

# „Towards a global compact for refugees“

## Thematic discussion 4

### Panel One: *How can we support voluntary and sustainable return?*

#### Statement by Croatia

14th November 2017

- While being aware that it is not possible to automatically apply the experience of one refugee situation to another, allow me to point out some elements of the approach taken by Croatian authorities in respect of the return and reintegration of refugees implemented from second half of the nineties to present.
- At the time of the Homeland War there were approximately **550.000 displaced persons** who left their homes and temporarily settled in other areas of Croatia that were not directly threatened by war. In addition, Croatia accepted **400.000 thousand refugees** from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, according to some estimations, about 250.000 people of Serbian origin left the country in 1995.
- Since the end of war, Croatian authorities have enabled the return of **355.000 displaced persons** and refugees on the basis of a program of reconstruction and housing care, out of which **133,000 belonged to registered minorities, mainly Serbian**. By 2014. the Republic of Croatia spent **5.5 billion euros from the state budget** for the implementation of national return programs, care for displaced persons, returnees and refugees, reconstruction and housing care. Only 5% of this amount was secured through international donations.
- What we would like to stress is that the end of conflict leaves a deep mark on the whole society, such was left also on Croatia. The overall return did not take place in ideal sociological and psychological conditions. The entire state and social life was suffering and was emotionally laden not only on the political and state level but also in the field. Hence, Croatia intervened institutionally with Repatriation Program, national Reconciliation program and similar document (abolition, convalidation and so forth). The entire repatriation project and process was open both to the domestic and international public.
- The reintegration required serious reforms and continuous engagement of various institutions to provide support:
  - It was crucial that high level of protection of the **minority rights** is enshrined in our Constitution.
  - As predominately Catholic country, Croatia concluded **contracts with other Religious Communities**, primarily Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish and provided resources for their activities. The success story of this approach is becoming known worldwide by our Islamic community.
  - In order to provide adequate assistance in remedying the damage caused by the war and then to ensure the **favorable economic development** of the affected areas that suffered most the damage, Croatia has established the category of areas of Special State Concern by the adoption of the Act of the same name.

- To curb **psychological consequences** arising from the war Croatia has opened four centers which deal with patients with PTSS.
  - The **massive reconstruction process** was a very expensive, but inevitable must – 151,452 housing units, houses and apartments that have been damaged or completely destroyed during the war, have been reconstructed or built. National housing Program, as well as Regional Housing program are still being implemented.
  - It was also important to support **the development of civil society** as numerous NGOs worked proactively on the issues of reintegration and reconciliation.
- As the **main concrete institutional and social mechanism for the reintegration process** we can adduce: creation of climate of tolerance and trust at all levels of society; securing the equality of all citizens before the state administration bodies; creation of general social, political, security and economic conditions for the normalization of the life in war-damaged areas; organizing fast, safe and efficient return of citizens in the areas from which they were expelled; involving all citizens in building a democratic society; creation of a policy framework for the implementation of valid legal norms; focus on education and job creation; investment in production and employment of the citizens.
  - Also, it is essential to strengthen the local capacities in the context of its needs, with the aim to create preconditions required for the voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin through sustainable solutions. In parallel, in order to ensure sustainable return and reintegration of refugees, priority should be given to development programs focusing on youth education complemented by incentives for the job creation.
  - In conclusion, Croatia wishes to highlight the cooperation with UNHCR, especially in fostering the successful and sustainable return of refugees acknowledged by the UNHCR Recommendation of 2014 to cease the refugee status to individuals who left Croatia. We acknowledge with appreciation the cessation clause to become fully effective by the end of 2017, and its subsequent implementation. This was a long and challenging process, and we are looking forward to its successful end.

Thank you!