

## Croatia<sup>1</sup>

**IHF FOCUS: freedom of expression and the media; judicial system and independence of the judiciary; religious intolerance; national and ethnic minorities; intolerance, xenophobia, racial discrimination and hate speech; returnees and displaced persons; homosexuals' rights.**

The human rights situation in Croatia deteriorated in 2002 after almost six years of gradual improvement following the end of the war in the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, the social situation in Croatia worsened, with a relatively high and stagnated unemployment rate and increasing poverty.

Moreover, the judicial system, which, by its own definition, should have contributed to the protection of human rights, functioned inadequately and slowly, resulting in an enormous backlog of cases some of which had been pending for more than five years.

The return of refugees remained problematic. Only a few cases related to the rights of returning refugees were solved adequately. Article 180 of the Law on Obligatory Relations, which guaranteed compensation to 1,000 victims of terrorist attacks in the past decade was not implemented in 2002 either, and unfair taxation was imposed on several returnees of the past few years.

The security services lacked competent leadership and there was no institutionalized civil control over them.

The government and parliament continued to avoid fulfilling their obligations under the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY): in the case of General Bobetko the government went so far as to decide to pay the costs for his medical care at his private home because, fearing arrest, he refused to go to hospital.

The Law on Minorities adopted in 2002 only solved some of the problems faced by national minorities, in practice however, the protection of their rights was more theoretical and symbolic. Violence against the Roma population became almost a daily phenomenon with no public reaction at all.

Finally, the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (CHC) continued to be denied registration and was exposed to numerous attempts by government officials to obstruct its activities.

### **Freedom of Expression and the Media**

Following the political changes of January 3, 2000 with the demise of the HDZ dominated government, Croatia's human rights record in the field of freedom of expression and the media changed rapidly. Although even favorable conditions were expected after the ruling coalition announced its positive attitude towards freedom of the media,<sup>2</sup> in 2002 Croatia enjoyed a greater degree of freedom of speech and of the media than ever before in the past decade: there were neither attempts to prohibit the work of the media nor harsh pressure exerted by the authorities aimed at directly controlling the media; media outlets

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the *Annual Report 2002* of the Croatian Helsinki Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Bozo Novak, president of the Council for the Media at the Seminar "The Public Right to Know and Limits to Free Access," organized by the CHC in May 2002.

demonstrated diversity and promoted various political options from extreme right to extreme left; no prohibitions on publishing were recorded; no prohibitions hindered the work of the electronic media; and no journalists were held in prisons as a result of work.

As of the end of 2002, the essential question in Croatia was how to establish the necessary balance between freedom of the media and responsibility of the media towards the public. Attention was diverted from the influence of the authorities on the media, to focusing on the behavior of owners of the media and other centers of power which became a restrictive factor in the sphere of human rights in the course of the 2002.

Under these new circumstances, the CHC established at the beginning of 2002 the Council for the Media, a form of ombudsperson. The council focused its activities on three main areas: firstly, on the protection of citizens and the public from abuse by the media; secondly, on the respect of the right of the public to receive information on issues of public interest; and, thirdly, on the protection of journalists in carrying out their professional duty, i.e., protection from the authorities, owners, employees and sometimes from themselves.

The coalition government and the new president of the republic displayed a high level of openness towards the public: the practice of discriminating against some journalists and media in obtaining information and statements ceased, and the number of journalists who monitored the work of the government almost doubled. As of the end of the year, 230 journalists monitored the work of the parliament. This could be seen as significant progress in accomplishing the right of the public to obtain information of general interest.

Croatia, however, still lacked an entirely elaborated legal system which would fully ensure the right to information. There were still no legal provisions regarding access to public files and archives, and it was necessary to grant access to the media to all meetings of public institutions. Such provisions would prevent certain prefects from expelling journalists who reported critically about their work from press conferences, or would at least limit such acts.

- The most notable example of the continuation of such practice was that of the president of the Sisak Court, who held several journalists captive in the court premises for a couple of hours, forbidding them to write anything about the procedure concerning the killings of Serb civilians in that city in 1991.<sup>3</sup>

While the ruling coalition supported the promotion of the freedom of the media, the changes were implemented slowly, only partially and without proper insight into the entire problem. It was obvious that there was no consistent governmental media policy.

