

Croatia: MEPs regret Church-led referendum on marriage

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On 1 December, Croatian citizens will be called to vote on whether to alter the constitution to define marriage as 'matrimony between a man and a woman'. Although family law, including marriage, remains the exclusive competence of Member States, Members of the European Parliament regret the initiative designed to prevent future legalisation of same-sex marriages.

The referendum was initiated by Catholic lobby group 'In the Name of the Family'. The group's petition gathered over 700,000 signatures.

Although the government agreed to a referendum, officials including President Ivo Josipović, Prime Minister Zoran Milanović and Minister of Foreign Affairs Vesna Pusić have expressed their concern and said they would vote against a restrictive definition of marriage.

Opponents of equality have used referendums since the 1990s to limit the rights of LGBT people, especially in the USA. They have traditionally mobilised enough human and financial resources to ensure outcomes reflect their views.

MEPs regret the initiative, which creates a non-inclusive type of democracy by asking a majority to decide about the rights of a minority.

Croatian Member of the European Parliament Sandra Petrović Jakovina MEP reacted: "It is shameful that the first citizen's initiative of my home country is one which seeks to limit other people's rights."

"However, I am very glad our President, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs said they would vote 'No' in this referendum. I certainly hope that the sensible majority will stand up for the rights of minorities, and that the referendum will be rejected in the end."

Nikola Vuljanić, another Croatian MEP, continued: "I am concerned about this referendum which threatens to put minorities in a less favourable position than they currently enjoy."

"Of course, this referendum is organised within the remit of the law. But the fact that it is legal does not mean it is just. Putting issues of basic human rights to vote is a very dangerous move."

Ulrike Lunacek MEP, Co-President of the Intergroup on LGBT rights, concluded: "Croatia has come a long way in recognising minorities and their rights. I have no doubt that, whatever the outcome of this referendum, equality and justice will prevail in the end."

Source: [*The European Parliament's Intergroup on LGBT Rights*](#)

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