

Speech of the dean, Ivan Koprić, PhD, full professor with tenure on the Celebration of 248 Years of Continuous Work and the Day of the Faculty of Law in Zagreb, November 4, 2024, including a Report on the Work of the Faculty during the Academic Year 2023/2024

On the occasion of celebrating 248 years of continuous work and the Day of the Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb, it is an opportunity to reflect on the past academic year, highlight the main elements of the present situation, as well as the challenges and achievements we have reached. However, while celebrating our long tradition, we remain fully dedicated to the development and modernization of the Faculty.

At the beginning of the academic year 2023/2024, a new three-year term of office commenced for the dean and members of the faculty administration. The composition of the administration remained unchanged, consisting of the dean, four vice-deans, two heads of study centres, and the general secretary. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Faculty Council for entrusting us once again with the leadership of the faculty.

The Faculty of Law independently offers 21 study programmes, while eight more programmes are delivered in collaboration with other domestic and international higher education institutions. In total, there are 29 study programmes across all levels in the fields of law, social work, social policy, public administration, and public finance.

Within our study programmes, there are 5,336 students studying, including 743 at the postgraduate level, within two doctoral and eleven university specialist programmes. Including students in international mobility programmes, the total number is approximately 5,500 students across all levels, from undergraduate to doctoral.

The Faculty of Law also administers and participates in the delivery and/or management of several additional university specialist programmes, which has an impact not only the workload of the teaching staff but also the administrative departments, particularly the Student Administration and Accounting departments.

The total number of undergraduate students decreased by 7.5 percentage points compared to the previous year, reflecting our efforts to make the study programmes more passable based on analyses and recommendations provided by our internal working group to improve the undergraduate studies. At the same time, the number of exchange students within the Erasmus+ programme during the winter semester increased from 64 last year to 81 this year, a growth of 26.6 percentage points. The number of postgraduate students has risen too, by approximately 100 students, representing an increase of 14.3 percentage points.

In the integrated undergraduate and graduate law programmes, there are 2,947 students enrolled; 934 students are enrolled in the undergraduate and graduate study programmes within the Study Centre for Social Work, and 712 students are enrolled within the Study Centre for Public Administration and Public Finance.

This year, 44 more students enrolled in the integrated undergraduate and graduate law programme, representing an increase of 7.7 percentage points compared to the previous academic year. Additionally, last year we enrolled 50 more law students compared to 2022. Over the past two years, we have increased the number of first-year law students by 94, equivalent to an 18 percentage-point rise.

We have once again fully filled the enrolment quota for full-time undergraduate students in the Social Work study programme, while the enrolment quota for full-time law students was nearly fully filled with 98.84%.

We have already conducted an analysis of the weaker enrolment results for the undergraduate Public Administration study programme and the undergraduate Tax Studies programme. In the coming period, we will propose measures to the Faculty Council and other relevant bodies to restructure these study programmes, making them significantly more attractive for enrolment and studying.

Looking at all study programmes together, this year, we enrolled 11 more students in the first year of the integrated Law programme and the undergraduate programmes in Social Work, Public Administration, and Tax Studies compared to 2023. This means that enrolment quota was filled at the level of 84.84%, compared to 82.69% in 2023. This demonstrates the continuous improvement in enrolment results during the term of office of the current faculty administration, particularly regarding the study programme of law. Given the well-known trends of a declining number of high school graduates entering higher education and an increasing offer of study programmes in our country, we consider this year's enrolment results satisfactory.

These positive results have certainly been supported by our active promotion of our study programmes at the Presentation Event for Faculties of the University of Zagreb, as well as at the Education and Career Fair *Informativa* in Ljubljana. Additionally, we presented our study programmes in about twenty high schools across the country. Many of our professors, associates, and students participated in these efforts.

The second generation of students in the new Doctoral Study Programme in Legal Sciences includes 24 participants. In May 2024, the Faculty of Law held its first doctoral conference, followed by the second workshop with external participants in June, aiming at establishing strong connections between doctoral research the legal profession and practical needs. In the academic year 2023/2024, 17 students of the seventh generation were admitted to the Doctoral Programmes in Social Work and Social Policy.

In June 2024, the qualification standard *University Master of Laws* was officially registered in the Croatian Qualifications Framework, prepared and proposed by the Faculty of Law in Zagreb.