On the positive side, NGO representatives had the possibility of participating in the preparation of draft laws relating to the media. However, the CHC proposals directed at further increasing the freedom of the public word, in accordance with the adopted international standards and obligations which needed to be fulfilled for accession to the European Union, were almost fully ignored. The same was true of the CHC proposal for changing the Penal Code to decriminalize the public word, taking "verbal offense" from the law, and sanctioning hate speech and the deliberate prevention of access to information.<sup>4</sup>

Croatia remained one of the few countries in the region which had not adopted a law on freedom of information act regarding access to official information, and this topic was not high on the government's agenda. While the Constitution provided for free access to information, this right was limited to journalists. There were provisions regulating the

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<sup>3</sup> The CHC criticized publicly this incident in the Statement No. 9 of August 2002 of the Council for the Media.

<sup>4</sup> Statement No. 10, October 2002, of the CHC's Council for the Media.

responsibility of public administration to grant access to information, but these were not implemented. As a result, citizens were denied access. The CHC, along with Transparency International Croatia, are pursuing a campaign to promote freedom of information. This aims at including a vast coalition of NGOs, which would draft a law on freedom of information and begin to lobby within the parliament for its adoption in the year 2003.<sup>5</sup>

Due to international pressure, the government spent at least half of 2002 focusing on the changes to the new Law on the National Television (HRT). The necessity to do this was a consequence of problems with the HRT management and the uncertain status of the privatization of the third national channel.

Another problem was the fact that different types of media concentrations had not been clearly defined, a fact which paved the way for the gradual monopolization of the media. The owners of the media did not respect the legal obligations of publishing the names of their owners and the amounts of their ownership share in the media. The CHC demanded that this issue be addressed in order to assure the transparency and plurality of the media scene in Croatia.

Additionally, the strong influence of commercial interests on the media was problematic. This could clearly be seen from the analyses of *Novinar*, a review of the Croatian Journalists' Association, as well as in the increasing importance of announcements in the finances of the media. The financial dependence on commercial companies was reflected in the fact that the media rarely criticized the activities of big companies, regardless of whether these companies were domestic or foreign. Moreover, the influence of large advertisement companies became stronger than the influence of politics.

### **Judicial System and Independence of the Judiciary**

The judiciary remained an area of particular concern, suffering from serious organizational problems, inefficient procedures, a lack of expertise and long delays in the proceedings. This weakness had a direct impact on the implementation of the rule of law, which remained problematic and unbalanced. While radical reforms were needed, no substantial progress was made.

In November, the government adopted a plan for judicial reform as proposed by the Ministry of Justice. The main items of the plan include dividing the ministry into two separate bodies and implementing a range of legislative reforms. The plan also envisions efforts to raise the salaries of judicial officials, to introduce information technology in court management, to strengthen judicial education and to improve the technical conditions of courts. The ministry anticipated that the full implementation of the plan would be concluded by the end of 2007.

Although there seemed to be a growing awareness and common understanding within the Croatian judiciary and administration of the main problems and challenges of reform, the bulk of the work remained to be done. The following were the main problems that continued to plague the Croatian judiciary:

- A large number of inherited pending cases,<sup>6</sup> so big that the question was sometimes raised whether the justice system could any longer offer efficient legal protection to citizens and legal persons;

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<sup>5</sup> The CHC, sponsored by the Council of Europe and ARTICLE 19, has organized three seminars on the Public Right to Know in 2001 and 2003.

<sup>6</sup> As of the end of 2001, there were 1,020,413 unresolved, mainly simple cases pending.

- The length of court proceedings,<sup>7</sup> the insufficient execution of judgments and the lack of homogenous court practice;
- A lack of qualified staff (judges, prosecutors and other court personnel) and appropriate professional training;
- An irrationally organized network of justice bodies (too many small state attorney's offices and courts some of which did not have sufficient work while a few justice institutions were overburdened – especially in Zagreb, Split and Rijeka).<sup>8</sup>

The government initiated a reform of the legislative framework. The amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code will introduce a new system of criminal procedure which will contain the regulation of the preliminary criminal procedure without the stage of investigation and the transformation of the investigating judge into a judge of preliminary proceedings. At the same time, the discovery and investigation of criminal offenses will be transferred to the State Attorney's Office. In the preparatory stage, new sections will be set up and new positions established in accordance with the constitutional regulations on independent justice bodies which are responsible for the criminal prosecution of all criminal offenses.

