

Dear Mr Ambassador Veyssière,
Dear Mr Advisor Drobňjak,
Dear Ambassadors/representatives of Embassies,
Dear representatives of courts, ministries and other state bodies,
Dear professors, experts and students,
Dear guests,

It is a pleasure to open the conference and welcome you all in Croatia – the youngest EU Member State – and at the Faculty of Law in Zagreb – as the oldest and largest law faculty in Croatia and one of the oldest law faculties in South-Eastern Europe. For this reason, it is not a pure coincidence that we have chosen this beautiful university hall, with its rich history, as the conference venue. We are proud of our Faculty history and culture, of its academic achievements and its community of hundreds of students, professors and other members of its staff. We aspire to advance its academic excellence, its openness, its social responsibility and internationalization. We are confident that this conference will contribute to these goals.

The title of the conference – ‘Croatian – French Discussion on the Priorities of the French EU Presidency’ – connects the priorities of the French EU Presidency with Croatian strategic goals and with European and global long-term challenges. The four main priorities of the French EU Presidency will be discussed in the four panels, from the French, Croatian, European and global perspective.

In the first panel we will concentrate on Schengen and the migration policies in the EU, which have been in the spotlight for the past seven years, since the refugee influx in 2015/2016. Joining Schengen is also the most important Croatian foreign policy priority, in addition to the adoption of the euro. From time to time, and it seems to me, more and more frequently, Europe deals with migrants from various parts of the world and, what is more important and more urgent for all of us, from other European countries. We can say that the whole history of Croatia is actually a history of migrations. Today, lines of refugees are literally walking in from Ukraine to the European Union. Having their pictures in mind, it is obvious that this conference cannot be timelier than it is!

The second panel will focus on strategic autonomy and European defence policy. At the moment when this priority was chosen in France and even at the moment when we agreed to organise the conference together with the French Embassy in Zagreb, nobody could have thought that this topic

would gain an additional dimension and relevance due to the terrible aggression of Russia against Ukraine. It seems to me that we all think about the future of Common European Defence as a challenge. However, security is not the only component of strategic autonomy; there are others, such as the economic component, public health and technological components, etc.

The third panel will discuss social issues and concentrate on the need to define a fair and decent European minimum wage, as one of the elements of the European Pillar of Social Rights. There is no need to particularly accentuate how important a debate about welfare state for today's Europe is. There has been a long-lasting, even exhausting, but also a productive debate about the welfare state and welfare state crisis, state and market failures, the European social model, and other themes relevant to all of us, to our people, to workers, to welfare professionals, and other groups within European society. I believe we will analyse some of these important themes today.

Last but not the least, the final panel will concentrate on the Green Deal whose creation is motivated by climate change and other environmental challenges, such as the loss of biodiversity, water pollution, waste production and ozone depletion. Needless to say, these issues are not only French or Croatian problems, but global issues that need to be addressed for the sake of the whole mankind. Along with other professionals, we as lawyers have a lot to say about them.

I hope that this conference - with an excellent list of speakers from France and Croatia, and with a high number of live and online participants will teach us important lessons and create a fertile ground for the exchange of thoughts and cooperation of the Croatian and French experts. Such initiatives are crucial both for the international cooperation of our Faculty and for stimulating intellectual debates on some of the most pressing global challenges.

Having said this, I would like to thank our French friends for joining us in organising this event and wish all the speakers, moderators and other participants an interesting and fruitful conference. Thank you.