As of January 1, 2024, like all other higher education institutions, we issue digital diplomas and diploma supplements, additionally to their printed versions, to all students. This calendar year, 1,142 digital diplomas and 1,021 digital diploma supplements have been issued. In compliance

with the legal obligation to import diplomas obtained since 1984 into the digital registry of the Information System of Records in Higher Education (ISeVO), we have digitalized additional 12,844 diplomas.

The organization of classes has been a significant challenge for us since the earthquake in 2020. Due to the ongoing process and difficulties related to the comprehensive renovation of our buildings, we are currently conducting classes at fifteen locations. Part of the teaching staff and administrative services operate at additional sites, and our library collections are housed across three separate locations. Altogether, the faculty uses its own and rented premises at 25 locations throughout the city. Despite these logistical challenges, all faculty activities are running smoothly, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of everyone involved. Given the big number of different locations and developmental needs too, we continuously invest in IT equipment, teaching aids, and digitalization. We have reopened two reading rooms for students, one at Trg Republike Hrvatske 3 and another at Heinzelova 70a.

In addition to the Student Council and the Student Ombudsman, ten student organizations operate at the faculty, all of which receive financial support.

Students have been continuously supported by the Counselling Centre, which last academic year assisted 304 students during 574 hours of counselling, offered both on-site at Gundulićeva 10-12 and online. During the enrolment period, the Student Information Centre, run by students themselves, was operational again last academic year. We dedicate special care to our students with disabilities. Upon completion of the comprehensive renovation of our buildings, we will have fully resolved issues of physical accessibility. As for the time being, accessibility has been solved through the installation of a new elevator and other construction-technical solutions in the faculty building at Trg Republike Hrvatske 3. Diversity among our students is a priority, and the faculty has established fully functioning public integrity systems, primarily an ethical system and a system for protection of students against gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

We have continued to improve the quality of teaching and studies, ranging from e-learning and the application of other modern teaching methods in work with students, to academic writing and modernizing seminars as a tuition format. Practical instruction, as well as professional and field work, can be conducted with more than 700 entities, including courts, independent regulators, state and other public law bodies and organizations, law firms, insurance companies, social welfare and healthcare institutions, local and regional self-government units, civil society organizations, international organizations and their representations in Croatia.

Clinical teaching and engaged student research under the mentorship of instructors are organized through the Legal Clinic, Administrative Compass, and HOME – Centre for Social Support and Innovation.

The Legal Clinic, where around a hundred students provide free legal aid to citizens under the supervision of mentors, operates at Palmotićeva 30 in Zagreb every day, as well as through external clinics in 17 other cities across Croatia once a month. It deals annually with

approximately 1,500 cases. Through 70 cooperation agreements with cities, institutions, and associations, the Legal Clinic is actively involved in a variety of socially beneficial activities, such as educational workshops for citizens, round tables, conferences, and more. The Clinic collaborates most intensively with the Ministry of Justice, Administration, and Digital Transformation, the City of Zagreb, and the Financial Agency. These institutions are crucial for the financing of the Clinic, along with the Faculty's own resources invested in it.

For clinical teaching, practical work, addressing the issues of citizens and institutions, and conducting engaged student research, the Faculty has two additional formats: Administrative Compass, which has been active since 2022 and it is connected with the work of the Study Centre for Public Administration and Public Finance, and HOME – Centre for Social Support and Innovation, which has been active since this academic year and is linked to the work of the Study Centre for Social Work. Administrative Compass operates at Petrinjska 73.

During the previous academic year, the Faculty of Law opened 696 courses on the Merlin online learning platform. Teaching staff uploaded numerous teaching materials within these courses, and exams were organized and conducted through Merlin.

It is also worth noting that, in addition to participating in long-established international competitions such as the Willem C. Vis Arbitration Moot and the Central and Eastern European Law Moot Court, our students participated in several other moot court competitions in additional different areas of law, achieving notable results.

Besides 85 students, who have taken part in the Erasmus mobility programme and Erasmus professional internships abroad, an increase in outgoing mobility under the UNIC alliance has been achieved. Additionally, last academic year, 22 of our students took part in three Erasmus BIP (Blended Intensive Programmes) at the University of Deusto in Bilbao, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and at the University of Ljubljana.

During the previous academic year, we signed five new Erasmus+ agreements with law faculties and universities in Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Romania, and North Macedonia. In addition to over 100 Erasmus+ agreements, we also have 42 bilateral cooperation agreements with faculties around the world.

