

**Speaker: Jelena Ristic**

Excellencies, Esteemed Colleagues, Dear Friends,

My name is Jelena Ristić, attorney-at-law and Vice President of the North Macedonia Bar Association, as well as HELP Info point, HELP tutor and member of the HELP Consultative Board.

It is a great pleasure to be here today, and I am honoured and grateful for the opportunity to address at this important Conference, and share our experience with the implementation of the Council of Europe HELP courses and integrating HELP courses in the national training curricula of legal professionals.

First of all, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the excellent continuous cooperation with the Council of Europe HELP Programme for the last five years. Namely, the HELP courses have shown to be a tremendously valuable tool for us, in terms of providing opportunities for continuous education for Macedonian lawyers.

We have so far jointly organized and successfully implemented almost 50 HELP tutored courses, for approximately 1.600 lawyers who have successfully completed the courses, (which is almost 60% of the total number of lawyers), while the average success rate in terms of participants who successfully completed the courses is around 80%. Also, Macedonian lawyers were included in 4 regional HELP courses. In addition, we had several courses that were attended and successfully completed by approximately 100 lawyer trainees and law students. Namely, cooperation was established with several law faculties throughout the country, in order to include law students in the HELP courses, given that HELP in Universities is another very important part of HELP's core mandate. I would also like to mention that expanding the pool of HELP tutors, through organization of ToTs with the support of the HELP Programme, has been a great step forward, in terms of expanding the capacity of the Bar Association to implement more HELP courses.

In regard with integrating HELP courses within the training curricula for Macedonian lawyers, I would like to share, as a positive example, the integration of the HELP course on Child Friendly Justice. According to the Macedonian Law on Children's Justice, the lawyers, in order to represent children, need to complete a specialized training on children's justice. In this regard, the Macedonian Bar Association, for the last almost three years, uses the HELP course on Child Friendly Justice to virtually licence lawyers to represent children, in accordance with the Law on Children's Justice. Namely, the certificates awarded for successfully completed HELP course on Child Friendly Justice are recognized as a licence for Macedonian lawyers to be eligible to represent children. So far, we have successfully implemented 10 HELP courses on Child Friendly Justice for approximately 500 lawyers, which is almost 20% of the total number of Macedonian lawyers.

I would also like to share that the North Macedonia Bar Association is working intensively for some time now on establishing, for the first time, an Education Centre of the Bar Association, in order to provide a systemic solution for education of the members of the Bar Association. In this regard, adequate changes have been made to the Law on the Bar, and we expect those changes to be adopted by the Assembly very soon. Namely, the new Law on the Bar foresees, as a novelty, an obligation for continuous education for lawyers, as well as initial training for candidate lawyers, whose implementation is the responsibility of the Education Centre of the

Bar Association. In this regard, I am happy to share that the training programmes also include a number of HELP courses.

All in all, I am very happy to say and confirm once again that the HELP courses are very well received among Macedonian lawyers. The constant increase of the interest in attending the courses is the greatest indicator of how these courses are perceived by the lawyers.

Many thanks once again to the Council of Europe and the whole HELP team for the constant support we receive in terms of successful implementation of the HELP courses, and thus providing valuable opportunities for education for Macedonian lawyers. We truly appreciate it, and we look forward to our further cooperation.

Thank you very much for your attention.