

Dear president Joggi, dear colleagues and friends, dear guests - welcome to Croatia and Istria, the most touristic developed region in Croatia.

It is my pleasure to welcome you in behalf of the Croatian Paraplegic and Tetraplegic Association and express our great joy that we are in position to host the Fourth Congress of the European Spinal Cord Injury Federation.

We are happy that this congress is organised in regular tourist environment, in a tourist object that organise congresses too. Accessibility of this hotel was the crucial for our application for the congress.

HUPT is relatively young organisation - we were founded just nine years ago - however we hope that our efforts show that we managed to be successful in various issues that are important for people with disability in Croatia; particularly for persons with spinal cord injury.

HUPT's activity is based on independent living philosophy and social model of disability. We are cooperating with various organisations and institutions in Croatia and common interests of people with disability in Croatia we are trying to represent together with the Croatian umbrella organisation for people with disability - the Association of organisations of persons with disability of Croatia.

We think that is important to emphasise that Croatia signed and ratified the UN convention of rights of persons with disabilities as well the Facultative protocol. We are very happy and proud on this and we are expecting these days - after 20 countries ratified the Convention - that the President of Croatia will sign the Law on Convention which will put the implementation into active force.

We are aware that for equalising possibilities for persons with disability we still need to work hard and much, but one may feel that there many improvements in quality of life of people with disability.

We in HUPT consider our membership in ESCIF very important. Rehabilitation of persons with spinal cord injury in Croatia is inadequate and we have high expectations on our European policy statement on the treatment, rehabilitation and life-long care of people with spinal cord injury which we shall present to Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. We do not expect that they will refuse to accept it.

There are other issues which are important for persons with spinal cord injury and these issues are easier to solve in mutual cooperation. Countries which have higher standards of solving issues that consider people with spinal cord injury must serve as model for countries which do not have adequate treatment or rehabilitation. We all need to equalise standards for persons with SCI.

Cooperation between member counties, our mutual understanding, experiences and solidarity must bring clear results of our efforts.

I wish to all of us successful work, exchange a lot of experiences and also to enjoy in this beautiful part of Adriatic.