The Faculty organizes two summer schools: the Social Work and *Community Development Summer School* was held for the 11th time in Zagreb, September 9–10, 2024, and the Faculty's first summer school, titled *EU Climate Change Law* was held in Zagreb from July 1–12, 2024. Lifelong learning programmes are also regularly organized by the Faculty. In collaboration with the British Law Centre, we launched a new lifelong learning program, *Diploma in English Law and Legal Skills*, at the end of 2023.

During the last academic year, 13 doctoral dissertations and 69 specialist theses were defended at the Faculty. A total of 593 students graduated: 261 from the integrated law studies, 210 from

the Study Centre for Social Work, and 122 from the Study Centre for Public Administration and Public Finance.

In addition to numerous ongoing projects, during the academic year 2023/2024 11 new scientific research projects were started, including two projects under the JUST programme and two under Erasmus+ programme, whereas one project under the COST programme. A twelfth new project under the HORIZON programme has also been contracted and will begin this academic year.

The Faculty hosted 13 scientific conferences, 12 forums and workshops, 84 other scientific and professional events, as well as numerous guest lectures and visits by professors, officials of professional organizations, and experts from abroad.

The Faculty publishes seven international, well-indexed scientific and professional journals, which continued to be issued regularly during the last academic year. All published works are also accessible through the Croatian scientific journal database, Hrčak. Within the Faculty's publishing department, 15 books and textbooks were published last academic year, in addition to those published by our faculty members and associates with other publishers, including prominent international publishers. A total of 144 books and textbooks are available for purchase through our web shop.

The Faculty allocates its own funds to support scientific work of its teachers, associates and researchers, professional and scientific activities, as well as the training and education of other employees. These funds also support student activities and student associations, with the funding limits increased once again at the start of this academic year.

Our Library, with a collection of over 515,000 existing bibliographic units, has been enriched with new books and journals. This includes the purchase of 263 classical books and subscriptions to 70 journals, among them 50 international journals. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly in this digital age, we maintain subscriptions to five leading international databases and three domestic databases. The Faculty invests annually €80,000 to €100,000 in this segment of its teaching, scientific, and professional infrastructure.

Most of the library's collection is housed in the Borongaj campus, in a building awaiting demolition very soon to make way for the construction of the State Hydrometeorological Institute. A smaller portion of the collection is stored at the Zagreb Fairgrounds. Unfortunately, even the largest part of Croatia's legal bibliographic heritage, which includes over 10,000 units, is kept in these external facilities under conditions that are far from ideal.

The preparation of project documentation for the new Library building, as part of the reconstruction of the building at Trg Republike Hrvatske 3, is currently underway. Following a public procurement process, the contract for the project documentation was signed on August 20, 2024, with a consortium of bidders: INOVAPRO d.o.o. from Šestanovac and CAPTURA VENTI d.o.o. from Zagreb. The application for the construction permit is expected to be submitted during the winter semester of this academic year. The Ministry of Science, Education, and Youth

approved €150,000 for the project documentation this year, and we hope the remaining funds will be allocated in the 2025 budget year. According to initial estimates, the construction cost, without equipment, is projected at approximately €20 million.

The Faculty's new website, launched at the beginning of the academic year 2023/2024, contains hundreds of pages of information about the Faculty in both Croatian and English. It also includes nearly 500 pages dedicated to faculty staff and external collaborators, and over 1,000 pages of course description, most of which relate to the Faculty's university specialist and doctoral study programmes. During the previous academic year, the website recorded 1,350,000 visits, in other words 3,700 visits daily.

The Faculty creates interactive communication on social media through its profiles on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and platform X. During the previous academic year, the number of followers across these platforms increased by 9%. Additionally, the Legal Clinic and Administrative Compass maintain their own social media profiles.

We take pride in our Alumni community, which welcomed several hundred new members over the past academic year. The community now includes 880 alumni, a 16% increase compared to the previous year. During the same period, two new alumni sections were established: one for graduates of Social Work and the other for graduates of Public Administration.

In collaboration with members of the Alumni community, we are running the Mentorship Project. Based on the experiences of the first group of 42 law students, who participated in one-on-one mentorship with alumni working in various organizations and offices, we are launching a systematic and ongoing programme. This initiative aims to provide students with early and in-depth exposure to the realities of employment in various sectors, helping them make informed decisions about their career paths, workplaces, and types of professions, and easing their transition into the professional world of employment. In the coming days, we will also launch a digital mentorship platform, which has already been developed. This platform will extend the mentorship to students across all study programmes at the Faculty.

