



**THE CROATIAN  
PARLIAMENT**  
*and*  
**EUROPEAN  
AFFAIRS**



Croatian Presidency of the  
Council of the European Union  
PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION



6  
TRG IV. MARKA

## The Croatian Parliament and European affairs

Croatia is a republic with a political system based on the principle of the division of power between the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The Croatian Parliament (Croatian: Hrvatski sabor) is the representative body of citizens of the Republic of Croatia and is vested with legislative power. According to the Constitution, the Croatian Parliament may have a minimum of 100 and a maximum of 160 Members of Parliament.

Members of Parliament are elected directly by secret ballot based on universal suffrage to a single chamber of Parliament from 12 constituencies for a term of four years. Regular elections to the Croatian Parliament are held every four years. Seats in the Parliament are distributed according to the d'Hondt method. The electoral threshold is 5%.

Every Croatian citizen aged 18 or over can vote in parliamentary elections.

Parliamentary terms of office are not binding, while members have legal immunity.



# The Croatian Parliament in a nutshell

The current 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term of the Croatian Parliament has 151 members, who took office in October 2016 for a four-year term. In accordance with the constitutional provisions, eight of the 151 elected Members of Parliament represent national minorities, while three Members of Parliament represent Croats living abroad. Currently, Parliament has 14 parliamentary groups, consisting of Members of Parliament from 23 political parties.

## Presidency (Bureau)

The Croatian Parliament has a Speaker and five Deputy Speakers who together form the Presidency of Parliament. The Presidency of Parliament decides on all major matters pertaining to the running of the Parliament. Three Deputy Speakers are elected on the proposal of the parliamentary majority and two on the proposal of the parliamentary minority. At the invitation of the Speaker, the Secretary General of Parliament, who is appointed and dismissed by Parliament, takes part in the work of the Presidency.

## Committees

The Croatian Parliament has 29 committees, which discuss and debate motions and initiatives for the enactment of legislation and other matters within the authority of Parliament. Committees monitor, within the limits of their competence, the work of the Croatian Government whose work is overseen by Parliament.

In performing their daily work, Members of Parliament and committees are assisted by parliamentary staff who perform professional, analytical, administrative, security and technical tasks.



151  
MEMBERS

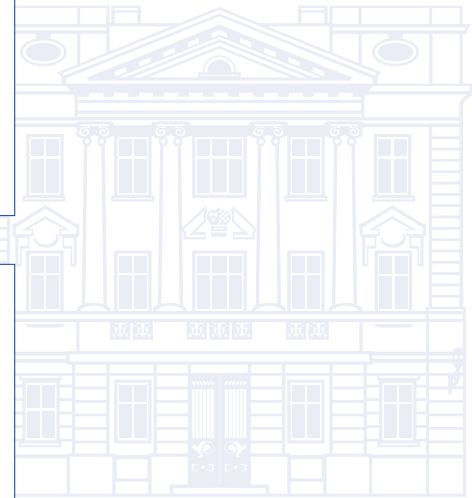
14  
PARLIAMENTARY  
GROUPS

23  
POLITICAL  
PARTIES

29  
COMMITTEES

8  
PERMANENT  
DELEGATIONS TO  
INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS

72  
PARLIAMENTARY  
FRIENDSHIP  
GROUPS



## Plenary sessions

The Croatian Parliament convenes regular sessions twice a year: the first session runs between 15 January and 15 July, while the second session runs from 15 September to 15 December. Parliament can also hold extraordinary sessions at the request of the President of the Republic, the Government or a majority of parliamentary deputies. The Speaker of Parliament may convene extraordinary sessions after having obtained the opinion of parliamentary groups.

