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*Croatia in her International Environment*

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**Croatian Foreign Policy:  
From State Building to the Regional Power**

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RADOVAN VUKADINOVIĆ

Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb

*Summary*

Within the theory of international relations, an opinion that the small countries almost do not have a foreign policy of their own, can often be heard. Croatian foreign policy in the short period of time went to long way of creating stable and useful relations with the world, which could promote Croatian national interest and ensure the peace, security and prosperity in this part of the world. Analysing relations with the neighbouring countries, the approaches of Europe, and strengthening the national security through international activities the author shows that Croatian foreign policy built a new model of relations and promotes itself as an important partner in new European relations.

Within the theory of international relations, an opinion that the small countries almost do not have a foreign policy of their own, can very often be heard. In some cases this is being explained due to the foreign affairs activities being performed on the lines of “action - reaction”, what, supposedly, automatically excludes the small countries from being independent creators of planned actions. According to these opinions, they may be nothing more but pure followers of the actions initiated by the powerful countries, with rare reactions that have the independent character, which usually do not have any international significance.

In other cases, this is being argued with the notion that the small countries are in the shadows of the activities of the great states, and that they are acting in the way that does not leave the impression of the existence of the pre-contemplated, independent activity in foreign policy. This is a reflection of the existing relations between the great and small countries, leaving the latter only with the possibility to acknowledge their existence within the international community by some symbolic moves. Even the crises that the small countries may be engulfed in are, in fact, the parts of the much grater plots, planned or performed on the levels of the powerful states. The possibility of treating the small country as an object is being pointed out as a permanent quality of their existence.

### *Do the small countries have a foreign policy?*

Such theories are often expressed by the statements that the small countries, within their conditionally set foreign activities, should primarily aim at solving of their existential questions. These would include:

- ensuring the access to the world markets,
- help in preservation of their national security.

If these, very narrow, views on foreign policies of the small countries would be implemented in case of the foreign policy of the Republic of Croatia, it could immediately be detected that, in this case, a very atypical situation is at issue. The Croatian foreign policy has been, from its beginnings<sup>1</sup> built as conscious, organised and politically coherent activity, aimed at achieving of a wide spectrum of foreign policy targets.

Within the process of creation of the state, the Croatian foreign policy has had several very complex tasks, which had to be accomplished in an interlinked process of forming of the state and its institutions, building of the foreign policy, diplomatic apparatus, and maintaining of its regular international activities, all simultaneously.

Due to the war, which has been forced upon Croatia, and the occupation of parts of its territory, one of the first tasks of the foreign policy was engagement in the efforts aimed against the Serbian aggression, and liberation of the occupied areas. This has called for a complex presenting and explaining of the newly developed situation in the territories of Croatia and ex-Yugoslavia on international stage - including constant fact presenting, aid soliciting, and finally, winning the battle of international recognition of Croatia, and successful incorporation to the structures of the international community. It may be said that by this, the state building process on internal level has been completed, while on the international level, after the recognition, the opportunity to form a new schedule of foreign policy priorities and actions has been opened, as well as the possibilities to seek its place within the circle of the other sovereign states, using the new instruments and through more organised efforts.

In the second phase, using its presence in the international institutions, Croatia has initiated actions for overcoming of the war situation, liberation and peaceful re-integration of the occupied areas into the state territory. This was all happening parallel with strengthening of international ties and relations, especially with the countries that have confirmed their friendly attitude towards Croatia, and which have become the allies in Croatian fight for statehood. These countries have also become the main protagonists of the peaceful solution of the crisis in the territories of ex-Yugoslavia.

<sup>1</sup>On beginnings of Croatian foreign policy, its principles and goals, see: R. Vukadinović, "Croatian Foreign Policy", *Balkan Forum*, Vol I., No 2., pp. 163-187.

In third phase, Croatia could concentrate on development of its relations with the neighbouring countries, on establishment of the first connections with European institutions, and finally, on search for the ways for wider economic co-operation with the world, with simultaneous strengthening of its national security.

This six years long process, divided in mentioned three phases, has confirmed, by dynamics and substance of activities, as well as by results achieved, that this was a case of active, well contemplated political action that has been strongly directed towards the international factors and international community. This action has clearly had its starting point in a firm determination to build an independent and sovereign Croatian state that is to cut all of its links with the past and with the former state, and that will, primarily through the foreign policy, build its position within the international community.