We plan to further intensify and improve the work of the Alumni community and our communication with former students. This will primarily involve establishing an Alumni Council and additional sections for postgraduate studies.

Two of our professors were recently promoted to the rank of professor emeritus and professor emerita. The Faculty currently employs: 44 full professors with tenure, 28 full professors in their first term, 52 associate professors, 16 assistant professors, 33 assistants and senior assistants, including those employed on projects, and 3 lecturers and senior lecturers. At the beginning of this academic year, professors Bouček, Rimac, and Šimonović retired. In the coming years, a significant number of faculty members, particularly full professors with permanent tenure, will also retire. To address this, we are working on solutions, including hiring more assistants. This will help turn the current inverted pyramid, where there is a disproportion between 143 employees with higher academic ranks and only 33 assistants. The Faculty's technical, administrative, and

support services employ 64 staff members. In total, the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, currently employs 240 people.

The ratio of employees with an academic rank to the rest of faculty employees is currently 176 to 64, which is worse compared to last year's ratio of 168 to 66. This is why we must face a big challenge of securing new positions in the administrative and technical services and ensuring appropriate salary coefficients for these employees. The capacity of the support services is insufficient, causing delays in many essential activities and different processes are carried out slower than they should be. Moreover, vacancies in the support and technical services remain unattractive, making it difficult to recruit qualified personnel for the Faculty.

We hope that the recently adopted Regulations on Organization, approved by the Senate of the University of Zagreb during its session in September 2024, will facilitate the recruitment of staff essential for modernizing the Faculty's support services and providing more suitable professional support for its work. This process will require the approval and support of Rector Professor Lakušić and Minister Professor Fuchs.

However, I must underline that obtaining approvals for new positions outlined in the Regulations on Organization is an extremely complex, lengthy, and difficult process. While approvals for replacements due to retirements or staff transitions to other workplaces are faster, they still leave the Faculty without necessary personnel for several months, leading to significant disruptions in the functioning of the support services. These delays have an impact on the smooth operation of key administrative processes.⁵

I would like to emphasize that we continue to successfully collaborate with the Croatian Parliament, the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, and all other courts, the Office of the President of the Republic, the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Office of the Prime Minister, various ministries and other public authorities, the State Attorney's Office of the Republic of Croatia, the Office of the Ombudsman and specialized ombuds offices, the Office of the Information Commissioner, the City of Zagreb, other cities and counties, as well as numerous public bodies, agencies, chambers, associations, and entities, including law firms and notary offices. We are grateful for this cooperation, which I believe is of great benefit to our country.

I would especially like to highlight our collaboration with the Rectorate of our University, all vice-rectors, and other faculties and academies of our university. This also extends to faculties of law in Split, Rijeka, and Osijek, as well as faculties of law in European Union member states, in neighbouring countries, and in numerous other academic institutions in the country and abroad. We are thankful to our partner for this cooperation and support.

I would also like to underline the support of relevant state bodies, the Ministry of Science, Education, and Youth, and the Central Agency for Financing and Contracting of EU Programmes and Projects, as well as the Government of the Republic of Croatia, for their role in the comprehensive renovation of the Faculty's buildings.

Our building at Trg Republike Hrvatske 3 is nearing completion of its renovation, which has been going on since July 2023.

Regarding the building at Nazorova 51, the Ministry of Science and Education granted approval in February 2024 to sign contracts with contractors for a comprehensive renovation. After public procurement procedures were completed, an initial meeting with the contractor's representative, the project manager, supervisory team, and lead designer was held on May 6, 2024, to introduce the contractor to the project. The construction work commenced on June 7, 2024, with an expected duration of 18 months.

For the building at Ćirilometodska 4, the public procurement process for construction works had to be repeated three times, as the bids we received significantly exceeded the estimated value. In the third procurement round, ten bids were submitted. Following the selection of the most favourable contractor, the Ministry of Science, Education, and Youth approved the contract in early June 2024. The contract was signed, and an introductory meeting to initiate the project was held on August 28, 2024. The renovation works began on September 5, 2024, and are expected to last 18 months.