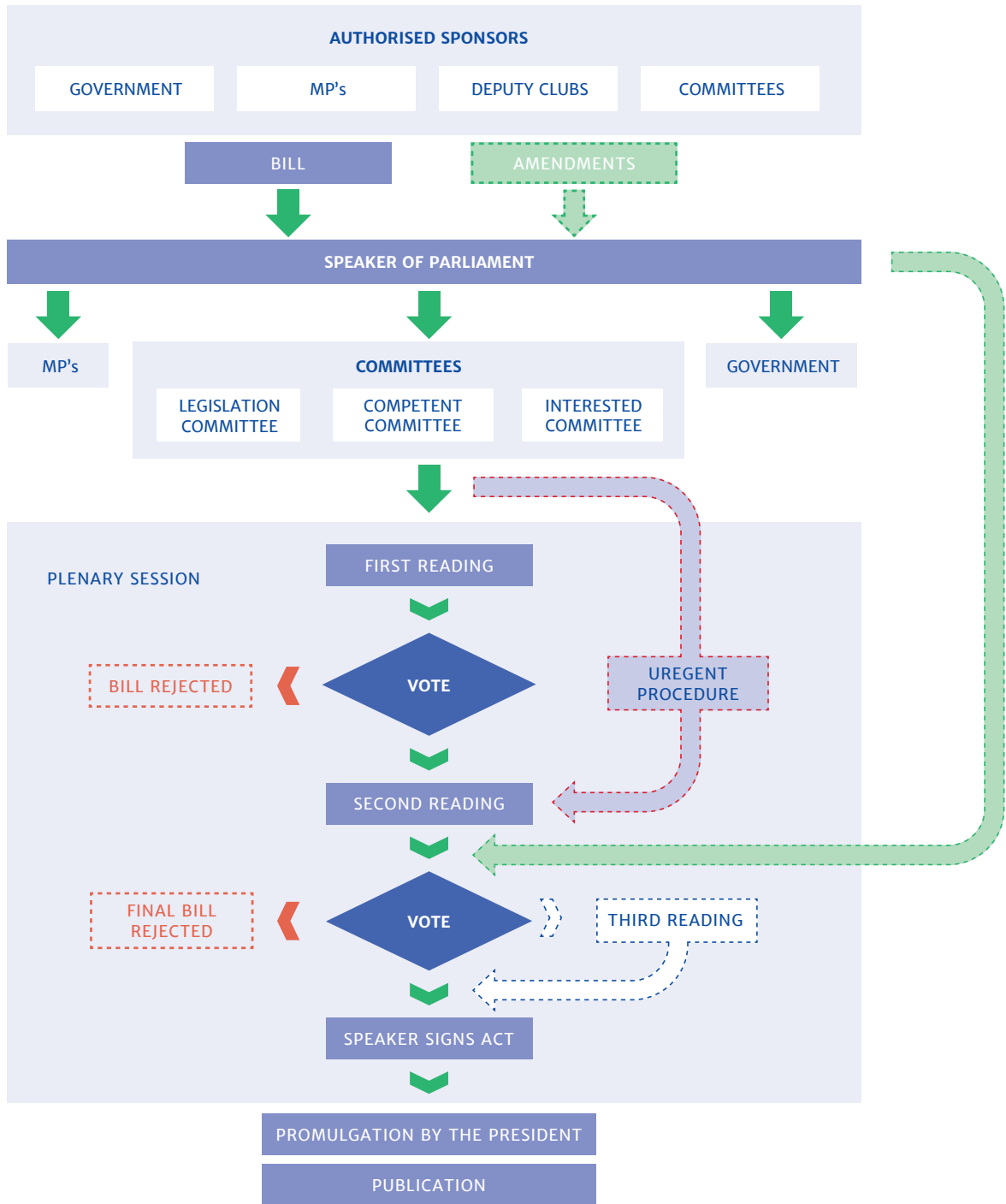
Sessions of the Croatian Parliament are open to the public.

## Decision-making

The Croatian Parliament decides on the enactment and amendment of the Constitution, passes legislation and adopts the National Budget. It elects and oversees the work of the Government and other bodies vested with public authority accountable to Parliament. The Croatian Parliament declares war and proclaims peace, passes declarations that express its positions, adopts national security and defence strategy, conducts civilian supervision of the armed forces and security services of the Republic of Croatia, decides on changes to the national borders and calls referendums.

The Croatian Parliament makes decisions by a majority of members present, except in cases specified otherwise by the Constitution or the Standing Orders of Parliament.





## Legislative procedure

Legislative procedure starts with the submission of a bill to the Speaker of Parliament. The Speaker forwards the bill to the chairs of all committees and Members of Parliament. Every Member of Parliament, political group and committee of the Croatian Parliament and the Croatian Government has the right to sponsor laws.

Prior to debate on a bill at a plenary session, competent committees and the Legislation Committee are obliged to debate the bill. Committees adopt positions on all elements of the bill, while the Legislation Committee adopts a position on the constitutional grounds of the law.

