

# uatuc info



Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia

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Dear readers,

Croatia has witnessed further turmoil in the Government, with the resignation of the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Economy Labour and Entrepreneurship Mr Damir Polančec, following a series of financial scandals in a number of public sector companies. Consultations for his successor are still going on, and so far there are not many candidates willing and ready to take this "hot potato" position which, beside corruption issues in public sector, brings responsibility for awaiting labour code amendments, restructuring and privatisation of shipbuilding sector and easing the crisis pressure on Croatian industry which is currently losing 160 jobs each day.

A battle is still being fought about the Labour Law. Although more than 15 months of work and negotiations have been put into drafting the amendments of the Labour Law, the Government has once again tried to bypass agreements reached with the trade unions, and has again sent its own proposal to the Parliament. Negotiations with employers still continue.

Trade unions condition the signing of the Social Agreement with the adoption of a set of demands, demanding new Croatia. If union demands are not met, workers will again be on the streets!

The long awaited privatization of Croatian shipbuilding industry has proved unsuccessful, with only two valid offers received in the first round. Metalworkers' Trade Union fears the second round will also be unsuccessful and demand restructuring first and only then privatization. Their demands received support from the EMF.

Since the beginning of 2009, around 48.000 jobs have been lost in Croatia, with the closure of around 25.000 jobs in the industry sector. It is expected that by the end of the year there will be 290.000 unemployed and more than 300.000 in 2010.

European Commission Progress Report reckons that Croatia has achieved some or substantial progress in most of the negotiation areas but at the same time warns that most of the crucial problems outlined in previous reports still remain. Government response to the crisis has been described as late and with doubtful impact on the competitiveness of the economy.

These are just some of the issues you can read about in this edition of the UATUC.

*Dijana Šobota*

Head of UATUC International Department

## SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP OR DEMONSTRATIONS?



**Zagreb, 30 October 2009** - On the initiative coming from the trade union side, on 21 October leaders of all five Croatian confederations met with Prime Minister Ms **Jadranka Kosor** in order to discuss trade union conditions for signing the so-called "Agreement on Social Partnership for Overcoming the Crisis", which Government has been trying to put on the agenda for a last few months. Set of demands short-term and long-term demands has been submitted to the Government. "If our joint demands will be accepted, we are ready to sign the social agreement this month", said UATUC President **Ana Knežević**, who recently took over rotating informal position of a coordinator of trade union confederations. "If not - we are going out on the streets."

Short-term demands include adoption of amendments to the Labour Law which will guarantee the improvement of the workers' position in practice (especially limiting possibilities of fixed-term employment and limiting the working week to 48 hours), implementation of urgent measures to solve the problem of internal insolvency in Croatian economy, immediate payment of all taxes and contributions which the state and the private capital owe to the state budget, in order to cancel the "crisis tax" on wages and pensions and to decrease VAT rate back to 22 percent as soon as possible, as well as the reduction of public spending and keeping state expenditure in 2010 budget within reasonable limits.

Long-term demands, which should be included in the text of the Agreement on Social Partnership, accompanied by fixing the timeline and actors responsible for their implementation, include establishment of new economic policy guided by the Nordic model, new tax policy which would put equal burden on work and on capital, as well as important changes in the salary, employment and agricultural policy, reforms in the healthcare, pension and education systems, reform of the public administration and efficient measures in combating the corruption.

While the trade unions are waiting for responses from respective ministries and Government as a whole, one of crucial points in this battle for new landscape of Croatian society and state, based on rule of law, market competitiveness and social solidarity, is being fought about the Labour Law. Although more than 15 months of work and negotiations have been put into drafting the amendments of the Labour Law which would harmonise it with the *acquis communautaire* of the EU, the Government has once again tried to bypass agreements reached with the trade unions, and has again sent its own proposal to the Parliament (first such attempt was made in February, but following the union pressure Law was finally withdrawn from the parliamentary procedure).

At the moment, there is still some time left for negotiations between the unions and employers' organisation. Although eager to adopt the new law by the end of November and as a condition to finally close negotiation chapter on social policy with the EU (original plan to do so was autumn 2009), the Government expressed readiness to propose further amendments during the parliamentary procedure, if social partners reach consensus before the voting takes place.