Amendments to the Penal Code should contribute to the more efficient prosecution of economic crimes, the suppression of the gray economy and to the provision of sanctions for crimes committed during transformation of ownership and the privatization process. The existing provisions of the privatization process will be modernized and incriminations adjusted according to the international conventions that Croatia has ratified and the EU *Acquis communautaire*.

The basic aims of the proposed amendments to the Civil Procedure Code will be taken to increase the efficiency of the procedures, to prevent the abuse of rights in the proceedings and to provide for new provisions concerning procedural discipline.<sup>9</sup>

Under the new amendments on the Law on Courts, judges will be initially elected for a five-year term, after which they will be subject to review by the State Judicial Council (SJC). If a judge passes a SJC review, he/she will be automatically appointed for life (until the age of seventy). Under the previous rules, all judges, including newly appointed ones, were appointed for life immediately. The new rule which includes a period of probation could prove useful as it was generally considered that the quality of new judges was poor and thus a future review process could help filter judges before they can obtain lifetime job security. However, it remains to be seen whether the probation period will also endanger the judges' independence.

Although laws provided for sanctions for the improper influence on a judge's work, public perception was that the judiciary was highly corrupt. Several cases against judicial corruption were initiated, but at the time of writing, it was unclear how many would result in convictions.

The appropriate use of disciplinary procedures was also an area that needed reform. As of the end of 2002, the SJC had conducted some 20 disciplinary proceedings, the majority of

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<sup>7</sup> The Constitutional Court delivered its first judgement awarding damages for excessively long proceedings in a case in which the applicant had been waiting eight years for a decision.

<sup>8</sup> Based on the paper of the reform of the justice system, prepared by the Ministry of Justice.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

which were based on a judge's failure to issue decisions within a reasonable time, including criminal cases in which the statute of limitations had expired while the case was pending.<sup>10</sup>

A number of judges were appointed by the SJC in order to correct the significant lack of judges, which was one of the reasons for the great backlog of cases.

- Milos Vojnovic, a Serb candidate for a judge's office, had been amnestied in 1997 for armed rebellion.<sup>11</sup> The president of the Croatian Judges' Association and other judicial officials, veterans' associations, as well as local political representatives publicly stated that former officials who had served in the formerly occupied territories should be considered permanently ineligible for the judiciary. In the meantime, Milos Vojnovic passed away.
- In the well-known "Lora trial," seven Croat defendants who were accused of torturing Serb prisoners in 1992 at military prison in Split, southern Croatia, were acquitted at the first level of the procedure. According to the judgment, "a war crime could not be committed against ones own citizens."
- After three years and intense media coverage, the criminal procedure against the Croatian mafia finished without proving that the 14 defendants had ever formed such an organization or participated in its activities.

### **Religious Intolerance**

In June, the Croatian parliament passed the Law on the Legal Position of Religious Communities. This law recognized all existing religious communities in Croatia and it stated that a provision ought to be established according to which they will be registered without any restrictions.

New religious communities, which were not covered by the provision regarding unrestricted recognition, will be registered on the basis of the Law on Associations of Citizens. To establish a new religious community, it must have at least 500 founding members: this provision was proposed by the legislator at the last moment in order to limit the number of so-called non-traditional and non-historical religious communities in Croatia. This provision had been promoted in public by the leading religious communities, such as the Catholic Church, some of whose leaders had proposed even more radical restrictions. However, non-Catholic so-called historical religious communities objected to this and submitted a complaint to the legislators about plans to introduce it. They believed that requiring a higher number of founding members would not slow down the establishment of new religious communities but rather would encourage them to more active recruitment of members to fulfill the legal requirements of the law. These communities preferred the initial version of the provision, whereby the minimum number of founding members was set at 100. Further, it was believed that the 500-limit may obstruct the registration of some small but historical religious communities such as the Old Roman Catholics, who are currently a community with a small number of members.

According to the new Law on the Legal Position of Religious Communities, all communities will be able to develop freely, establish schools, humanitarian organizations and similar. The law at the same time prescribed the signing of an agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the Vatican. The Serb Orthodox Church and the Islamic community

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<sup>10</sup> In an extreme case a judge was dismissed for failing to decide on a case after a period of ten years.