A bill is debated in two readings. At the first reading, which marks the first stage in the legislative procedure, the plenary holds a general debate on the bill, including a debate on the wording of the bill, a debate on the positions of the committees which have considered the bill, and the adoption of a conclusion on the need to pass the bill into law.

The second reading includes a debate on the text of the final draft of the bill, debate on the positions of the committees, debate on the amendments submitted, adoption of a decision on the amendments, and the passing of the act.

The third reading of a bill is conducted in cases where the text of the final draft is subject to a considerable number of amendments, or where the amendments are such that they significantly change the content of the final draft.

By way of derogation, laws may be enacted under urgent procedure when this is required on particularly justified grounds, in particular in defence-related matters and other important matters of state, or when this is required to prevent or remedy major disturbances in the economy.

## Harmonization of legislation

As a member state of the European Union, Croatia is obliged to align its national legislation with European law.

Since 1 July 2013, the Croatian Parliament has been adopting legislation harmonized with European law following the procedure established in the pre-accession period, according to which all legislative proposals that align Croatian legislation bear the designation “P.Z.E.”.

Parliament adopts the annual legislative alignment plan, which is an integral part of the Government’s programme for incorporating and implementing European law.

## Inter-parliamentary cooperation

Members of the Croatian Parliament actively participate in the work of numerous global and regional inter-parliamentary organizations. They also take part in the work of Parliamentary Friendship Groups.

The current 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term has eight Permanent Delegations to international organizations and 72 Parliamentary Friendship Groups.

Parliamentary committees, within their regular activities, act upon achieving the foreign-policy objectives of Croatia. Especially active are the Foreign Policy Committee, Inter-parliamentary Co-operation Committee, and European Affairs Committee.

Recently, the Republic of Croatia has held chairmanship-in-office of various international political forums, and the Croatian Parliament has actively participated in, or presided over, the parliamentary dimension by organizing conferences and inter-parliamentary meetings (South-East Europe Cooperation Process, Central European Initiative, and Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, to name just a few).

## A history of parliamentarism

The first recorded Assembly (Sabor) of the Kingdom of Slavonia was held in Zagreb in the year 1273, and the minutes and conclusions of this session have been preserved, while the earliest Sabor of the Kingdom of Croatia and Dalmatia dates to 1351.

Membership of Sabor was, for centuries, restricted to members of the nobility, until Sabor acquired the characteristics of a representative body in 1848, when its membership was extended beyond the previous aristocratic Assembly by adding 192 representatives elected regardless of their social status, although still subject to property and educational restrictions.

The Croatian language has been the language of the Croatian Parliament since 1847, when it replaced the previous official language, Latin.

The first free, multiparty democratic elections in Croatia were held in late spring 1990. On the basis of the electoral results, the democratic Croatian Parliament was constituted on 30 May 1990. Following the provisions of the new Croatian Constitution, enacted in December 1990, the newly-constituted Croatian Parliament consisted of two chambers: the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Counties. A referendum on the country's independence was held in May 1991, and resulted in the declaration of independence on 25 June 1991. Croatia's independence was recognized by the European Economic Community on 15 January 1992. Pursuant to constitutional amendments enacted in 2000, Croatia's semi-presidential system of government was replaced with a parliamentary system, while further amendments enacted in March 2001 abolished the Chamber of Counties, so the Croatian Parliament became unicameral.





## The Croatian parliamentary palace

The Baroque palace as it is today, where sessions of the Croatian Parliament are held, makes use of technological and architectural solutions adjusted to the needs of a modern legislative process. However, the very beginnings of the Croatian representative body, some hundred years ago, were very different.

Although Parliament has been convening its sessions in Zagreb since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, discussions relating to legislative work were held in the houses of city dignitaries, and the royal and bishop's courts. It was only in 1731, when a house was purchased on St. Marko's Square, being the main city square in those days, that the parliament assembly obtained a permanent venue. Besides the session hall, there were parliament offices, an archive, a judiciary court and an arms dump in the same building as well.

The Croatian Parliament convened its first session in the new building on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1737.

Over the next 150 years, the parliament building was frequently renovated. Some offices were occasionally shared with the City Government: thus the building became too small for parliamentary needs. Therefore, surrounding city mansions were purchased and, after complicated construction interventions, united into one single palace. In 1911 the complete construction work was finished and the Croatian Parliament became the sole owner of the building.