"If our joint demands will be accepted, we are ready to sign the social agreement this month. If not - we are going out on the streets." - UATUC President Ana Knežević

The Croatian Employers' Association responded by trying to make a bargain - they would accept trade union demands on fixed-term contracts, in return for changing the provisions on permanent employment contract which would make dismissals easier and cheaper. While UATUC resolutely declined such a bargain, standing on the position that provisions on fixed-term contract are part of harmonisation with EU, and the latter ones are not, and therefore cannot be negotiated simultaneously, some of other confederations are still not clear in their positions regarding this issue.<<

## MINISTER OF ECONOMY, LABOUR AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESIGNS DUE TO CORRUPTION SCANDAL

**Zagreb, 31 October 2009** - Following the series of financial scandals in a number of public sector companies that started to raise media interest since late summer, which came to its peak with recent arrest of the top management of key Croatian food producing company "Podravka", Minister of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship and Vice-Prime Minister **Damir Polančec** resigned. His resignation, at least because of the political responsibility his function implied, was expected by the media and demanded by all opposition and even some of the ruling coalition parties for the last two weeks.

The corruption investigation in "Podravka", in which Government still owns 25 percent of the shares, is being connected to the secret plan of the management to take over the company ownership. Media reported that the Office for Combating Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK) is investigating Minister Polančec's direct involvement in the secret plan.

Minister's resignation, which can be interpreted as taking political responsibility for this and other financial scandals in his sector, can be welcomed, but achieving true results in fighting corruption will require a court decision on criminal responsibility of those involved in this and other similar cases, no matter how high in the political hierarchy the investigation will lead. Although the Government is currently trying to persuade Croatian public and the European Commission of its readiness to seriously deal with the corruption problem, we are still waiting for major court decisions on criminal responsibility in such cases, which can be the only real confirmation that the real fight against corruption has started.

Regarding the possible successor of Minister Polančec, the consultations inside ruling party are still going on, and so far there are not many candidates willing and ready to take the position which, beside corruption issues in public sector, brings responsibility for awaiting restructuring and privatisation of shipbuilding sector and easing the crisis pressure on Croatian industry which is currently losing 160 jobs each day.<<



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## UNEMPLOYMENT RISING UNTIL SPRING, REDUCTION OF WORKING WEEK FAILED

The entrepreneurs are frightened, and they will not employ new workers immediately, even if their business starts going better

**Zagreb, 26 October 2009** - Since the beginning of 2009, around 48 thousand jobs have been lost in Croatia. Croatian Employment Service is expecting registered unemployment of around 290.000 until the end of the year, which would mean the increase of 31 000 since the beginning of October. In 2010 the registered unemployment is expected to reach above 300 000.

The crisis has caused the closure of around 25 000 jobs in the industry sector, which is 10 percent of sector's employment. Tourism also lost 10 percent, and building industry around 7 percent of its job places.

The economic experts and analysts agree that labour market reacted to the crisis slower than the financial market, and therefore recovery will also be slower. "The entrepreneurs are frightened, and they will not employ new workers immediately, even if their business starts going better", say the analysts.

At the same time, the Law on the reduction of the work week, adopted in August, but not in the form and content that was proposed by the UATUC and Croatian Employers' Association, failed so far to produce any results whatsoever.

The UATUC warning that the state subsidy for "Friday off", in the way it was established by the Law, will not be attractive for the employers turned out to be true. Since mid-August until mid-October Croatian Employment Service has received only three applications for subsidies, out of which only one was approved, and that one coming from the commerce company employing only seven workers.

Employers confirm that the eligibility criteria, of which we wrote in last edition, for the subsidy are too rigid, and that the Law was adopted too late. However, Croatian Employment Service still believes that the subsidy will eventually raise interest among employers and that more applications will follow soon.

"The result is that 250 million Kuna (approx. 35 million Euros) provided by the state budget for this subsidy is not being used. The Law is so complicated that the companies which need help the most are not able to apply for subsidy", said Ivan Tomac UATUC Vice-President for industry sector.<<

## CROATIAN SHIPYARDS WAITING FOR THE SECOND TENDER



**Zagreb, 22 October 2009** - The tender for privatization of six state-owned shipyards, based on the model agreed with the European Commission and published in August, resulted with only two valid offers, for only two shipyards. One of the two offers assumed the abandonment of shipbuilding activity after restructuring, and the other one, although taken as valid, failed to meet the tender condition to provide funds for at least 40 percent of the restructuring costs. In both cases, price offered was 1 Kuna. It seems that both offers will be declined.

