

Published in Croatian Weekly Magazine **Nacional**. August 24, 2010 (Page 26-27)  
(By Zrinka Ferina, Photo: NCL)

**Politics**

## **QUALITY OF CROATIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM RECOGNIZED**

**AMERICA'S NEWSWEEK** has ranked Croatia No. 22 on its list of best countries in education. Former Minister of Education Dragan Primorac commented for **Nacional** on this high ranking

### **THE GRADES AWARDED TO THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM MAKE ME PROUD**



**SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM REFORM** Dragan Primorac, former Minister of Science, Education and Sports says that the Newsweek survey results have provided strong encouragement for his future work.

"I have achieved many things in my life, most prestigious international scientific journals have published my articles, but nothing so far has motivated me as strongly as the recently published Newsweek research", says Dragan Primorac about the distinguished magazine's survey "The World's Best Countries in Health, Education, Economy, Politics and Quality Of Life" which ranked Croatian education No. 22 in the world. Croatia also ranked 32 through 34 in all other categories, reaching an overall rank of 28 among world countries. The credit for such a high score of Croatia's education on the Newsweek's list goes primarily to Dragan Primorac, former Minister of Science, Education and Sports, and a series of measures taken by him for the reform of Croatia's educational system.

**HE HIMSELF POINTS OUT:** "It is a result which makes me proud, it is an honor to the entire nation and all the members of my team, as there are a great many number of those whose names will not appear in the media, but who believed in my reforms, though there were many more of those who believed that neither Bologna nor the State School Leaving Examination would ever become a reality. That's why we just need to keep walking that road and there is no fear for Croatia."

**NEWSWEEK RESEARCH** was conducted by prominent scientists, including a Nobel laureate, and Croatia's 22nd place positions it ahead of countries such as USA, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Israel. "This is the confirmation that we have achieved the goal we set before us six years ago when we said that we would be the most competitive educational system in Europe. There we are, with only Austria sharing this rank with us" Primorac says.

During his term of office, from 2004 through 2009, the Ministry invested 4.4 billion kuna in the educational system and additional 3 billion in campuses construction. Total investments in educational systems reached one billion euro in the period. "In parallel with the upgrading of the entire educational system we also created some 10,000 new jobs and built 278 new schools, while more than 161 are under construction. The Free Textbooks Program we initiated was also a part of the big picture," says Dragan Primorac, the very program which triggered his resignation as the benefit of free textbooks for every schoolchild was discontinued. It made him, in 2009, the first minister ever to resign in the history of Croatia, the resignation taking place at the very peak of his political career.

**PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT** segment of the reforms that resulted in such good Croatia's ranking by Newsweek, according to Primorac, is certainly the external evaluation of education. "Since 2006 students have been taking national exams in Croatia; this is an important milestone, as for the first time external evaluation in education was introduced, a prerequisite for implementation of the institute of the State School Leaving Examination. The State School Leaving Examination was finally introduced in 2007, after it had been waited for for 60 years", Primorac points out and adds that the State School Leaving Examination has put Croatia on the map of the world's most developed nations. "We are among the first countries where the entire system is run electronically, through e-Matrix, an application which currently contains about 100 million data," continues the former Minister of Science, Education and Sports, who, according to his words, at the beginning of his term in office had hard times getting data on schools, students, classes, grades, subjects. The State School Leaving Examination not only eliminated corruption, it also resulted in 30 million kuna cost reduction, while the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions increased significantly after its introduction. Unlike the situation in the past, when high school graduates were allowed to apply for entrance tests for only two faculties, today they can apply for ten faculties simultaneously, which gives each of them a chance for an academic career.

The methodology used in the Newsweek research includes the results of PISA testing, the program in which Croatia has been participating only since 2006, and which assesses the degree of knowledge and skills of 15 year old students, measuring also their general competences such as learning strategies, attitudes and beliefs, as well as their preparedness for lifelong learning. In the first PISA survey Croatian students outperformed students from 41 participating countries, ten of which being EU member countries.

**SPEAKING OF RANKING No. 22** by Newsweek, Dragan Primorac said that it carries a crucial political and economic message, because it tells where new technologies are easiest to implement, where it pays to invest, which country is endowed with sufficiently educated population. "Apart from possible massive improvements in health care, quality of life, political stability or economic dynamics, nothing can

affect more favorably the inflow of foreign investment and the perception of Croatia as a serious nation than the results published by Newsweek. Our educational strategy was based on the best experiences of the Croatian educational tradition, as well as on the best practices known in the world today: Canada, America, Israel, Finland. The basic message is - if you set your goals high and you know where you are heading, there's no way it will not happen. Being a small nation, we just have to be twice as good if we are to be competitive in such a huge market."

When asked whether he sees the Newsweek survey as an encouragement for him to take up the politics actively once again, he says: "I hold a teaching position as adjunct assistant professor at Penn State University in the United States. I have a chance to directly transfer all this knowledge to the Croatian educational system as a teacher at the Medical schools in Osijek and Split. And one of the biggest challenges is a new teaching program in Split, where we educate students to obtain master's degree in forensic science. Wherever I may be, I will make my contributions to the educational and scientific community, but I currently live my life between Croatia, America and Israel. In Israel I have close relationship with a good friend, Prime Minister Netanyahu's. Furthermore, there are several projects that are launched in Croatia and those are my true challenges at present. However, I'll always be nearby - at the disposal of my successor as much as possible, just as all my knowledge and experience are always at full disposal of the Prime Minister and the President.



**THE WORLD'S BEST COUNTRIES** Newsweek has published the results of the survey "The World's Best Countries in Health, Education, Economy, Politics and Quality Of Life"; Croatia's overall rank was 28.

My advantage is that I have always regarded education as a nonpartisan issue, something that is important for the sake of children, yours and mine just alike. I have never allowed any calculations about that. It is a matter of national prosperity and the Newsweek research bears witness to that in the best possible way." **Copyright NACIONAL 2010**