

The Zagreb Summit and Croatian Foreign Policy

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The policy of the six-parties Croatian coalition government, after the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections, opened the country and made possible a real transition from a nationalist post-communist impasse towards a democratic society. The response from the West was immediate and supportive showing that democracy is superior to the authoritarian rule. The idea of a summit of the European Union to be devoted to the development of the South-east European Region underwent several changes, from the idea of a "Balkan Summit" in the first place, subsequently turning to the idea of a "Western-Balkan Summit", to be eventually fixed as the "Zagreb Summit". The controversies were not only semantic: the idea of a Balkan summit opened the dilemma about the participants - who would be the participants. The aim of the European Union is to create a situation in which military conflict will become "unthinkable" and thereby to expand to South-east Europe the area of peace, stability, prosperity and freedom which the fifteen member states have created in the past fifty years. The Zagreb summit was called a "historic meeting": a meeting of this kind in the Croatian capital would have been unthinkable a year ago, since Croatia was isolated from the rest of Europe and alienated from much of the rest of the region. The Zagreb Summit was a turning point for the whole region and its future implementation will be a test for each country in the region.

Keywords: Zagreb Summit, EU, Croatia, transition, democracy.

1. Introduction

After the elections held on the 3rd of January 2000, Croatia approached a new phase in its development, both internal and external, which marked the rupture with a nine-year period of nationalist, authoritarian rule within the country and political isolation towards the international community. The new policy of the six-parties coalition government opened the country and made possible a real transition from a nationalist post-communist impasse towards a democratic society, open to the world and to its regional environment, Europe. The new policy of the Croatian democratic government was cheered abroad and Croatia, for a short while, became the "first good news" from the war-torn South-east European region. Not only the Croatian electorate rejected the rule of the nationalist party and its au-

thoritarianism, thus clearing the way for a real change of the collectivist society following the patterns of democratic development and building a democratically elected and controlled government.

The response from the West was immediate: the Croatian events were not only seen as a breakthrough with the almost one decade long period of wars, aggression, ethnic cleansing and civil strife, but as an encouragement and example for other societies in the region. Nationalism can be won on the ground of real democratic elections and democratic articulation of interests, showing that democracy is superior, in the long run, to any form of authoritarian rule and statism.

The European Union was the first to hail the changes that occurred in Croatia. The first foreign statesman to come to Croatia was the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, who brought the messages of support and friendship extended to the new Croatian leadership that overthrew

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nationalism, setting the pattern for a contagious propagation of democratic impulses throughout the region.

When France assumed the presidency of the European Union, time became ripe for a reevaluation of the political situation in the region. In Spring Croatian President Stipe Mesić visited France and on that occasion the French President launched, officially, the initiative of a summit of the European Union to be devoted to the development of the South-east European Region, i.e. the former Yugoslav political space. Gradually, the initiative materialised in the form of an EU summit to be held on the spot - in the capital of the country that marked the first score in withering away with nationalist rule. The idea of a summit underwent several changes, from the idea of a "Balkan Summit" in the first place, subsequently turning to the idea of a "Western-Balkan Summit", to be eventually fixed as the "Zagreb Summit". The controversies were not only semantic: the idea of a Balkan summit opened the dilemma about the participants - who would be the participants. The concept of a Balkan summit would have inevitably dragged also such countries as Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey and would have broadened the problems to be tackled at that meeting. The concept of a "Western-Balkan summit" caused a lot of discussions within Croatia, since the very notion of "Western Balkan" was disputed by some political forces that clearly rejected Croatia's Balkan identity and established the borders of the Balkan peninsula at the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, wrongly assuming that the Balkan is a geopolitical term from which modern Croatia want to dissociate. The old nationalist Government under President Tudjman, in fact, rejected Croatia's geographical location as being part of the Balkans, developing the theory that Croatia belongs to *Mittleuropa* - Middle Europe solely. During the election campaign the opposition force, and especially the Social-Democratic Party argued that Croatia's identity cannot be reduced only to the "*Mittleuropean*" side, but has to encompass also its Mediterranean and Balkan part; that is, Croatia is not solely a Middle European, but also a Mediterranean and a Balkan country.