Simultaneously with these activities, the foreign policy apparatus has been built and developed. Without the previous experiences on international level, this task has not been an easy one either. It called for additional efforts in recruitment of the staff, their education and training in complex issues of international relations.

Furthermore, although this tremendous effort has not been undertaken in normal conditions of peace, nevertheless, it has produced significant results. Today, Croatia is an equal member of international community: from the UN<sup>2</sup> to the European regional organisations. By its foreign policy it has succeeded not only to clarify its position, both in war and in peace, its needs and claims, but has made friends and allies as well, seeking with them the paths for overcoming of the crisis.

From almost empty handed people that have opted for creation of their state, back in 1990, through the painful process of state building in war conditions, liberation of the country and moving towards a normal life, Croatian foreign policy has considerably helped to cross the road from fighting for independent state to the situation where Croatia is nowadays being considered as a regional power in South-Eastern Europe.

### *Croatian foreign policy in action*

The activities of the Croatian foreign policy in the times of normalisation of relations in the areas of former Yugoslavia may be viewed in the frames of three concentric circles, which are at the same time the focus of its foreign policy:

<sup>2</sup>On almost all aspects of Croatian activity, see: Croatia and the United Nations, Zagreb, 1996.

- relations with the neighbouring countries,
- seeking the approaches to Europe,
- strengthening the national security through international activities.

1. *Italian policy* had no clearly defined position regarding the fall apart of former Yugoslavia. This has enabled certain political forces to re-open some questions that have been already solved after the World War II. By not hurrying with establishment of tighter connections with Croatia, official Italian policy has given additional motivation and space to the Italian Right to open the questions of revision of the Osim Treaties and the position of Italian minority in Croatia. These statements may be backed with the fact that the media have transmitted statements made by Serbian nationalists saying that by break-apart of Yugoslavia the Osim Treaties are being annulled, and that the agreement may not be delegated to the states successors of the ex-Yugoslavia.

Only when Croatian overall position has gained strength, and when the European Union has started to advocate some Croatian positions, the official Italian policy has started to take a more positive approach to Croatia. The agreement regarding minorities has been reached, the question of former Italian properties has been solved, and Italy has supported the acceptance of Croatia to the Council of Europe. At the same time, commercial channels have been considerably developed, as well as the traffic and tourism. In the overall Croatian import and export to and from Europe, Italy is very highly positioned<sup>3</sup>. At the moment, within this dynamics of relations, which are being further improved, these relations may be described as normal bilateral relations that are not encumbered by any significant problems.

For further Croatian approach to Europe, Italy will be very important. Italian support to Croatian economic, political and military aspirations for entering the European institutions will depend on development of bilateral relations. The country which has a direct border with Croatia, and that has well developed bilateral relations, will certainly have the interest and the argumentation to assist the Croatian joining of the European institutions, and thus further simplify mutual communication.

Therefore Croatian foreign policy must continue to carefully build its relations with Italy, bearing in mind constantly that this is the only EU member on Croatian borders, and the one that, in its approach and assessment of developments within Croatia, has special possibilities for giving the true picture.

<sup>3</sup>Italy accounts for some 20% of Croatian foreign trade, and is its trade partner No. 1 at this moment.

2. With *Slovenia*, Croatia is sharing the parallel beginning of state building process and the joint attempts to form a confederation in the territories of ex-Yugoslavia. After that, their ways went in different directions. JNA has peacefully withdrawn from Slovenia, while Croatia has faced the Serb rebellion and was forced into the war. And while Slovenia was searching for the ways in which it could approach Europe, Croatia had to bear the great burden and hardships of war, accommodation of refugees, obtaining of the international support and final liberation of its territories.

In such different situations, different starting positions of the foreign policies of the two countries were determined. In Slovenia, the Croatian problems have not been fully understood sometimes<sup>4</sup>, and on Croatian side, the role of Slovenia in early days of the war is being neglected.

Nevertheless, within the new conditions, when the Croatian side has considerably more freedom in its foreign activity, two problems are gaining on weight, especially in the times of political oscillations. The border in Piran bay, according to the Slovenian opinion, should be drawn in a new way, while Croatian side deems that the existing border regime, dating from the times of old republics, should be kept. Second question concerns the hard currency savings which are owed by Ljubljanska Banka to the Croatian savers. Slovenian side stays on the position that this problem should be solved within the question of succession of former Yugoslav state, and may not be solved separately from that process. Croatian savers, on the other hand, demand the payment of their claims by Ljubljanska Banka, stating the fact that the Slovenian citizens have been paid in full.

