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It is my honour and pleasure to be here today with you and to have this opportunity to address you at the opening of this year's HELP Annual Network Conference on behalf of the Croatian Judicial Academy. There are at least two reasons for this – one is the fact that Croatia is holding the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from May to November this year and the other is that the Croatian Judicial Academy has been working with the HELP Programme for several years now and it is nice to have an opportunity to refer to that in the context of the Chairmanship.

Providing regular, up-to-date and modern training on human rights for judges, prosecutors and the judiciary staff can never be overestimated. No matter how much training is provided on an annual basis and on how many subjects, the themes related to human rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the case-law of the Court of Human Rights never lose their topicality. Human rights as such are one of the most vibrant training areas constantly opening challenging questions to national judges and prosecutors as to the correct application of national, European and international legal instruments. Some of these questions will be addressed in the course of this conference today and tomorrow.

What can national training institutions do in this regard, how and who can help them? Every judicial training institution, of course, has its own rules of procedure and work practices, as well as annual plans and programmes. In Croatia's case, every year in early June, the Judicial Academy starts collecting training needs information from all the national courts, prosecution offices and the relevant directorates of the Ministry of Justice, which are then put together, analysed and organised into annual programme

ideas to be approved by the Programme Council of the Academy. The European Convention and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights always find their place in the annual programme, with a variety of topics ranging from general ones, such as civil and criminal law aspects of the Convention, to particular rights, such as the right to a fair trial or the right to respect for private and family life.

In order not to bother you with figures and statistical data, let me give you, just as an example, the case of last year only. The Judicial Academy organised two trainings for 50 participants on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights in the field of administrative law and 6 trainings on the Convention for 152 judges, prosecutors and advisors. However, regardless of the fact that face-to-face trainings can never be replaced by online trainings, the fact is that e-learning is becoming more and more demanded by our target groups for several reasons. As you are well aware of, judges and prosecutors of all the Council of Europe Member States have heavy workloads with hearings scheduled months in advance. Some of them are not able to travel to trainings or to leave their court rooms and offices to attend trainings for a day or a couple of days.

Online courses allow them to learn at their own pace and in accordance with their personal schedules. This is where the Croatian Judicial Academy has acquired considerable experience in the last years when it introduced online training within an EU IPA twinning project with Spanish colleagues. This is where it has established successful cooperation with the Council of Europe, i.e. with the colleagues of the HELP Programme when it comes to e-learning in the field of human rights. We are very proud to be able to say that the first HELP course was successfully organised already three years ago entitled "Introduction to the Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights". It was conducted under the supervision and tutorship of the former President of the Croatian Constitutional Court, Professor Jasna Omejec, with participants judges, prosecutors and teachers of the national Police School. The second course on "The Fight against Racism, Xenophobia, Homophobia and Transphobia" was organised two years ago, while the second edition of this course ran from March to June this year. Both courses on "The Fight against Racism, Xenophobia, Transphobia and Homophobia" were tutored by a Croatian Municipal Court judge who is also a certified HELP trainer.

What has been the reception of the HELP courses and of the online training in general? What have they taught us so far? Which way to go? We have learned several important lessons: E-courses need to be as interactive as possible. They must not repeat the logic of the training materials prepared for the face-to-face trainings. They are an excellent tool to offer training to national judges and prosecutors on specific topics that are not covered by the national training programme at the moment, and some of the examples of such topics will be discussed tomorrow. Last but not least, we have learned to have faith and to receive a positive feedback even when we have been concerned that a particular training will not be well-received due to the online training methodology. Although the judiciary is sometimes considered to be conservative and not open to new technologies, online trainings have proven otherwise. They have not only offered training opportunities to judges and prosecutors, but they have also revealed interactive and up-to-date training development capacities of some of our trainers.

In the end, allow me to add that this conference is an excellent opportunity for all of us to exchange experience and ideas and I am truly looking forward to learning about the best practices in other

countries and about the plans of the Council of Europe in the field of human rights training. I wish us all good work and a fruitful conference.

Thank you for your attention!