2. "Zagreb Summit"

Eventually it was decided to name this summit as, simply, the "Zagreb Summit", eluding any geographical specification. All these dilemmas were, in a way, expressed in the opening speeches of the Croatian President and the Croatian Prime Minister at the Zagreb meeting. Despite the fact that Croatia accepts regional co-operation and is prepared for

continuous involvement in the creation of conditions for the establishment of quality relations between states, as a need and an expression of its own interests, too - "it does not want to become a captive of the region and thereby remain enclosed within its borders". Regional co-operation, in the view of the Croatian President, must not be an end in itself, but it must be just one of the steps on the "hopefully not too long road to the European Union". The Croatian view of the summit may be summarised in the final message of the Croatian President's speech: The Zagreb Summit was expected to lay out the clear-cut principles for the building of relations among the countries in the region, and to "send a clear message to the citizens of these countries that they are welcome to the Union - at the rate which they are capable of achieving, that is, individually, or in a regatta and not in a convoy".

The metaphor of the "regatta" versus the "convoy" approach was emphasised many times before and during the Zagreb Summit. This was reiterated by the Croatian Prime Minister Ivica Račan, who inverted the values of the regional-individual approach to the EU: while President Mesić started from the regional but concluded with the "regatta, and not convoy" metaphor, the departure was the principle of individual approach to the European Union accompanied with the determination to protect Croatia's territorial integrity, Prime Minister Račan pointed out that Croatia never forgets about her own share of responsibility for the stability and wellbeing of the region. Thus, Croatia will act as guarantor and factor of stability in the region, as a generator of good neighbourly relations, open for economic co-operation and joint action... "Croatia is a country combining the features of the Mediterranean, the Danube, Central and South-eastern Europe, the Pannonian plains and the rugged Dinara mountain chains". The term "Balkan" was omitted, but it was done, allegedly, for domestic purposes.

The Prime Minister's speech was not delivered at the very Summit, but immediately after it, in a ceremony marking the official launching of negotiations on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the European Union. Thus the Zagreb Summit ended not only with a final declaration, much debated during the preparations, but also with the start of negotiations between the EU and Croatia, becoming thus the most tangible result for Croatia. However, this was only the culmination of a process of coming near, dramatically accelerated by the parliamentary and presidential elections in Croatia in January and March 2000. However, it should not be forgotten that the EU Council of Ministers in 1997 established the

political and economic conditions for the development of bilateral relations with Croatia, that were labelled by the EU as the "Regional Approach". In 1999 the EU proposed a new Stabilisation and Association Process for the five countries of South-eastern Europe, including Croatia. The milestone of the 2000 change of government in Croatian politics and the new political climate offered the opportunity for a rapid progress in the relationship between Croatia and the European Union: the EU established an EU-Croatian Consultative Task Force, designed to provide Croatia with expertise and technical assistance in preparation for the stabilisation and association process. Furthermore, it upgraded the EC Office of the Special Envoy to a permanent Delegation of the European Commission. On May 24, 2000 the EU published a positive feasibility study on the opening of negotiations for a stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), and the EC adopted a recommendation to the Council on the opening of negotiations for an SAA with Croatia, with the idea that the SAA might provide a wide ranging co-operation and a guidance to a gradual approach of Croatia to the EU structures. As it was conceived in 1999, the SAA aims to provide the establishment of a framework for political dialogue and the promotion of economic and trade relations with the perspective of establishing a free trade area, including an extension of duty-free access to EU market for products for Croatia. The agreement also, as it was declared, aimed at providing a basis for co-operation in the field of justice and home affairs, and identify the "acquis communautaire" which Croatia will have to adopt in order to be able to effectively participate in the European Integration Process.

It is quite clear that the aim of the European Union is to create a situation in which military conflict will become "unthinkable" and thereby to expand to South-east Europe the area of peace, stability, prosperity and freedom which the fifteen member states have created in the past fifty years. The tailor-made stabilisation and association agreements intended, thus, to be vehicle for a more rapid approach of these countries to the EU, surmounting the difficulties and backwardness of these countries caused by the war.

The Zagreb Summit laid down precisely these foundations, as it was underlined in the opening address of the President of the European Commission Romano Prodi. The Zagreb summit was called a "historic meeting": a meeting of this kind in the Croatian capital would have been unthinkable a year ago, since Croatia was isolated from the rest of Europe and alienated from much of the rest of the region. The purpose of the Zagreb Summit, as Prodi put it, was to

launch a new phase of closer co-operation between the European Union and the individual countries of South-east Europe, based on the SAA process. But Prodi wanted also to state, for the record, that no one was suggesting to recreate the former Yugoslavia, and what they were talking about was building co-operation between independent sovereign countries, not only through the Stability Pact to which the EU is a major contributor.

