

**Speaker: Kristina Bekavac**

**2023 HELP Network Conference, Strasbourg, 6-7 July 2023**

**(Friday, 7 July 2023: HELP Network Members Experiences, 9:50 - 10:20)**

**Distinguished representatives of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, dear Secretary General of the EJTN, dear colleagues from the national judicial training institutions, national focal and info points, ladies and gentlemen,**

It is truly an honour and a pleasure for me to be given an opportunity to share with you the experience of the Croatian Judicial Academy with the implementation of the HELP Programme in the national judiciary.

The Judicial Academy of Croatia is an independent public institution which is in charge of both the initial and the continuous judicial training. Our target groups are judges and prosecutors, judicial advisors, judicial trainees, as well as future judges and prosecutors. We also train court staff and clerks in the judiciary.

I would present **the integration of HELP courses in the national judicial training programme in three stages.**

**In the first stage, the Judicial Academy started organising HELP courses in May 2014** with the course on the *“Introduction to the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms and the European Court of Human Rights”*. For the first few years only this course and the course on antidiscrimination were organised for Croatian judges, prosecutors and judicial advisors.

**In 2019 we introduced quite a significant change in the initial training of judicial trainees, that is, young lawyers who are trained by the Judicial Academy to pass the Bar Exam. That year we introduced the course on the “Introduction to the European Convention and the European Court of Human Rights” as part of their obligatory training.** The responses from both the trainees and the tutors were excellent. The trainees expressed their satisfaction with the approach and the methodology, while the tutors enjoyed working with young, enthusiastic and responsive students. **Since 2019, three such editions of the Introductory course have been organised for a total of 146 trainees** (2019: 44; 2020: 50; 2021: 52 trainees) **and in each year all the trainees have successfully completed**

**the course. This practice has been recognised by the HELP team as one of the examples of good national practices and we consider it the second stage of integration of the HELP courses in the national judicial training programmes.**

**We are now at the third stage at which we would like to increase the number of HELP courses offered to judges, prosecutors and judicial advisors as standard part of their continuous judicial training.** Our objective is to have at least two different HELP courses offered in Croatian each year, if possible targeting different areas of law and different judicial specialisations. This year Croatian judges and judicial advisors have been involved in the course *“Judicial Reasoning and Human Rights”* together with Slovenian judges. This course will end in the first half of July and we are already preparing the launch of the course on *“Asylum”* in September this year for administrative court judges and advisors.

Here, it is important to mention that **these national efforts have been significantly strengthened by the Council of Europe, the HELP team and the European Commission through a project financed from the Technical Support Instrument of the DG REFORM and dedicated to the trainings on the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.** This project is implemented by the Judicial Academy and the Office of the Agent of the Republic of Croatia before the European Court of Human Rights. It is a good example of networking between the national institutions with the Council of Europe and the European Commission in raising the quality of judicial training and bringing HELP courses closer to the national judiciary. In parallel with the project implementation, five (5) more HELP courses are being translated into Croatian and they will soon be available for the upload on the national Moodle platform of the Judicial Academy. These courses are: *Freedom of Expression, Ethics for Judges, Property Rights, Data Protection* and the updated course on the *Fight against Racism, Xenophobia, Homophobia and Transphobia*.

I would like to conclude my statement by singling out the **things that I believe contribute to good integration of the HELP courses in the national curricula:**

- **Close cooperation with the national focal point and the Office of the Agent in the identification of the training needs;**
- **The training and engagement of national trainers who are open to digital training methods:** They are then proactive in reaching out to national participants and catering to their training needs.

- **Close cooperation with judicial training institutions from other member states and learning from their best practices** as we have from our esteemed colleagues from Portugal and Spain.

- **Popularisation of the HELP courses among trainees and future judges and prosecutors:** With this we are strengthening the foundations of the national judiciary for the generations to come. Based on the model of integrating HELP in the training of judicial trainees, this year we are planning to integrate at least one HELP course in the training of future judges and prosecutors. This will probably be the course on “Ethics for Judges”.

I hope that some of our experiences may be interesting and useful to other member institutions and I thank you all for your kind attention.