Minister of Economy **Damir Polančec** announced publishing the second tender in few weeks, which would offer more favourable terms in relation to the share of shipyards' debts that potential buyers will need to take over with the company. Total debts of the state-owned shipbuilding industry are estimated to 12 billion Kuna (around 1.7 billion euro), out of which 8 billion is covered with the state warranties. Commenting earlier on trade union demands for postponing the privatisation for better economic times than this, Polančec said that the global crisis is just an additional reason for privatisation, since state budget is not capable to continue spending 1.5 billion Kuna on shipyards annually as it was the case in previous years (400 million Kuna in subventions and 1.1 million in business losses covered by the state).

At the same time, the Metalworkers' Trade Union of Croatia (SMH) organised signing of petition for saving the Croatian shipbuilding industry, asking from the Croatian Government to demand from the European Commission the postponement of the second round of privatisation, in order to get time for better preparation of the second tender. In the meantime, metalworkers are asking from the Government and Ministry of Economy to ensure normal production activity and payment of the salaries for workers in state-owned shipyards, since most of them are currently facing liquidity problems due to halt in issuing state warranties for already signed order contracts. The UATUC Presidency gave its full support to the activities of SMH and declared its readiness to be actively included in further actions aimed at saving shipbuilding industry.

During a week from 7 to 15 October petition was signed by 30 000 union members and citizens and was finally handed to Prime Minister **Jadranka Kosor** during a meeting in the Government premises with SMH Acting President **Vedran Dragičević** and shop stewards from three shipyards.

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"Trade unions will not allow bankruptcy of a single shipyard, for that would mean economic breakdown and bankruptcy of Croatia", said SMH President Vedran Dragičević on the protest demonstrations organized in shipyard "3. maj" in Rijeka on 22 October, which gathered around 3 000 shipyard workers, as well as their retired colleagues and other citizens.

On the meeting held in "Brodosplit shipyard" in Split on 23 October, representatives from three unions active in state-owned shipyards agreed on joint position towards the Government, management and potential buyers, as well as on organising joint union actions if needed. Shipyard unions believe that second tender will also fail, and that shipyard should be restructured first and only then privatised.

Support for demands of Croatian trade unions came from the European Metalworkers' Federation. EMF General Secretary Peter Scherrer, following the meeting with Vedran

"Trade unions will not allow bankruptcy of a single shipyard, for that would mean economic breakdown and bankruptcy of Croatia" - SMH President Vedran Dragičević



Dragičević, expressed support for all trade union activities undertaken by SMH with the aim of saving Croatian shipyards and promised that EMF will make the voice of Croatian metalworkers heard in Brussels and European institutions. Although many countries faced similar problems in this sector, Scherrer pointed out that Croatian shipbuilding is in specific situation due to the fact that it is a key industry in national metal sector and its destruction would also mean the destruction of about two thousand small companies which employ additional 40 thousand workers. <<



## SEAFARERS AND HEALTH SERVICE UNIONS LEFT UATUC

Zagreb, 22 October 2009 - In the course of one month two unions - Seafarers' Union of Croatia and Autonomous Trade Union of Health Care and Social Protection Service of Croatia - have left the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia.

Autonomous Trade Union of Health Care and Social Protection Service (SSZSSH) announced its leave

from the confederation and affiliation to the Association of Croatian Unions (Matica) on the 22 September. The reasons for this decision lay in quintessential and day-to-day discrepancies between SSZSSH and UATUC, mostly caused by the inability of formulating joint positions inside the confederation gathering both industrial and public sector unions, said **Spomenka Abveršek**, SSZSSH President and until this decision UATUC Vice-President for public sector. SSZSSH is expecting to better represent the interests of its members inside the Association of Croatian Unions whose members are predominantly the public sector unions.

The Seafarers' Unions of Croatia (SPH) made its decision on leaving the confederation on the Main Board meeting on 21 October. The main reason for leaving being the dissatisfaction with inefficiency of the trade union movement, SPH decided to stay outside any confederation by now, while participating in activities of UATUC and affiliated unions whenever they recognize their interests in them. <<

## SPLIT IRONWORKS AGONY CONTINUES

**Split, 21 October 2009** - Although the hunger strike started by shop stewards in Split Ironworks in late August ended few days later after the meeting with the Prime Minister, on which they were promised payment of due wages and finding permanent solution for the company until the

end of October, it seems that agony of one of the two remaining large ironwork plants in Croatia and its workers is far from over.