Regardless of the fact that these questions may be re-opened in certain political situations, it should not be forgotten that these two recent states are very much directed to each other by many factors. Therefore it is of their mutual interest to achieve such level of their relations which could be used as a basis for the construction which would be immune to the political oscillations and conjunctures. Slovenian approach towards Europe, and the Croatian wish to do the same, will demand the maintaining of good relations with Slovenia. Croatian entrance to CEFTA, where Slovenia is already a member, will maybe speed up the solution of the problems, as well as the understanding of the need for development of good and wide interstate relations on both sides.

It would be absolutely wrong if the opinion that by its entering the Partnership for Peace<sup>5</sup> and its approach to the EU Slovenia has become a sort of European southern border would prevail on both sides. On con-

<sup>4</sup>B. Bučar: *Political and Economic Transformation in East Central Europe*, edited by A. Neuhold, P. Havlik and A. Suppen, Oxford, 1995, pp. 291-292.

<sup>5</sup>A. Grizold: "Slovenia and European Security Integration", *Peace and Sciences*, Vol. XXVII., Sept. 1996, p. 29.

trary, Slovenian approach to Europe should be used as a model for Croatia, and the path for this approaching should go through Slovenia.

3. *Hungary* has supported the process of Croatian independence from its very beginning. The first purchases of arms for Croatian fighters were made in Hungary. Later, the weapons and supplies were brought regularly to Croatia through Hungary, and Hungary has accommodated a large number of Croatian refugees. By clearly taking the Slovenian and Croatian side, the Hungarian policy has, at certain moments, even put in jeopardy the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina. Some Hungarian statements regarding the need to form an anti-Serb coalition were the expression of this determination, which has been slightly modified with the time.

The relations with Croatia were not changed after the socialists have raised to power. Hungary has continued to give a political support to Croatian demands for ending of the occupation of its territories. It has greeted the normalisation of relations in this region, and has offered its territory for the IFOR bases, thus getting closer to the membership in NATO. The bilateral relations with Croatia are constantly being widened and strengthened, and there is none of the issues that could lead to the confrontation between the two countries.

Croatian entrance to the CEFTA will even further strengthen the economic co-operation between the two countries, and will be an opportunity for Hungary to promote the Croatian approach to Europe. As one of the leading Central European candidates for the NATO membership, and with the time the EU membership as well, the good Croatian-Hungarian relations are ensuring important support. Even if the Hungarian relations with Yugoslavia start picking up in strength, it should not be expected that relations with Croatia would start to cool down. Geographical connection, the tradition of relations, as well as the similar civilizational inheritance, will continue to form a firm grounds for successful Croatian-Hungarian relations. Followed by the complementary economic possibilities, these grounds will have a very solid superstructure.

4. *Bosnia and Herzegovina* has been, from the first days of existence of Croatian state, one of the central questions. In Bosnia and Herzegovina several parameters have met, that make this part of former Yugoslavia an important strategic point for eventual further critical developments. When analysing the importance of this area to the Croatian policy, it may be stated as follows:

- there is a geostrategic connection,
- there is a wish of Croatian people living in B&H to have the equal rights as the other two nations, and not to be treated as a minority there,
- there was a high level of engagement of Bosnian Croats in defence of B&H and their leading role in its preservation.

Having all this in mind, the engagement of the Croatian policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina may be easily understood. It has called for the joint Muslim and Croat fight against the Serb aggression from the first day, recognising in it the only chance for realisation of the interests of Croatian people, and for the building of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state. When the conflicts between the Croats and Muslims have occurred, it was the Croatian policy that has immediately accepted the American initiative for reconciliation and the Washington agreement - as a chance for saving the vital interests of the Croatian people.

In the same way, the Croatian policy has accepted the Dayton accord, as well as the 1-2-3 formula (one state Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federation of Croats and Muslims and Republic of Srpska, three nations equal in their rights). Giving the aid to the Muslim fight and accepting their refugees in Croatia, as well as being the first one to recognise the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Croatian policy has clearly, by practical moves, demonstrated that it cares for the survival of Bosnia and Herzegovina and for co-operation with it.

Numerous problems on the ground, where the war has left terrifying consequences, will certainly not be easy to overcome. Tremendous exodus of the population has created three, ethnically almost pure entities, returning to which is very difficult. This process of ethnification<sup>6</sup> has caught very deep roots during past four war years, and the situation is even worse in those communities and families that have suffered human losses. The mutual trust has been broken and even relatively insignificant incidents may easily create the fertile environment for the new clashes.