But strengthening economic and political ties with the EU entails also commitments on the part of beneficiaries - including moving towards some of the obligations that lie at the heart of the EU. For this purpose, all "Balkan countries" - including Albania - should sign regional conventions among themselves, thus clarifying and spelling out the regional dimension of the Stabilisation and Associations Agreements.

3. EU Supports Regional Cooperation

The EU, it was said during the Summit, supports regional co-operation as a means of promoting stability, security and development. A strong and lasting commitment to regional co-operation by the South-Eastern European countries themselves is essential for overcoming the legacy of regional disintegration. That is why the EU wanted to help ensure the success of the Adriatic and Ionian initiative, and to welcome the admission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the Adriatic and Ionian Council. In fact, the recent events in Belgrade, the overturning of Slobodan Milošević from power came in the midst of the preparations of the Zagreb Summit, bringing new glimpses of hope. Although Croatia was adduced as the champion in democratisation, the EU hailed the new Yugoslav President Koštunica expecting from him to join the common efforts towards democracy and peace in the region.

French President Chirac, the promoter of this initiative, stressed that Europe expects much from a new regional political dialogue. The return of democracy must create new relations oriented towards stability and peace, and to create a new spirit which will bring about the reconciliation and the integration of this part of Europe into a common European home. As a result of the French Presidency of the European Union, the French negotiators insisted on three main messages: First, democracy, reconciliation and regional co-operation on the one hand, and, on the other, closer relations between each of the relevant countries and the European Union as a whole; Second, the democratic changes in Croatia and then in the FR of Yugoslavia pave the way for

reconciliation and regional co-operation, making possible a policy of good neighbourliness based on the negotiated settlement of disputes, respect for the rights of people belonging to minorities, respect for international obligations, including the co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, permanent settlement of the issue of refugees and displaced persons and respect for states' international borders, including the encouragement of the conclusion of regional arms control and reduction negotiations provided for in the Dayton Peace Agreement; Third, it also paves the way for all the region's countries to move closer to the European Union in the framework of the stabilisation and association process, including the announcement of the adoption of a new Community aid programme for the region known as CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Democratisation and Stabilisation), which has been allocated a total of 4.65 billion euros for the 2000-2006 period.

The final declaration reaffirms the prospective of the five countries of former Yugoslavia to accession, as it was offered by the European Union summit in Köln, in June 1999, and according to the accepted status of the states of the region as potential candidates for EU membership in accordance with the conclusions of the European Council in Feire, in June 2000. The final Declaration summarised the events in the region in four specific points:

First, the participants stated that the year 2000 began with democratic change in Croatia, following the presidential and legislative elections, and it continued with the victory of democratic forces in the FR of Yugoslavia in the elections of 24 September. This was labelled as a "movement", developing in the interest of all the countries in the region and offering them new prospects.

Second, the recent historic changes were perceived as opening the way for regional reconciliation and co-operation, enabling all the countries in the region to establish new relations, beneficial to all of them, for the stability of the region and peace and stability on the whole European continent. These changes give new impetus to a policy of good neighbourliness based on the negotiated settlement of disputes, respect for the rights of minorities, respect for international obligations, including with regard to the ICTY, a lasting resolution of the problem of refugees and displaced persons and respect for states' international borders. The aim of the European Union is disclosed, in this respect, to hold a second Regional Funding Conference at which the countries concerned should submit economic recovery and reform programmes.

Third, the Heads of state or government of the

five countries concerned solemnly undertook to establish between their countries regional co-operation agreements providing for a political dialogue, a regional free trade area and close co-operation in the field of justice and home affairs, in particular for the reinforcement of justice and the independence thereof, for combating organised crime, corruption, money laundering, illegal immigration, trafficking in human beings, etc. These agreement, as the Final Declaration made clear, will be incorporated in the stabilisation and association agreements as they are concluded with the European Union.

The central point of the Final Declaration is that rapprochement with the European Union will go hand in hand with this process of developing regional co-operation. To develop regional co-operation is hence a matter of priority.

Fourth, the European Union declared that the way is open now to all countries of the region to move closer to the European Union as part of the stabilisation and association process. Therefore the EU reiterated its wish to contribute to the consolidation of democracy and to give its resolute support to the process of reconciliation of the countries involved. As before, the stabilisation and association process is at the heart of the Union's policy towards the five countries concerned, taking into account the situation of each country. On the basis of the criteria and conditions defined by the Council on 29 April 1997 the Union proposes an individualised approach to each of these countries. The prospect of accession is offered on the basis of the provisions of the Treaty of the European Union, respect for the criteria defined at the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 and the progress made in implementing the stabilisation and association agreements, in particular on regional co-operation.