<sup>11</sup> The Vukovar Court Council supported his candidature.

signed a similar agreement with the government in late December. The traditional Protestant communities (Lutherans and Reformed) are expected to sign such an agreement in 2003.

The new law provides the Roman Catholics with a relatively privileged status in Croatian society as the largest religious community. According to the agreement between the Croatian government and the Vatican, the Roman Catholic Church had the right to offer religious education in schools and kindergartens, a fact that raised great debate. Many expressed the view that restricting this right to the Catholic Church violated the rights of non-Catholic children and their parents, and that this practice could lead to the isolation and segregation of non-Catholic children.

### **National and Ethnic Minorities**

The results of the 2001 official census were made public in June 2002. According to these, the number of almost all ethnic minorities in Croatia had reduced by half since the 1991 census. Most notably, the percentage of ethnic Serbs in Croatia had dropped from 11.5% in 1991 to 4.5% in 2001. The census not only showed how the war had caused major waves of migration but also appeared to reveal that many members of ethnic minorities were afraid to report their real ethnic identity.

Following the withdrawal from parliament of the old version of the draft Constitutional Law on National Minorities – which was drafted with the participation of human rights NGOs – in February 2002, a smaller working group was set up by the government to draw up a new version. This working group, which was composed of five members of the government, worked for months in a non-transparent manner and with no input from either human rights NGOs or members of minority communities. However, following disputes between the members of the working group and members of parliament representing different ethnic communities, the Croatian parliament passed the Constitutional Law on National Minorities with almost full consensus on 18 December 2002. Considering the fact that the adoption of such a law was one of the requirements of the Council of Europe at Croatia's admission in 1996, its passage was a positive step in the field of human rights.

Another positive fact was the position of ethnic minorities in Croatia which during 2002 was in general no longer burdened by the harsh, open and continuous abuses which it was subjected to during the period between 1991 and 2001. The intensity of intolerance demonstrated towards ethnic minorities in the media and by administrative bodies decreased.

#### *Roma Minority*

The position of Roma in Croatia was burdened by the systematic policy of the Ministry of Education of segregating Roma children into special classes in elementary schools.

- Roma children, who made up some 43% of school children in the Cakovec region, attended classes separated from the non-Roma children in more than 20 of its districts. The school authorities justified this discriminatory practice by the fact that the Roma children did not speak the Croatian language and had bad hygiene practices. It was also evident that the authorities had not made any efforts to organize Croat language classes for those Roma pre-school children who did not speak Croatia. Moreover, Roma children in schools played separately from non-Roma children, and Roma parents complained that their children had been subjected to verbal and physical abuse. The disadvantaged situation of the Roma community in Medimurje was additionally burdened by intolerant statements issued by county officials towards Roma.

The practice of segregating Roma children in schools resulted in a court complaint filed by parents of 57 Roma children in April who requested that their children be mixed with non-Roma children. However, the county and municipal court in Cakovec declared the complaint inadmissible in record time – the promptness of this response was extraordinary considering the fact that the average length of a court procedure in Croatia was over five years. As of the end of 2002, the case was pending in the Constitutional Court.

The atmosphere of intolerance between mixed Roma and non-Roma classes escalated on the first day of the school year in 2002/3 when around 300 parents of non-Roma children blocked the entrance to the school in the settlement of Drzimurec-Strelec in Cakovec and did not allow Roma children to enter the school building. This was a reaction to an order by the Ministry of Education to one of the high schools in Medimurje not to set up separate classes for Roma. The non-Roma parents demanded that the curriculum be changed because they did not want their children to attend mixed classes. Following this event, the Ministry of Education promised better support for Roma children – including instruction in the Croatian language – in pre-schools to prepare them for elementary schools. However, it appeared that no special measures had been taken to this end by the year's end.

### **Intolerance, Xenophobia, Racial Discrimination and Hate Speech**

There was no comprehensive legislation explicitly prohibiting racial discrimination in all spheres of public life although the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination prescribes it and Croatia is party to the convention. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) commented on the situation in Croatia in March 2002<sup>12</sup> and expressed concern about the segregation of Roma children in the educational system and about access for Roma to employment, appropriate health care, citizenship rights and political representation.

Also, concern was raised with regard to the prevention of discrimination against Croatian Serbs: the UN committee strongly urged the Croatian government to undertake measures to ensure that all provisions of the Croatian Law on Citizenship were applied in a non-discriminatory manner, in conformity with article 5 of the convention. The committee also pointed to the discriminatory application of the right to equal treatment before the law, particularly in the areas of property claims, where the courts reportedly continued to favor persons of Croat origin.