Croatian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that have created during the war days their political, economic, social and military structure of government: the Republic of Herzeg Bosnia, are continuing to insist on equal treatment, and do not wish to find themselves in the position of minority. Only through equal and fair political action, and without the majorisation in voting, all these three entities could co-exist in this territory. This should be the basis for creation of the unique Bosnia and Herzegovina as a community of three equal nations.

If we try to project the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the standing point of this moment, starting from the Dayton accord, as well as from the post-Dayton development, two options could be recognised. One, that could be called ideal, or optimistic, and the other that would, logically, be less ideal and more pessimistic. Of course, only the time will show which of those, or their blend, could be called realistic.

The American plan, in large based on the stick and carrot policy, has stopped the war, has drawn the demarcation lines, separated the two en-

<sup>6</sup>See: S. Vrcan, "War in Bosnia and Herzegovina", *Balkan Forum*, Vol. 4., No. 2, 1996, p. 94.

tities (para-states), conducted the elections, and got the results as expected - in the spirit of ethnocentrism. If now, after the pyramid of unique government has been set, (the Presidium and the Parliament of the Bosnia and Herzegovina), the process of forming of joint institutions would pick up, under the international supervision and control, if an inflow of capital and financing would strengthen, if the NATO troops would stay there for some longer period, and if the Bosnia and Herzegovina would, in some way, be put under a sort of protectorate by international community, it could be said that it is a success. This success should be felt primarily on the economic field, which would solve the existential problems of the citizens of the B&H. Politically it should lead to the dialogue among the people, and maybe even to some gradual achieving of trust among the three nations. All of this would help the process of returning of refugees to their homes on all three sides of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This period of successful rebuilding of a country disintegrated by the war and hatred should, by all means, last some ten years, and would demand primarily on:

- political will of international community to keep its presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a longer time, and to confirm this willingness by military presence as well,
- massive investments in economic reconstruction, in order to create the possibilities for return of refugees and to develop a belief that the life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is possible,
- if these measures could succeed in achieving (which is hard to believe at this point) a higher standard of living in Bosnia and Herzegovina than in neighbouring countries, than the layers of hatred could more easily peel off, and the new generations would, maybe, wish to live together.<sup>7</sup>

In this case the bilateral relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia could be developed in more peaceful environment which would enable them to find the mutual interests based on which the good neighbouring relations could be developed.

The other option is certainly grimmer. It is starting from the real situation on the grounds as it is at this moment - hate, lack of trust, unpreparedness to build a unique state. The results of the elections will fix the division on three national communities and will lead to higher and higher organisation of life in all three entities. The refugees will never re-

<sup>7</sup>Pledge for joint life of all inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina, returning of refugees to their homes, punishing the war criminals and responsibility of the Serbian state for the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is resolutely demanded by Dj. Sokolović; see Dj. Sokolović: "The Black Hole or the Big Bang", *Balkan Forum*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1996, pp. 157-158.

turn to their former abodes, which are now, in majority, inhabited by the members of opposite nationality, and the economical aid by the international community<sup>8</sup>, which should form the main axe of the coexistence, is even today far smaller than the promised, or announced one. Therefore it may be expected that, by time, it will get lower and lower, and that, for many reasons - from economic to political - the huge investments will not occur either.

With the active participation of domestic political forces, the tendencies of furthered connecting of Bosnian Serbs and Croats with their main countries (Yugoslavia and Croatia), would continue, and the third nation (Muslims) would be given an opportunity to create its own state<sup>9</sup>.

If all this could be achieved through consent, peacefully, than most probably, the international community would be relieved, conditioned that it would be assured that Sarajevo would not turn into sort of a fundamentalist Muslim centre. Striving for a fast solution of the situation, the international community has prematurely tried to form a democratic state, ignoring the situation on the grounds. It is being apparent now, that without the process of de-ethnification and elimination of dominant nationalistic strategies there will be nor stable and democratic, nor unique, country in this territory.

Croatian policy is being aware of the complexity of the problem, as well as of the options standing in front of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Existence of the democratic state in which the rights of all nationalities would be equal, and within which, in two entities, the life would be possible on the level of European civilised way of life, would certainly be the best solution. This would not demand new migrations, demarcations, or maybe even a conflict.