Company's current owner, Polish Zlomrex, of which we wrote in the last edition of the UATUC Info, whose overall business performance in 2008 was poor, has brought Split Ironworks into debt, which caused blocking of company's account and suspending all production in mid-April. At the same time, Zlomrex failed to pay salaries and stopped all communication with workers, which urged workers' representatives to demand termination of the privatisation contract and finding a new owner which would restart production process.

In early September, English fund Carlson Private Equity Limited bought 95.86 percent of shares from Zlomrex, but the Ministry of Economy declined its offer for takeover of the company. Although no details were published, the union representatives stated that Carlson's offer failed to fulfil workers' demands for restarting the production and saving the jobs.

Following these events and not satisfied with the Government's efforts to save the company, four shop stewards re-started hunger strike on 19 October, this time in front of the Ministry of Economy building in Zagreb, and 20 workers inside the plant joined them this time as well. Although the management tried to stop workers from entering the plant, they managed to occupy the meeting hall and said to stay there until they receive written guarantees that privatisation contract with Zlomrex will be terminated, production restarted and full salaries paid instead of minimal ones they were promised earlier.

However, the same day Ministry of Economy declared that agreement has been reached with Zlomrex on conditions of terminating the privatisation agreement and that the search for a new "strategic partner" has started. After the meeting with the Minister, workers' representatives claimed they were satisfied and aware that it was the most what was possible to achieve at the moment. On 21 October at workers' assembly it was decided to end hunger strike and give Government deadline to find new partner until 1 January 2010. Workers also stated they expected a meeting with the President of Croatian Privatisation Fund, as soon as Zlomrex returns its company shares, in order to discuss the "adequate salary" and urgent steps to restart the production. <<



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2009 PROGRESS REPORT FOR CROATIA



**Zagreb, 14 October 2008** - 2009 Progress Report for Croatia, which the European Commission published as a part of its Enlargement Package on 14 October, in its overall tone and content resembles greatly to the last year's one. Commission reckons that Croatia has achieved some or substantial progress in most of the negotiation areas but at the same time warns that most of the crucial problems outlined in previous reports still remain.

Until October 2009 Croatia has opened 28 and provisionally closed 12 out of total 35 negotiation chapters. Due to the border dispute with Slovenia, which was holding

accession negotiations at halt from November 2008 until October this year, it is not possible to achieve timeline proposed by Commission last year and conclude negotiations by the end of 2009, but report states that they could be closed during 2010, provided Croatia meets all necessary conditions.

However, Commission also clearly states that problem with Slovenia was not the only reason for negotiations not progressing in line with the proposed roadmap, referring particularly to the opening of chapters on judiciary and fundamental rights and competition which have not progressed as planned. Moreover, the list of areas in which progress was unsatisfactory is basically the same as in last year's report, including reform of the judiciary and public administration, corruption and organised crime, minority rights including return of the refugees, war crime trials and cooperation with the ICTY.

The reform of public administration, which is one of the key areas of accession process, is still not receiving adequate political attention, the main problem being inefficiency, lack of professionalism and politicisation. Although report acknowledges some efforts in the reform of judiciary system, they have so far been mostly in the form of adopted documents which still need to be tested in practice. Levels of independence and professionalism of the judiciary are still far from satisfactory, with wide area of political influence still existing.

Situation is something better in the field of fight against corruption and organised crime, with most important progress seen in the fact that the Office for Combating Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK) has increased its activity and finally started to investigate high-level cases (one of them including a former minister) while first verdicts in some cases brought up by USKOK have been issued. However, corruption remains widely present, number of prosecutions remains low and the culture of political accountability for the corruption is still lacking.

Although Commission assesses that Croatia has coped with the global crisis relatively well, it can be thanked more to the monetary measures of the Croatian Central Bank than to the Government response, which is described as late and with doubtful impact on the competitiveness of the economy. Although macroeconomic stability has been preserved and strategic planning of economic policy slightly improved, many decisions in this field are still being made on an ad-hoc basis and Government's economic policy often lacks a clear mid-term orientation. Business environment experienced limited improvements while the labour market is still suffering from structural problems and mismatch between offer and demand.

Government response to crisis described as late and with doubtful impact on the competitiveness of economy.