Due to the long process of construction and adaptation of the Parliament building, there is a certain mix of shapes and styles, in which one can notice elements of classicism, neo-renaissance and Art Nouveau, making this palace an important cultural monument.



## The Croatian Parliament and the citizens

The Croatian Parliament is committed to open and transparent engagement with citizens. The Citizens' Service provides answers to citizens' queries, petitions and letters. It organizes visits for citizens wishing to take an inside tour of the Parliament building or to attend plenary sessions, and provides information on the Croatian Parliament's history, history of the Parliament building and information on parliamentary work. It has developed, and carries out, educational programmes and assists schools in implementing the civic-education curriculum. The Citizens' Service of the Croatian Parliament successfully implements programmes such as Open Days of the Croatian Parliament, the programme of volunteering in the Parliament for final-year students studying law and political science, and simulation of Parliament's plenary session for various generations of scholars.

## The Croatian Parliament and the media

The Press Office informs the public about the work of Parliament and parliamentary committees and commissions. It organizes press conferences, issues announcements and notices on parliamentary work, and offers answers to journalists' questions. The Office manages media coverage of parliamentary work, as well as the process of providing press credentials for journalists. It is involved in the work of Sabor TV and edits and maintains Sabor's website.



## The Croatian Parliament in the EU accession process

The competences of the Croatian Parliament in the process of accession to the European Union related to both legal and political control over the integration process of Croatia. Since 2003, the Croatian Parliament has been monitoring the legal harmonization process and the compliance of Croatian legislation with European law.

The Croatian Parliament played an active role throughout the process, with broad responsibilities including harmonization of legislation, cooperation with other national parliaments and with the European Parliament, parliamentary monitoring of the negotiating process, communication with key stakeholders, consensus building and awareness-building activities.

The Constitution and Standing Orders of the Croatian Parliament provided for parliamentary control over

the Government's actions, while negotiations on the accession of Croatia to the Union were additionally covered by other relevant documents.

The Croatian Parliament participated in the preparation of Croatia for membership through its working bodies – the European Integration Committee and the National Committee for Monitoring Accession Negotiations – as well as through the Croatia-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee.

The essential characteristic of the Croatian accession process was a national consensus of all parliamentary political parties on Croatian membership in the European Union as a strategic objective and priority.

During the pre-accession period, the Croatian Parliament passed 683 laws to harmonize the Croatian legal system with European law.



# European affairs in the Croatian Parliament

European affairs in the Croatian Parliament imply the Parliament's participation in the EU decision-making process through the activities of the Croatian Parliament arising from Croatian Membership in the European Union.

The Croatian Parliament participates in European affairs on the basis of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, the Act on Co-operation of the Croatian Parliament and the Government of the Republic of Croatia in European Affairs, and the Standing Orders of the Croatian Parliament.

Parliament scrutinizes European affairs indirectly, by monitoring the activities of the Government in the institutions of the European Union, and directly, by exercising the powers conferred on national parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon. Political dialogue is also considered a form of direct conduct of European affairs.

The powers of the Croatian Parliament in European affairs are, as a rule, carried out by the European Affairs Committee, while the Foreign Affairs Committee is in charge of issues pertaining to Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Standing Orders of Parliament provide for the involvement of all committees and Members of Parliament in European affairs.

## Indirect Scrutiny of European Affairs

### a) Consideration of Croatian positions on EU documents

The annual EU scrutiny cycle begins with preliminary discussion on EU priorities held at the session of the European Affairs Committee, with the participation of the Speaker of Parliament and the Chairpersons of all parliamentary groups and committees. Preliminary discussion includes presentation of the Commission's annual work programme, usually by the Croatian Commissioner.

Following preliminary discussion, the European Affairs Committee invites all committees to give their proposals of draft EU documents and the Commission's initiatives to be scrutinized in the forthcoming year. Selected committees' proposals are included in the Work Programme for the Consideration of the Positions of Croatia adopted by the European Affairs Committee. The Government's positions on EU documents included in the Work Programme are received by the European Affairs Committee and forwarded to relevant sectoral committees. The committees may give their opinions on the positions of the Republic of Croatia. Based on those opinions, where available, the European Affairs Committee may adopt conclusions that serve as a basis for the Government's actions in the Council of the EU.