Within this complicated balance of various factors and influences, where a wrong move may lead to the avalanche of new accusations, criticism, and even clashes, it is certainly not easy to harmonise the demands of Croatian nationality in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the state policy of the Republic of Croatia. Especially when having in mind that the positions

<sup>8</sup>On the measures undertaken so far, as well as difficulties, see: C. Bildt: "Implementing the civilian tasks of the Bosnian Peace Agreement", *NATO Review*, No. 5, Sept. 1996, pp. 3-6.

<sup>9</sup>The most direct call for division of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been made by two American politologists, who are arguing that the elections for the Presidium have confirmed that the country should be divided, since its citizens want it that way. American firm insisting on maintaining of Bosnia and Herzegovina these authors are defining as abandoning of the laissez-faire policy, implemented by the USA so far, by passively letting the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman empire, Pakistan, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia and Yugoslavia to break apart. J. Mearsheimer and St. Van Evera, "Partition is the Inevitable Solution for Bosnia", *The International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 25, 1996, p. 6.

of the Croats from Herzegovina are different from those advocated by the Croats from Central or Northern Bosnia.

Despite of the numerous criticism addressed to the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to the Croatian policy<sup>10</sup>, it should not be forgotten that the Muslims have the majority in the Federation, and that the way the Croats feel to large extent depends on Muslim behaviour. If they demonstrate that they are ready to promote the spirit of equality and tolerance, than this model of coexistence could give life to the Federation as a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at the same time be a strong example to the other part of the state. In such case, with the harmonised internal relations, the Federation could be the part of the Bosnia and Herzegovina state that could develop friendly and co-operative relations with Croatia, which would certainly be a considerable contribution to stability in South Eastern Europe.

5. With the normalisation of relations with *Yugoslavia*, the starting premises have been created for development of relations based on the facts:

a) that these are two sovereign states, and,

b) that none of the pan-slavic models, or brotherhood and unity models will be the basis for some future relations ever again. Bilateral relations based on the European model, in spite of all the difficulties caused by the war and the casualties, relations based on the mutual interests of both parties, as a category that may in easiest way lead to the full normalization of bilateral relations and life in this region, should be developed.

The fact that Croatia is on the path of achieving almost all of its stated goals, and that the Milošević's regime is appearing to be a losing side in all aspects of his proclaimed actions, may be used as a starting point for Croatian foreign policy, but Croatia must not take this for granted. It must be ready to approach the relation building soberly and realistically, taking into consideration the past experiences, as well as the future life on this territories. It should not give up to any euphoria's, but rather through careful monitoring of developments within the Yugoslavia to search for the possibilities for co-operation that exist, and at the same time, to be alert, and constantly have in mind the specific character of this bilateral relations.

After establishment of full diplomatic relations, mutual recognition of borders, and recognition of continuation of the former state, some questions still remain opened.

<sup>10</sup>Croatia is very often being accused of intention to annex the Herzegovina and create the "Great Croatia". F. S. Larrabee, *The Balkans*, RAND, Santa Monica, 1996, p. 103.

- For Croatia, the question of the Prevlaka peninsula is a security, not a territorial one. In this area Croatian foreign policy is prepared to build such system of demilitarisation that would satisfy both sides, and would enable connections between Croatia and Montenegro in matters of communications and tourism, and both sides could profit from such solution in the long run. But Milošević's game with Prevlaka leaves some doubts regarding the future solution, probably due to the intention to leave this question opened in order to keep the pressure.

The problem of Eastern Slavonia and its reintegration into Croatian legal system, after recognition of borders and normalisation of relations, becomes exclusively Croatian internal problem. The attempts of Serbian population in Eastern Slavonia for prolonging of the UNTAES presence, demands for voting rights for everyone residing there at the moment, (regardless whether they have lived there in 1991 or not), rejecting to accept Croatian laws and institutions, and conditioning the return of Croats to their homes; may be considered as attempts to prolong and complicate the reintegration<sup>11</sup>. It is quite certain that these movements are being encouraged from Belgrade and that it convenes to Milošević's policy to hold Eastern Slavonia as a sort of tampon zone, in which he will try to keep as large number of Serbs as possible, along with stating some further, unrealistic demands.

The return of the citizens of both states has been provided by the Agreement on normalisation, but it is apparent that the time will be needed for this process. Croatia has demonstrated its good will by its laws on amnesty. It is ready to accept part of the Serbs that have fled Krajina region, but after everything that has happened during past few years, it is apparent that the war horrors have left deep traces that will not be easily overcome. Along with careful investigation of each particular case, the conditions should be created to avoid the possible destabilisation in certain areas, caused by this return. Due to the humanitarian reasons, as well as to the interest shown by the international community, this question should, by all means, be solved, but gradually and with caution, in order to avoid provoking of additional difficulties by some hurried move.