Regarding workers' and trade union rights, report states that ability of trade unions to influence on Government's policies and decision making process has improved, which is not the opinion shared by Croatian trade unions, which are highly disaffected with the content of Government's antirecession measures as well as with the process of their formulation and adoption. The same can be said about rating the social dialogue in general, although report calls it "relatively well developed".

There has still been no progress in the amending the Labour Law, although the process was planned to be finished by autumn last year, says the report. <<



## START OF MASSIVE PUBLIC DISCONTENT OR A "TROJAN HORSE" IN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT?

**Zagreb, 16 September 2009** - Although consultations about joint demonstrations against the "crisis tax" and Government's incompetent dealing with the crisis started between Croatian trade union confederations already during summer, Croatian Trade Union Association (HUS) eventually decided to go with demonstrations independently.

Refusing to wait for agreement that would include entire Croatian trade union movement, at the beginning of September HUS announced a series of demonstrations lasting for one week, each day in different big city in Croatia - and not during weekend. Members of other confederations were invited to join the demonstrations, but HUS explicitly stated that their leaders will not be permitted to speak from the stage.

Starting on 9 September in Vinkovci, and ending on 15 September in Zagreb, the demonstrations were able to attract from few hundreds to few thousand citizens. Although HUS eventually judged demonstrations as a success, claiming it was a necessary first step in broader mobilisation of citizens discontent with the Government and its social and economics policy, it is doubtful if they produced any concrete result, except for a week of successive media coverage and TV appearances of HUS President **Ozren Matijašević**.

In the meanwhile, some of the other trade union leaders described the demonstrations as a "Trojan horse", backed up and secretly plotted with the Government, with a real purpose to blow up public discontent in a series of demonstrations which were from start deemed to fail in reaching their proclaimed goals. <<

## WORLD DAY FOR DECENT WORK



**Zagreb, 7 October 2009** - Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia and Independent Trade Unions of Croatia (NHS), two Croatian confederation affiliated to ITUC, jointly marked the World Day for Decent Work. In a letter sent to Prime Minister **Jadranka Kosor**, UATUC and NHS asked for support in defending the dignity of work and of the workers, through planned amendments of the Labour Law.

Reminding that as an ILO member Croatia is obliged to participate in fulfilling the ILO Decent Work Agenda, UATUC and NHS proposed that in the future the Government should be actively included in marking the World Day for Decent Work, thus contributing to raising awareness about the need to return the decency to the work of Croatian workers. It should be the aim of every government to secure the decent job for every worker and full respect of the workers' rights, says the letter signed by the UATUC President **Ana Knežević** and NHS President **Krešimir Sever**.

The letter to the Prime Minister was accompanied with 10 000 postcards, with pictures from 1st May parade and messages about the need to protect the dignity of Croatian workers, which were also sent to the addresses of Government Ministers, parliamentary clubs and Croatian Employers' Association.

The UATUC Women and Youth sections also joined marking the 7th October. The Women Section organized public event on the main square in Zagreb during which they warned to the fact that women are in average still paid 20 percent less than men, and consequently demanded a law that would stipulate that women pay all products and services 20 percent less. Women's work is underpaid, underestimated and humiliated, and women more often than men work in the grey economy, on fixed-term contracts and on low-paid jobs, without possibilities of professional development - says the leaflet which was distributed to citizens during the event.

In a joint protest letter sent to the Prime Minister, the UATUC Youth Section and NHS Youth Board reminded on the problems young people are facing on the labour market, their unemployment rate being almost double than that of general population, warning that pushing the most valuable potential of the society to the margins presents a threat for the development of democratic society and just globalisation, at the same time amplifying the serious demographic problems Croatia is facing. <<