Regarding the lack of adequate legislation prohibiting advocacy of racial or ethnic hatred, the CHC stated that article 174 of the present Penal Code was not explicit enough and proposed that the article be amended to state: “Whoever, on the basis of a difference in race, religion, language, political and other beliefs, property, birth, education, social status and other characteristics, such as sex, color, national or ethnic origin, violates or incites the violation and discrimination of fundamental human rights and freedoms recognized by the international community shall be punished by imprisonment...”

Foreigners and minorities were, in general, treated fairly both by the public and the media. However, occasionally articles with racist overtones were published, especially in the so called “black chronicles” sections of daily news in which the nationality of perpetrators was also highlighted: in most cases these were Roma or ethnic Albanians.

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<sup>12</sup> CERD, *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Croatia*. 21/05/2002, at [www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CERD.C.60.CO.4.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CERD.C.60.CO.4.En?Opendocument)

Furthermore, in the course of 2002 there were a series of violent attacks by skinhead groups which warranted serious attention, but the police failed to deal with them appropriately. The victims were mainly Roma, colored people and foreign tourists.

- Seventeen-year-old Luis Arcanga Ramon Colon, who was born in Honduras and played soccer in the club “Dinamo,” was attacked by skinheads four times during his short stay in the country.

Ethnic Serbs were subjected to various forms of discrimination by authorities in some parts of Croatia, especially in Eastern Slavonia and Knin. Such cases included in particular court disputes related to the restitution of the property of Serb returnees, allocation of reconstruction assistance or residency and citizenship issues.

- In Knin no ethnic Serbs were employed by any significant public services, not even by the school system despite the fact that some 300 Serb children attended local schools.
- On the notice board of the public employment bureau in Vukovar there was an advertisement offering work to Croats only. No staff member bothered to remove it.

In connection with the issue of the segregation of Roma pupils in elementary schools, the Medimurje prefect, Branko Levacic noted that the inter-ethnic situation was relatively bad in all villages and towns with a mixed population, and that he feared it could escalate to a conflict. However, he also noted that he would not allow his children to attend the same classes with Roma children because, in the long run, it would have adverse effects on their performance at school.

The filing of a law suit for segregation on behalf of 57 Roma children and their families resulted in heated reactions in the media.

- The weekly *Medimurje* stated in its article of April 23 that “Unsatisfied Roma people should be loaded onto a train of no return...” The author Ivica Jurgec wrote: “My fellow citizens, do not quarrel with the Croatian Helsinki Committee and its president Zarko Puhovski, who has been ‘inciting’ Roma in Medimurje to act against schools, the municipality, the city, the county and the state authorities. Why? Because we shall need them in a year or two ourselves, very soon. Namely, in order to protect us from the Roma, as we will very soon become a minority in Medimurje. It seems that Roma children do not wish to learn Croatian in mixed classes from little ‘civilians’ but exactly the contrary: they wish to teach little Croats the Roma language. (...) What happens here is assimilation. In a few years time, my neighbor will say ‘blood will prevail and all of us will become Gypsies’. (...) And we, people in Medimurje, good-hearted as we are, gave them everything, and more than that (...) For it is a common fact that it’s always lazy, indolent people and hooligans who complain, who blame others for their own misfortunes. (...) Perhaps, it would be good to ensure ‘a train of no return’ on which they would be put together with their families. And then they should decide for themselves and choose for themselves the train station at which they would get off. (...) However, I fear that if the situation continues as it is, we will have to get on this train ourselves, because everything they do to us has exceeded the limit of tolerance.”

## **Returnees and Displaced Persons**



In 2002, the Croatian government adopted two significant legal documents which provided the legal basis for improved implementation of the return process. These were the Law on the Amendments to the Law on Regions under Special State Protection, and the new Program of Return. As a consequence of these two documents, the former Housing Commissions – which in most cases were strongly influenced by local politicians who placed numerous administrative obstacles in the way of the return process – were closed down and their responsibilities were transferred to new regional bodies directly subordinated to the Ministry of Reconstruction and Public Work. Despite the fact that these administrative changes created a better legal basis for the return process, the CHC noted that it did not observe significant improvements in practice in the field.