The issues connected with the succession remain as a question that has to be discussed further, and where Croatia, along with the other new states, will claim its part of assets. Obviously, this is also going to be a lengthy process, where some compensations or compromises might be accepted, but it should not be resigned from, and none of the offers that could be detrimental to the Republic of Croatia should be considered.

The relations in all other areas will be developing gradually. Surely the economic co-operation (communications, pipeline, commerce) will lead the

<sup>11</sup>On this, see: Gen. J. Klein, "The Mandate of UNTAES - Achievements and Problems", *Eurobalkans*, No. 22-23, 1996, pp. 30-33.

way, and the interest for this co-operation will be the strongest. In other areas, especially in scientific co-operation, culture, tourism, etc. past war-time experiences will slow down the connecting and some time will pass before the contacts will start to intensify. This is, anyway, not a specificum of this area but rather a natural result of the state of relations after the conflict, where mutual trust is being built slowly and gradually, with constant danger that a smaller incident might slow down, or even suspend the process.

Apart from the need to carefully build the bilateral relations, the Croatian foreign policy in this sensitive domain must constantly insist on accurate presentation of the existing situation to the world. The international community is eager to see the end to this conflict, as well as the overcoming of the consequences of the conflict, as soon as possible. By careful elaboration of the situation, by constant reminding on the roles which Croatia and Yugoslavia have played, and by identifying the principal initiator of the conflict, Croatian foreign policy must show patience in explanation of the history and presentation of the current state of relations. It must not be the side that is slowing down the establishing of dynamic bilateral relations, but must continue to keep the national interests of Croatian state, which was not easy to build, constantly in consideration.

### *Approaching the Europe*

Almost all of the political parties that have competed in the first democratic elections in Croatia in 1990 had in their programs the closer approach to Europe. This has been viewed as an opportunity for faster build-up of the state, increase of well-being, implementation of European standards of living, as well as the possibility to link the question of security to the model that was emerging after the fall of the Berlin wall.

This tremendous, almost euphoric enthusiasm for Europe started to diminish after the open conflict has started, and when the fact has been realised that the Europe, especially the European Union, after some starting initiative has lost the pace of its involvement. Soon, it became apparent that the EU was not able to produce a coherent and unique foreign policy of its member states regarding the fall-apart of Yugoslavia. Divisions and different interests have clearly been demonstrated, as well as certain sympathies for one or the other side in conflict.

It was incomprehensive to the Croatian political structures, and even more so to the public opinion, how passively is Europe witnessing the destruction of Croatian villages, shelling of cities and complete destruction of Vukovar. This was beginning of a new, critical evaluation of Europe, and of the conviction that the support and help for solving of burning Croatian questions may not be expected from that side. After recognition of Croatia, and further development of events, these convictions have been to

some extent modified, but the bitter taste has stayed, whenever remembering the inactivity and divisions that have immobilised the EU in faster action towards overcoming of the conflict.

Having learned this lesson, Croatian foreign policy was monitoring the American engagement in South Eastern Europe, assessing it to be a more resolute and serious effort for reaching the peace. Croatia has immediately accepted the American initiative, and thus it became a principal American ally in South East of Europe, and has readily engaged in overcoming of crisis<sup>12</sup>.

Today, in the phase of normalisation of relations, and when Croatia has established diplomatic relations with all of the countries that have emerged in the region of former Yugoslavia, the European option, together with further development of relations with the USA, represents the basis of Croatian international activity. And while it may be said that the relations with the USA are on high level, and appropriate for the present moment, the Croatian foreign policy is still searching the fastest way to link itself to Europe.

The central question of the moment was to become a member of the Council of Europe. The process of joining this starting, but as well the central European institution, from which the paths are leading to other forms of European integration, was burdened with some internal Croatian issues, as well as with the European wish to keep a certain form of pressure on Croatia. Croatia was the only country that has been rejected the membership, although it could be hardly said that the level of respect of human rights in Croatia is below the level in Russia, for example. The position of the Serb minority, freedom of media, Zagreb crisis etc., are still of less importance for EU than the possibility to influence Croatian policies through the denial of membership, especially when it comes to the co-operative behaviour regarding the Bosnia and Herzegovina problem.