Representatives of the companies involved in the comprehensive renovation process are with us today: MDK Građevinar, responsible for the renovation of the building at Trg Republike Hrvatske 3; Hedom, handling the works at Nazorova 51; Valakon and Projektgradnja Plus, undertaking the renovation at Ćirilometodska 4; and Sintegras, which serves as the project manager for the comprehensive renovation of all three buildings.

The comprehensive renovation of the building at Trg Republike Hrvatske 14, which we have been sharing with the Rectorate since ancient times, although it is owned by the University, has not yet begun. This is a significant concern for us as it complicates and increases the cost of the Faculty's operations due to the need to lease substitute premises. Approximately one-quarter of our total operational space is in this building. Not a day goes by without a faculty member, administrative staff member, or student asking me when the renovation will begin and end. We are now entering the fifth year since we left this building, which is our official headquarters, so I trust you understand the emotional connection we have with that building.

Since the academic year 2023/2024, the Faculty has been implementing numerous activities and measures foreseen in the three-year Action Plan as part of the Faculty's reaccreditation process. Since September 1, 2024, the newly established Office for Quality Assurance and E-Learning, staffed by two employees, has been fully operational.

At the end of this report, I am pleased to announce that we have begun preparations to celebrate our significant anniversary: 250 years, in other words two and a half centuries of continuous operation of the Faculty of Law. We will now present a new subsection of our website, where, over the next two years and beyond, information related to this anniversary will be published. This is also an opportunity to reveal the logo, designed by Studio Bestias and Mrs. Božidarka Brnas, available in both Croatian and English versions.

We have started filling the Media Library with materials about our Faculty as they appeared in the media, thanks to the dedication of our colleagues Dragutin Nemec and Krunoslav Fučkor. Work has also commenced on the conceptual framework for the Jubilee Monograph in both Croatian and English. The editors of this publication will be Professor Emeritus Dalibor Čepulo and Professor Dr. Siniša Zrinščak, with contributions from numerous other faculty members, associates, and employees. Other sections on the anniversary webpage will be enriched with content over the coming years. We also plan to engage actively our Alumni community in the anniversary celebrations.

I invite all our faculty members, associates, staff, external collaborators, members of the Alumni community, former students, and other interested individuals and friends to join us in celebrating two and a half centuries of continuous operation of the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb.

In my presentation last year, I outlined the key elements of the modernisation of the Faculty of Law, which were described in the programme I submitted to the Faculty Council as a dean candidate in February 2023. The following four key priorities of this process remain relevant: accelerated internationalization, comprehensive renovation of Faculty buildings, beginning of construction works for the new library building, and significant modernization of study programmes. I would like to add that a special working group has been established to prepare changes to the university integrated undergraduate and graduate study programme of law. Additional activities to modernise most of our study programmes will follow.

Regarding management and finances, in the academic year 2023/2024, we had a 21% increase in revenue compared to the previous year, but also a 69% increase in expenditures. This large discrepancy stems from several factors. Firstly, launching the comprehensive renovation of two additional buildings, where we ensure timely payment to contractors, while reimbursement of funds from the state budget is considerably slower. Secondly, there was a significant increase in salary coefficients starting March 1, 2024. And thirdly, costs related to relocation and higher rental expenses for temporary spaces used for classes as well as for housing faculty staff and some administrative services.

I cannot refrain from appealing to the relevant authorities to expedite the review of reimbursement requests for the costs of comprehensive renovations that we have submitted, as well as the timely payment following positive verification results.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests and friends, on the occasion of celebrating 248 years of continuous operation of the Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb, I extend my thanks to all of you for your presence and your support for the Faculty. Congratulations to all the award recipients for the well-deserved awards and recognitions they will receive today. I also wish a happy Faculty Day to all students, employees, members of our Alumni community, and former students!

In closing, I would like to announce that the four faculties of law from Split, Rijeka, Osijek, and Zagreb have organized a two-day scientific conference, titled Academic Freedoms, under the

dedicated engagement of the Chair of the Programme Committee, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ksenija Grubišić. The conference begins tomorrow, November 5, 2024, at 10 a.m., in the main reading room of the Croatian State Archives, located at Marulićev trg 21. You are all warmly invited.

I would also like to invite you to the reception that will take place in hall III at Trg Republike Hrvatske 3, immediately following today's ceremony.

Thank you all once again, and Salut!