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| <b>Date:</b>   | <b>08-05-2020</b>              | <b>Document:</b> | <b>F20-018 EN</b> |
| <b>Title:</b>  | <b>National Report Croatia</b> |                  |                   |
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### **SPRING REPORT CROATIA**

FEMS online General Assembly, 8 May 2020

Shortage of doctors, violation of national legislation and European regulations, continuous exceeding the legally permitted number of overtime hours and hard work, are still problems of Croatian doctors, as reported at previous FEMS Meetings.

In addition, HLS has still no right to negotiate for salaries and the rights of doctors.

To start solving this problems, three main Croatian doctor's organizations (Croatian Medical Union, Croatian Medical Chamber and the Croatian Medical Association) made an agreement and started joined action in November 2019. On behalf of all Croatian doctors, we demand the adoption of a special law on doctors' salaries and working rights.

As a reminder, on September 10, 2019, three medical organizations issued a *September statement* on Croatian medicine and the health care system, warning that the health care system has been in a personnel, financial, infrastructural and organizational crisis for a long time. In that document, we demand concrete changes and called the Government to urgently start solving the problems of the Croatian health system.

On December 1, 2019 we started the action called *I want to work in accordance with the law*, where we invited colleagues to express their willingness to refuse consent to work longer than 48 hours a week. Our action lasted 2 months and results showed that about 70% Croatian doctors want to work no more than 48 hours a week.

The Croatian health care system can only be maintained thanks to the large number of overtime hours worked by doctors. If doctors refuse to work overtime, the health care system will collapse. By this action, we wanted to warn Croatian Government that healthcare system cannot exist without doctor's overtime work.

Additional problem was inadequate overtime calculation, and that was the reason for more than 4.000 lawsuits. The most of them have been decided in favour of doctors by second instance courts across Croatia, but some hospitals have requested these judgments to be reviewed by the Supreme Court .

The judgment of the Supreme Court was handed down in favour of the doctors on December 10th 2019. However, we are still not paid correctly for overtime work.

Just two days ago, the decree determined that overtime work will begin to be paid in accordance with the decision of the Supreme Court, starting from April 1, 2020.

In January 2020, a new Minister of Health was appointed. He invited representatives of medical associations to a working meeting after only a few days in office. We agreed to start working on new Law on doctors salaries, working conditions and rights and we really started to do that Law only few days after that meeting, together with Ministry of Health.

By the end of February, we had agreed on more than 3/4 of the text of the law, after which we had to suspend work due to the COVID-19 virus epidemic.

At the beginning of the epidemic, we worked without enough and without adequate protective equipment. The work of the health system has been reorganized, and only emergencies are being treated in hospitals.

At the height of the epidemic Zagreb was hit by the devastating earthquake on March, 22. The center of our capital has suffered great damage, and many historic buildings in the center of Zagreb need to be demolished because they are no longer safe to live in.

Due to significant damage to some hospitals, we had to organize the evacuation of patients due to the earthquake, respecting all anti-epidemic measures. Equally, HLS office in the center of Zagreb suffered significant damage and we are still not allowed to work in our office .

Unfortunately, in such circumstances we were forced to cancel the organization of our autumn session, which was planned to be held in Zagreb at the end of September 2020.

The epidemiological situation in Croatia is stable and under control, and up to 10 new cases of COVID-19 infection are registered daily in Croatia.

Up to date, there is 79 doctors infected with the COVID-19 virus in Croatia, and several hundred are/were in self-isolation.

Both the public and the Government of the Republic of Croatia thank healthcare workers almost daily for their dedication and work during the epidemic.

However, it is incomprehensible, but true, that even in such extraordinary conditions, doctors have problems with the management of some hospitals in Croatia.

It is unbelievable and unthinkable that some principals refuse to pay doctors for overtime work they do in a pandemic.

And that is exactly what HLS is intensively dealing with these days ...

I hope we will be able to host you all some day in renovated Zagreb, without COVID-19, and I am looking forward to see you there!