

STATEMENT TEXT, UNECE, 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to greet you on behalf of the Minister of Physical Planning, Construction, and State Assets of Croatia and on my own behalf.

If there is only one thing that we all strive for together as the highest priority, then this is our quest to make the world a better place for future generations. No matter which scale of basic needs is analyzed, food and housing are always within the five primary human needs. Today it is essential to provide affordable and humane housing. Is it not intriguing that in the 21st century, with the technology of robotization development and the discussion of robot ethical behavior, we are not sure what the gap is between verbalizing sustainability and its actual application to such vital issues as housing?

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is an important partner of Croatian initiatives and achievements. This is because of not only the intergovernmental approach, but also of a multi-sectoral one. Our goals are common - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

We will build a comprehensive environment - it will provide stimulating industrial production growth, including innovations, transfer of breakthrough technologies, and considerable structural changes in all sectors.

It is our wish and responsibility to stimulate sustainable living for all citizens. An interdisciplinary approach will integrate the fields of energy, construction, and environmental protection. It will highlight benefits that can encourage investors and future users to approach designing and building in such a way as to adapt to new regulations and market conditions.

In Croatia, for example, by 2020, more than € 211 million were allocated for energy efficiency in public buildings and more than € 100 million for energy efficiency in residential buildings. We have already defined a roadmap for nearly zero-energy buildings, both for existing and new ones. It is not the future, but the present for all new installations. We engaged in defining robust requirements, building performance, and about 30% of obligatory renewable energy in new buildings. Croatia developed an ESCO model to renovate existing buildings, which Eurostat recognized and adopted as a proposed model.

We see Croatia's contribution in developing and implementing innovations, finding coexistence with climate change, and complete transformation towards modern solutions that are above all natural and sustainable. Embraced by the Mediterranean and continental temperate climate, Croatia, with its more than 1,000 islands and excellent growth potential, sees innovation and sustainability as the solution to existing challenges. Probably, there was no as challenging a place as Croatia in December last year. In the middle of the

lockdown and Covid-19 crisis, we faced a strong earthquake in Croatia's capital city and one more to the south of Zagreb. The state and local authorities have decided to support citizens, create emergency measures, and turn these disasters into opportunities.

In Croatia, you will find the smallest city in the world (Hum, 21 inhabitants); the smallest cathedral in the world - the church of St. Križ in Nin; one of the narrowest streets in the world on the island of Krk; the oldest cathedral in the world - the Cathedral of St. Duje, Split (Split Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary), but also the oldest Croatian and European city (continuously inhabited for more than 8300 years - Vinkovci). We have the shortest ropeway in the world in Zagreb (66 m). We are a country with 428 municipalities and 127 cities per about 4 million inhabitants and 20 regional self-government units, i.e., counties. The Natura 2000 ecological network of the Republic of Croatia covers 36.67% of the land territory and 16.26% of the territorial sea and internal sea waters of the Republic of Croatia, i.e., 29.34% of the total area of the Republic of Croatia. More than 10% of the country's surface are parks, including national parks. The protection of the value of natural resources is certainly one of the reasons that about 87% of the population drinks tap water.

Considering the challenges, we share them with UNECE. A few years ago the UNECE published obstacles that were entirely applicable to Croatia. The main impact factors for success are education and communication. UNECE is, therefore, a platform for success.

Nowadays, exceptional support to the development of medium-sized and small towns is crucial for the survival of predominantly rural areas, significantly affected by depopulation, restructuring of the socio-economic base, and vanishing of public functions and content. The preservation of the historic urban tissue is also in focus. Understanding worldwide conditions and solutions and best practices that apply to a concrete market will help us grow. Sustainability is often mentioned today, without ensuring whether the three pillars' knowledge has reached every citizen of the UNECE region. Where the environmental, social, and economic aspects meet optimally, sustainability occurs. Theoretically mastered, but in practice, there is still too little awareness thereof. Transforming challenges into opportunities and introducing agile behavior and management is the only thing that gives hope. The world no longer has time for traditional planning and sequencing of the implementation of these plans.

Management guided by adaptation to fast change and implementing measures in parallel with strategic and operational transformation to the actual situation is a concept we have not inherited.

However, we will apply it together with turning adverse events to our advantage. Technology is no longer a problem; it seems that the gap between the organization's progress and technology has become so pronounced that the problem becomes – we ourselves. Everything is available, but our goals have not been achieved whenever people

do not have a roof over their heads. Infrastructure and supply chains must accompany the accelerated development of urban settlements.

Farms and the production of healthy food must inhabit cities together with the people. That is what we talk about when talking about sustainability. Clean air and clean water must move into the towns along with people. When a man moves to the city, his needs follow him. Discussions on challenges must never end without concrete measures to transform those challenges into opportunities. In achieving prosperity in cities, we must connect the pole of technology with the pole of nature. In achieving that goal, everyone needs to make one small contribution each day.

Thank you for your attention, your thoughts, and your step to move forward.