4. Final Declaration

The wording of the Final Declaration was subject of negotiations and differences of opinions, expressed during the preparations. The Croatian side, as host of the first European summit held outside the boundaries of the European Union, which in itself represents a precedent that confirms the importance attached to this initiative, insisted on the individual aspect of the "regatta". The participants of the other four countries also wanted to make the Final Declaration more "personal", and this resulted in an Annex to the Final Declaration, in which all five countries were mentioned individually. The Annex, indeed, analysed the stabilisation and association process on an individualised basis, and this was much to the satisfaction of the concerned countries.

As far as Croatia is concerned, the Union commended the scale of the efforts and the success of the reforms embarked upon since the start of the year 2000 by the country's authorities. These authorities were also commended because they enabled negotiations to be started for SAA, which the EU hoped would progress rapidly.

As far as Yugoslavia is concerned, the prospect of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement was now established in accordance with the invitation issued by the Council on October 9, 2000. A decision has been taken to set up a EU-FRY consultative task force, as in the former Croatian case, and, as well as in Croatian example, the Commission undertook to work on a feasibility study with a view to negotiating directives for a stabilisation and association agreement.

As far as Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, the Union called on the authorities of this country to continue their efforts on the basis of the progress already made, to enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to fulfil by the middle of 2001 all the conditions laid down in the "road map" drawn up last spring, so that the Commission can undertake a feasibility study.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia found itself ahead in the SAA process: the EU was initialling the first Stabilisation and Association Agreement on the very same day of the Zagreb Summit, and this marked an important stage in the implementation of the reforms carried out.

Albania - as the fifth country in the region - was commended also for the progress since the feasibility study conducted by the Commission, and it called on the country's leaders to continue their efforts, deciding to step up its co-operation and to spell out the reforms to be carried out, and to this end it has been agreed that a high level EU-Albania steering group will be set up. A report will also be submitted to the Council before the middle of 2001 in preparation for the negotiation of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

In this way, the Final Declaration really reflected an individualised approach as put in the Annex, although the accent put in the central part of the Final Declaration on the need to establish regional co-operation underlines the importance of both the aspects of the long march towards the European institutions. For Croatia, it was undoubtedly a welcome sign of appreciation made by the European Union and all the participants of the Zagreb Summit. First, it showed to the domestic public opinion that the new Government is "sailing" in the "regatta" at good wind speed, while the former Tudjman government only proclaimed its aim to join the European Union, but

was doing everything possible to preserve Croatia outside any form of substantial co-operation with Europe and the region, thus isolating the whole country from the Euro-Atlantic integration processes. Secondly, it showed the resolution of Croatia's new government to play an active role in the region, not being only a recipient and passive object of initiative launched by others. Croatia was perceived at this meeting as a factor of stability and a catalyst for change in the region, which was flattering but in the same time an obliging task to stay at the height of expectations. Third, the Summit and its Final Declaration was a boost for all pro-European forces within the country, limiting the force and scope of remaining nationalist relics, who lost further ground in their destruction of multicultural coexistence.

The Zagreb meeting received another sign of appreciation in the Statement of the European Union and the United States on South-east Europe, on December 18, 2000 in Washington. The EU-US Summit underlined the importance of the Zagreb Summit, giving full support to this process of reconciliation and regional co-operation, which offer new prospects for the countries in the region. Therefore the results of the Zagreb Summit were explicitly welcome. The Summit, as the Statement marks out, underlined the connection between the progress of new countries of the region towards democracy, the rule of law, regional reconciliation and co-operation, on the one hand, and the rapprochement of each of these countries with the European Union on the basis of an individual treatment, in the framework of the European Union's Stabilisation and Association Process, on the other hand. In this regard, the joint EU-US statement welcome the commitments undertaken by the five countries in the Zagreb declaration.

The Statement emphasised the importance of the Stability Pact for South-east Europe as a means to accelerate the integration of the region into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream, and called upon all states in the region to continue and intensify efforts to resolve bilateral differences and internal ethnic minority issues exclusively through peaceful, democratic dialogue, and to show full respect for international obligations including co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia.

Thus the Zagreb Summit became indeed a turning point for the whole region and its future implementation will be a test for each country in the region. For Croatia it was not only the conclusion of a period of reformulation of its foreign policy, but also a starting point for an accelerated accession to the European Union, of which the SAA is only the first, but very important step. ■