All documents directly transmitted to the Croatian Parliament by the institutions of the EU, in accordance with the provisions of Protocol 1 of the Trea-

ty of Lisbon on the role of national parliaments in the EU, are published on Parliament's website. In addition, Parliament's website hosts the "e-Doc" section, which acts as a repository of national documents relating to the Work Programme for the Consideration of the Positions of Croatia.

### **b) 'Hearings' on Council meetings**

The European Affairs Committee may invite relevant ministers to report to the Committee on meetings of the Council of the European Union and preparations underway for future meetings in given formats. Croatian positions for Council meetings are delivered to the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, who forwards them to the European Affairs Committee. The Chairman of the European Affairs Committee distributes these positions further, to relevant sectoral committees. Those committees are included in hearings, when held. Positions for all Council meetings are regularly sent to members of the European Affairs Committee.

### **c) European Council scrutiny**

Ahead of each European Council meeting, the Croatian Government informs the European Affairs Committee of the Annotated Draft Agenda of the meeting, Draft Conclusions and Croatian positions on items included in the Agenda. After the meeting of the European Council, the Government submits to the Croatian Parliament a written report on the meeting. The Prime Minister reports to the plenary at the be-

ginning of each year on all European Council meetings held during the previous year. Additionally, he may be invited by the Speaker of Parliament to report to the European Affairs Committee or to the plenary session immediately before or after any of the European Council meetings.

### **d) Appointment of Croatian candidates to EU institutions and bodies**

The European Affairs Committee must hold hearings of the candidates of Croatia to be appointed to institutions and bodies of the Union, namely the European Commission, the Court of Justice and the General Court, the Court of Auditors and the Management Committee of the European Investment Bank. As a result of the hearing, the Committee will adopt an opinion on the proposed candidate that the Government must take into consideration before submitting the proposal to the European Union.



## Direct scrutiny of European Affairs

### a) Subsidiarity checks

Subsidiarity checks of draft EU legislative acts in the Croatian Parliament may be initiated by any MP, committee or parliamentary party group. The subsidiarity check itself is conducted by the European Affairs Committee, which may adopt a Reasoned Opinion on behalf of the Croatian Parliament, thus determining a breach of the subsidiarity principle.

### b) Political dialogue

Any MP, parliamentary committee or party group may engage in political dialogue with the European Commission, through written exchange of opinions on any EU document or any other EU-related business. Opinions are transmitted via the secretariat of the European Affairs Committee.

### c) Participation in amendments to the treaties of the European Union

The Croatian Parliament is set to discuss proposed amendments to the treaties of the European Union and the positions of the Republic of Croatia in relation to the proposed amendments. Parliament must provide a conclusion on those Croatian positions and submit it to the Government.

### d) Participation in the implementation of passe-relle clauses

The Croatian Parliament may adopt a conclusion that opposes the proposed decisions to implement passe-relle clauses made available through Article 48 paragraph 7 of the Treaty on the European Union and Article 81 paragraph 3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, within six months of the delivery of the notification of such initiatives.



## European Affairs Committee

The European Affairs Committee consists of 17 Committee Members, including Chair and two Deputy Chairs. It is the only parliamentary committee that has two Deputy Chairpersons: one elected from the ranks of the parliamentary majority, and one from the opposition. The Chairperson of the Committee comes from within the ranks of the parliamentary majority.

The Committee streamlines EU-related documents through parliamentary procedure and coordinates

scrutiny of the positions of Croatia with competent parliamentary committees. It closely cooperates with other committees of Parliament that follow the policies of the EU, each within its own remit.

In practice, the Committee focuses primarily on indirect participation in the EU decision-making process.