This kind of European behaviour has, in meantime, resulted in negative reactions in Croatia. Croats have remembered the war times and European slowness and hesitation in recognising the aggressor and helping to stop the war, and in the part of extremely nationalistically coloured structures, the notions that Croatia doesn't need the Council of Europe at all, that it is older than many other European nations, and that it is the Council of Europe that should be asking Croatia to join and not vice versa, may also be heard. As much as these thesis might seem naive to an outsider, they do tend to reflect part of the frustration of Croatian people, and the conviction that Europe bears part of the blame for all that was happening in these parts.

<sup>12</sup>Lj. Čučić, *US Foreign Policy and Croatia*, Zagreb, 1995, pp. 109-110.

But it is through joining the Council of Europe that Croatia will have the chance to present its situation and its needs, and the Europe will have the opportunity for strong, direct influence on Croatian leadership in those areas where the levels of European democracy have not yet been reached. If a will to support the development of democracy exists, than Croatian membership in the Council is the best way to assist it, and to demand for the behaviour in harmony with the rights that are the result of that membership<sup>13</sup>.

In its categorisation of the new members, the European Union is leaving the possibility for joint membership in the Union for Croatia quite far away, and even further is the possibility of full membership. Even certain models that are putting Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia<sup>14</sup> in same category, much further away than other countries in transition, are being developed recently. The reasons, at least in case of Croatia, are not of economic nature, but rather political. Following the intention to keep Croatia on certain level” which would enable the EU to monitor the internal development in Croatia, grouping Croatia together with mentioned states, opens the possibility for a solution in regional package, to which Macedonia and Albania are sometimes also categorized.

The demand for a regional co-operation between these states, and only after this would be achieved the regional connection with Europe, is being offered as an option for this part of Europe.

Of course, the regional co-operation is something within the philosophy of European integration and it is being implemented in practically all areas. This approach demands that the countries of certain region should first demonstrate their readiness for a constructive co-operation, to develop it within the region, and after the results would be achieved they may expect the connections with the EU.

Although such vision of regional co-operation is theoretically correct, the specific situation in this region should not be lost out of sight. It is not identical to the Baltic, Central European or even Mediterranean region. The war has been raging in this region recently, and it is still easy to recognise who has started it and who bears most of the responsibility. Automatic equalisation of all of these states, demand for the development

<sup>13</sup>In order to illustrate the closeness of Croatia to Europe, it is being referred to as Central European, Mediterranean and Danube country, all aimed against persistent “pushing” of Croatia to Balkans. I. Šimonović, A. Plenković, “The Croatian European Policy”, *Croatian International Relations Review*, Vol. II, No. 3, 1996, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>This kind of regional connection, by the opinions in Croatia, is ignoring the war that has recently ended, shows lack of feeling for the fundamental cultural and historic differences, and, most important, is aimed at pushing Croatia away from its main, and natural, economic partners. Ibid. p. 7.

of regional co-operation prior to any approaching to the EU, does not necessary lead to the conditions necessary for faster forms of co-operation. In present situation any forcing of the directions and forms of connections from outside rises suspicion, and is generally not accepted as a bona fide proposal, especially if Croatia and Yugoslavia are put in the same group.

Since the process of dissolving in this territories took the form of war, destruction, human sufferings and casualties, it is impossible to move towards any kind of directed associating, which at the same time, rightfully or not, rises suspicion whether there are some hidden agendas behind it.

Any expert on the European methods of action will immediately object that the regional co-operation is *conditio sine qua non* for co-operation with Europe, but after this war, in these communities, any regional connections have completely different significance. In any suggestions aiming at regional co-operation, connection or grouping, Croatian foreign policy reeds primarily danger of eventual reconstruction of some new Yugoslavia, or a group resembling it. Even quite harmless, very theoretical ideas on certain Euroslavia, or Federation of Adriatic States have been received extremely negatively in Croatia. This is aimed at making it clear that after only recently obtained independence, and dearly paid for, there is no outside force that could make Croatian policy accept any new ties, even if some evident economic benefits would be apparent.

The Europe must understand this Croatian sensitivity and the desire to independently reach the solutions and decisions that would be the best for Croatia. It is apparent that the co-operation in this region will happen and will start to develop, but the decision on this must be left to these states, and to their evaluation of the right moment and forms of relations. The attempt to force it on them may only have the opposite effect and trigger the suspicion to the whole idea and concept of connection.