- ▶ **7 October 2009** - In the interval of just few days, Croatian Prime Minister **Jadranka Kosor** received letters from both ETUC General Secretary John Monks and ITUC General Secretary **Guy Ryder** expressing their concerns about the announcements of Croatian Government to introduce further liberalisation and flexibilisation through the new Labour Law. While John Monks was especially concerned about the provisions on working time and fixed-term contracts, Guy Ryder, in addition, also emphasized the lack of Government's effort in continuing the ratification of the important ILO conventions.
- ▶ **15 October 2009** - Trade Union of the Employed in Agriculture, Food, Tobacco and Water Industries of Croatia (PPDIV) has submitted to the Constitutional Court a request for reviewing the constitutionality of the Law on the special tax on salaries, retirements and other income adopted in July this year. PPDIV has supported its request with 16 thousand signatures of its members. Later on, the same exercise was done by the Metalworkers' Trade Union of Croatia (SMH).
- ▶ **30-31 October 2009** - Two-day founding conference of the Youth Section of the Trade Union of Construction Industry of Croatia (SGH), which gathered 18 delegates from all parts of Croatia, was held in Zagreb. Reflecting on the fact that average membership age in the sector has increased to more than 50 years of age, SGH President **Mirko Štorga** stressed the importance of the active inclusion of young people in trade union work and structures, promising strong support for the work of the Youth Section and its five members Committee elected on the conference.
- ▶ **23 September 2009** - ILO Mission, headed by Mark Levin, Director of Sub-regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe, visited Zagreb to meet with representatives of trade union confederations and discuss current situation in Croatia as well as trade union view on the role of the ILO in Croatia, with the possibility of adoption of the Decent Work Country Programme for Croatia. Beside the UATUC, the meeting with the ILO Mission included representatives from Independent Trade Unions of Croatia, Association of Croatian Unions and Croatian Trade Union Association.
- ▶ **23-24 September 2009** - Two-day workshop "The impact of the crisis and the future of the work legislation in EU and SE Europe" organised by ETUI and the Centre for regional cooperation and European integration gathered 20 trade union legal experts from Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Croatia.
- ▶ **21 September 2009** - Commercial Trade Union of Croatia and Norwegian Trade Union of Employees in Commerce and Offices (West region) held a joint meeting of the Main Boards in Zagreb. Topics discussed included sharing experiences on organisation of unions and workers' rights in both countries.
- ▶ **18 September 2009** - At the initiative of the UATUC Women's Section, a seminar was organized on workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. The discussions touched the issues of legislation and practice in Croatia, the role of trade unions in prevention of discrimination and in protection. The seminar is part of the project „Together against discrimination at work place“, financed by the European Commission.
- ▶ **16-18 September 2009** - Continuing the joint project of LO Norway and UATUC, the three-day seminar on communication in the trade unions was held in Trogir. Ten participants from UATUC and affiliated unions had the opportunity to share Norwegian experiences on communication and publishing in trade unions and to discuss current and future UATUC activities in this field.

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDICATORS IN FIGURES**

GDP growth: -6,3%

Foreign debt: 40.8 billion EUR

Average annual inflation rate: 6,1%

Average net wage covers only 83.15% of the "trade union basket"

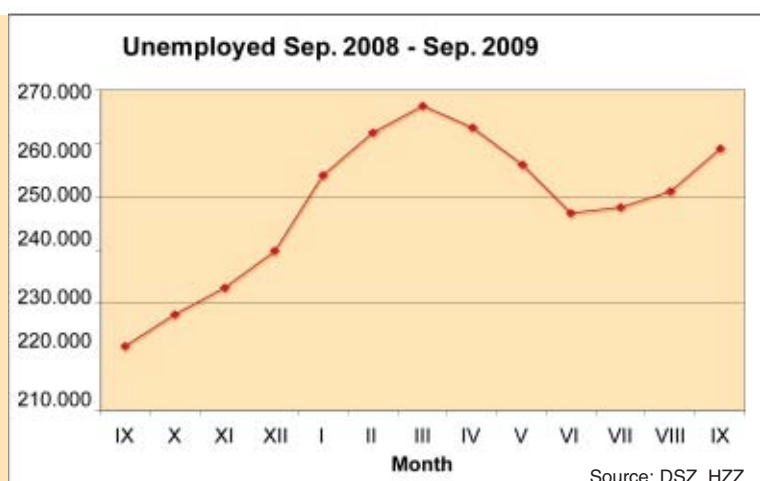
More 48.000 jobs have been lost in Croatia in 2009

**Figure of the month** - 14.7 % unemployment rate

**UNEMPLOYMENT**

In September 2009 there were 259.193 persons registered at the Croatian Employment Service so the unemployment rate in this month was 14.7 percent. In September 2009 the Croatian Employment Service registered 36.976 unemployed persons more than as compared to same month last year. Unemployment as compared to September 2008 has been increased by 16.6 percent.

The greatest loss of jobs has been registered in industry. In September, processing industry in Croatia employed 227.384 people, which is 26.800 less than in September 2008.



*Together we are stronger*



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