The Plenary debates and decides on:	The European Affairs Committee:	Division of European affairs in the Croatian Parliament between the Plenary and the European Affairs Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister's reports on European Council meetings</li> <li>• Amendments to Treaties</li> <li>• Application of passerelle clauses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adopts the Work Programme for the Consideration of the Positions of the Republic of Croatia</li> <li>• considers the documents of the European Union and the positions of the Republic of Croatia, and may adopt conclusions</li> <li>• considers the reports of the Government on the meetings of the Council of the European Union</li> <li>• conducts subsidiarity checks</li> <li>• adopts a conclusion proposing the implementation of a regulatory-impact assessment procedure</li> <li>• takes part in the process of nominating Croatian candidates for EU institutions and bodies</li> <li>• monitors the alignment of the Croatian legal system with the EU acquis</li> <li>• participates in the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC)</li> </ul>	

# The Croatian Parliament and members of the European Parliament

The election of Members of the European Parliament from Croatia is governed by the Republic of Croatia European Parliamentary Elections Act.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> term of the European Parliament, 2019–2024, Croatia has 11 MEPs, with one more expected to take office upon completion of Brexit. They were elected in the elections for Members of the Europe-

an Parliament from Croatia held on 26 May 2019. Croatian Members of the European Parliament are invited to all meetings of the European Affairs Committee and may participate in meetings of all other committees of the Croatian Parliament.





## From recipient to provider of technical assistance

Since Croatia's accession to the European Union, the Croatian Parliament has been actively involved in providing technical assistance and capacity building for third countries' parliaments. Croatia firmly supports further enlargement of the Union and remains committed to assisting countries in the region in all stages of their accession processes, and countries of the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods.

Croatia has experience of the process of accession that is not only the most recent but also the most relevant, since Croatia acceded to the Union as the first country with experience of the Stabilization and Association Process. More importantly, a new methodology with opening and closing benchmarks for negotiating chapters was devised and used for the first time in Croatia's accession negotiations. The latter makes the experience of Croatian experts particularly valuable, since countries from the region with the ambition of joining the EU in the future face similar methodology in their accession negotiations.

Since 2014, the Croatian Parliament has participated in more than 50 technical-assistance activities, ranging from the participation of experts in various projects to organizing numerous study visits for Members and officials of Parliaments from South-East Europe and the Eastern Neighbourhood.

After Croatia's accession to the European Union, experts from the Croatian Parliament participated as short-term experts in several twinning projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo led by the Hungarian National Assembly. In addition, experts from the Croatian Parliament participated in parlia-

mentary capacity-building projects in Albania via an IPA-funded project and a twinning programme implemented by the Hellenic Parliament.

In all the technical activities conducted by experts from the Croatian Parliament, their contribution was rated highly valuable on the basis of the extensive experience of Croatian experts in a wide range of issues, from legal approximation and organizational work to inter-parliamentary cooperation, awareness building, cooperation with key stakeholders and negotiating techniques.

### **The Croatian Parliament as a junior partner in a Twinning project**

The Croatian Parliament participates as a junior partner in the implementation of the Twinning project "Empowerment and further support to the parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina in EU integration tasks" jointly with the Hungarian National Assembly and the Austrian Parliament. The project started in May 2019 and will run for two years.

The Project has a strategic mission to strengthen the capacities of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska and the Brčko District Assembly, as well as the Cantonal Assemblies, to exercise their EU-related tasks in the European Union accession process and implementation of the requirements of the EU-BH Stabilization and Association Agreement.

# The parliamentary dimension of the Croatian presidency of the Council of the European Union

Croatia holds the presidency of the Council of the European Union from January 1 to June 30, 2020, as the last member of the Trio it makes up with Romania and Finland.

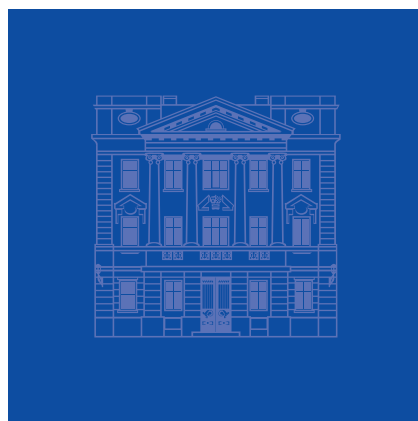
During the Croatian Presidency, the Croatian Parliament will organize and chair meetings within the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency as follows:

DATE	MEETING
19–20 January 2020	Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC) (Zagreb)
18–19 February 2020	Inter-parliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union (European Parliament, Brussels)
2–4 March 2020	Inter-parliamentary Conference on the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP) (Zagreb)
22–23 March 2020	6 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG) on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) (Zagreb)
24–26 May 2020	LXIII Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) (Zagreb)

All information on parliamentary meetings can be found at [www.parleu2020.sabor.hr](http://www.parleu2020.sabor.hr)



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