rest will do so in the academic year 2005/6.

4.3. *Establishment of a system of credits [and modularization]*

Despite a traditional studying system in Croatia, by the end of the 90s the Zagreb University started showing interest in ECTS and making preparations for its application. Some time ago a brochure on ECTS was translated and published, a number of seminars on the system of credits were held, following which some polytechnics introduced a system of credits as a part of internal organization of their studies. Judging from such experience we are confident that the introduction of a system of credits will be almost welcome and that its introduction and application will proceed without major difficulties.

Actual preparations for introduction of ECTS into entire Croatian higher education will start this autumn, together with the preparations for three-cyclical studying (compare 4.2.).

4.4. *Promotion of mobility*

Since scientific results are only those which are recognized by 'international scientific community', the international cooperation is a definite obligation of every scientific worker. Therefore Croatia strongly supports intensive international cooperation and exchange of people and ideas: scientists and university teachers, students, and the university administration staff.

Since it does not participate in European mobility programmes, Croatia executes mobility on bilateral and regional basis.

Apart from that, Croatia provides grants and scholarships out of its own funds for its university and scientific workers' studying visits abroad.

As Croatia lacks a specialized training programme for university administration, there is a pending problem of the exchange of university administrators.

We are confident that the candidacy for the EU membership will open to Croatia a possibility to participate in European mobility programmes. The opening of this possibility is among our priorities.

4.5. *Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance*

The quality of higher education in Croatia is a responsibility of the National Council for Higher Education, but the results of its monitoring could be characterized as unsatisfactory. Therefore, one of the key tasks of the reform of higher education in Croatia will be the promotion of 'cultural quality'. It will involve various aspects of external and internal evaluation, including student evaluation, as well as self-evaluation at the university level, the evaluation of the programmes of study and of individuals.

We consider students to be important participants in higher education and invaluable partners in the process of assessment and promotion of the quality of higher education teaching. The new law anticipates that the students' representatives of the first and the second cycle should participate in the Senate with at least 10% of the total number of the Senate members, and the students of the third cycle with at least 5%.

In our effort to improve quality we consider international cooperation to be invaluable. Commonly accepted (European) instruments for quality assessment would contribute to an objective evaluation and would consequently lead to the 'harmonization' of European institutions of higher education.

In the process of implementing quality improvement and quality verification Croatia plans to cooperate with Slovenia, Austria and Italy, on the individual as well as on the institutional level.

Croatian universities currently participate in a number of Tempus and CARDS projects with quality as their subject-matter, which helps experts from Croatian universities to gain the necessary knowledge and international experience, at the same time giving their share to the promotion of quality on bilateral and multilateral basis.

4.6. *Promotion of [the necessary] European dimensions in higher education*

The activities mentioned above implicitly contribute to the affirmation and promotion of European higher education.

Such orientation will become increasingly manifest with the change of curricula and probable introduction of jointly agreed upon (on bilateral and multilateral level) modules of studying.

In cooperation with some universities from the region and some from the EU, Croatia plans to promote:

- a) undergraduate and postgraduate studying programmes towards joint degrees and
- b) joint appointment professorate.