During 2002, the return of refugees slowed down somewhat. However, cases related to former tenancy right holders became more frequent. A large group of tenancy rights holders from Eastern Slavonia signed a complaint for not being able to purchase their flats under the same conditions as the rest of the Croatian citizens.

The security situation in the regions of frequent return improved in 2002. The CHC registered only a few cases of violence towards returnees and in those cases police officers reacted promptly and professionally. However, of serious concern was the failure by the prosecutor's offices to initiate proceedings on the basis of the cases filed by the police.

The process of the reconstruction of houses for possible returnees remained slow, mainly due to a lack of financial resources, according to the Ministry of Reconstruction and Public Work. The deadline for filing a request for reconstruction expired on 1 January 2002 and it was not prolonged. For this reason the number of complaints regarding the reconstruction of houses decreased. But even many of those who had filed their requests years ago had still not received the decisions in a written form. Another concrete problem was related to internally displaced persons who were using alternative accommodation while waiting for their houses to be reconstructed. Their refugee status was annulled and they became returnees in spite of the fact that their houses were not reconstructed and many of them still did not have a place to return to.

Since unemployment was a problem in all Croatia, it was impossible to establish whether there was general, systematic discrimination against returnees in the area of employment. However, clear cases of discrimination in terms of employment opportunities were observed in Vukovar and Knin.

Returnees had a right to very limited financial assistance and only for a period of six months. After that they had the possibility of being registered for a small monthly social welfare payment. Undoubtedly, the return process between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will depend equally on the respect of ownership rights in the three countries.

The greatest problem, however, was still related to the return of tenancy rights to ethnic Serb returnees. Since legislation related to tenancy rights of publicly owned apartments had been changed since the war, Croatian authorities tried to solve the issues by applying other laws. However, under these laws, the tenancy rights were significantly reduced in comparison to other citizens. For example, by those provisions they would have the right to buy rented apartments after ten years of lease while others could buy their apartments immediately.

## **Homosexuals' Rights**

In their annual reports, the NGO Iskorak and the lesbian group Kontra remarked that the general state of human rights of sexual and gender minorities in 2002 remained equally worrisome as it had been over the past 25 years, the last marked improvement being the 1977 decriminalization of same-sex intercourse that was called an “unnatural act” between men.

The year 2002 was remarkable in the sense that during that period the status of sexual minorities in Croatia was discussed publicly on a systematic basis, including in the media, the government and the parliament as well as among the public.

On June 29, the first Gay Pride event was held in Zagreb in the organization of the above-mentioned two NGOs. While the level of support from other NGO activists and even some well-known politicians was strong, the event was accompanied by an anti-demonstration of a skinhead group and their supporters who both verbally and physically insulted the participants of the rally. What was even worse, the police officers present did not adequately ensure the security of the participants. The leader of the event, Mario Kovac, as well as another twenty persons were beaten in ten separate incidents. Moreover, only an hour after the event, seven of the most violent skinheads went to the club Mama and the café club Mocvarica and randomly beat up several customers: during the week, round table discussions and media presentations had been held in those clubs. Also on this occasion police failed to react adequately and secure the places. The police arrested 27 people and processed the same number for minor offenses, but failed to take any action against the skinhead group that was notorious for violent behavior towards Roma, foreign tourists, homosexuals and other people.

The media resorted to stereotypical presentations of sexual minorities and a number of offensive articles were published in the press. The most problematic incident took place when the editor-in-chief of Croatian state television, HTV, forbade the host of a well-known weekly show, Aleksandar Stankovic, from inviting the leader of Iskorak, Dorino Manzin, onto his show. According to the editor-in-chief, the show moderated by Stankovic was a political show while the issue of homosexuality should rather be discussed in a scientific program. Stankovic finally got his way, but the incident reflected well the persistence of some forms of censorship on HTV as well as the forms of discrimination that sexual minorities faced in Croatia.

In the second half of 2002 the government’s proposed changes to the Law on the Family were submitted to parliament. One of them was an amendment which would allow for the registration of same-sex partnerships, allowing the partners to obtain certain basic rights which normally follow from marriage. However, this amendment was attacked heavily not only from rightwing opposition parties, but also from members of the ruling coalition, HSS. At the time of writing it seemed highly unlikely that the parliament would pass this amendment.