Participating in all forms of co-operation that are connected with Europe, Croatian policy has clearly demonstrated its willingness and commitment to co-operation. If the full membership in CEFTA will be reached, it will be a further proof not only for Croatian wish for connecting, but the desired direction of this connections at this moment as well.

Well developed co-operation with USA, which was especially strengthened after the "Oluja" action and liberation of krajina, and relations which are in Croatian official elaboration's often referred to as strategic partnership, can not substitute for Europe. Not only by considering geographical distances, but the economical connections and flows are pointing to that as well, since some 60% of Croatian foreign trade is being realised with the EU members, and only 1% with USA. There are also other questions that are tying Croatia with Europe: tradition, history, culture, as well as very concrete questions that need to be solved: question of refu-

gees, Croatian citizens working in EU countries and a mass of tourists that are coming to Croatia, mostly from the EU countries.

This is clearly showing that there is no alternative to Croatian connecting with Europe. Various directions may be discussed, but neither USA, nor, for example, CEFTA or East European countries may replace importance of Europe to Croatia. Therefore, the Croatian policy will have to seek the way for getting closer to all of European bodies, and to recognise in them the chance for creation of new relations in this region. And as Croatia has its value for Europe as well, it may be expected that this will be a two way process towards the same goal.

### *Foreign policy and strengthening of security*

Its fight for independent and sovereign state the Croatian people have started bare handed and unprepared. In coping with far stronger enemy, Yugoslav army - JNA and well armed Serb rebels in Croatia, the military force has been created which constantly grew stronger, highly motivated and well organised<sup>15</sup>. With enormous efforts' and against the arms embargo, it got well equipped and gradually started repossessing of occupied areas<sup>16</sup>. These were the first steps that have indicated that the Croatian army is ready and capable of liberation of all of the occupied territories, and that even by risking the criticism of international community, the process of liberation of Croatia must be completed.

In this effort for final solution of the question of highest priority, the question of survival and national interest of Croatian state, the foreign policy has been preparing favourable conditions within the international community. Development of friendly relations with part of the neighbouring states has enabled uninterrupted flow of supplies for the armed forces, the international community has, in the first phase, helped in stabilizing the battle lines, while later, facing the fast advance of Croatian army, UNPROFOR had to gradually abandon its role of protecting the rebels.

But the most significant step forward has been made in the direction of USA, which have realized that, within the framework of its strategic engagement in South Eastern Europe, Croatia may be a principal pillar on which the American policy could lean on. Croatian army had to help forming of the alliance with the Whether army and by this to stop the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, at the same time, to cut their

<sup>15</sup>E. E. Larrabee: *The Former Yugoslavia: Emerging Security Orientations*, RAND, Santa Monica, 1994, p. 184.

<sup>16</sup>R. Vukadinović: "Security in the Area of Former Yugoslavia: Threats, Concerns, Doctrines and Structure of Military Forces", in: *Common Security Regimes in the Balkans*, ed. by K. Tsipis, Columbia, New York, 1996, pp. 31-35.

communications with the Serbs in Krajina. The “Oluja” strike has liberated Krajina, destroyed and swept away Serbian armed forces, weakened their line of defence in Western Bosnia, and prepared the grounds for entrance of American forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Without “Oluja”, apparently, there would be no Dayton nor IFOR.

The strategic partnership that has been developed in the region of South Eastern Europe, between small Croatia and the only super-power - USA, does not have to remain as a permanent and eternal category, of course. In particular time period it has enabled the projection of American role in this region, and at the same time has helped realization of Croatian principal goals: liberation of Krajina, beginning of the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, and creation of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Croats have to have an equal status.

The next step for Croatian foreign policy is joining the Partnership for Peace. The relations between Croatia and Yugoslavia so far have been assessed as an open conflict, what certainly has put distance between Croatia and the Partnership. In its provisions regarding the Partnership for Peace, NATO has clearly stated the request that any country aspiring for the membership must have stable situation on its borders. The recent normalization of relations with Yugoslavia is annulling this objection, leaving the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia within the domain of Croatian internal policy. At the same time, entering the Partnership for Peace would enable Croatia to strengthen its own security, it would create preconditions for an equal co-operation with other countries and make it easier to create the possibility for entering the NATO.

It is obvious that for Croatia, a small country, the security for some future circumstances can not be reached by counting exclusively on its own possibilities<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, the creation of a sort of security alliance with part of the neighbouring countries also is not an option, especially after recent war experiences. Only the total system of security that has a continental, European forms, may help in achieving the security for all countries within the system.

In some ideal structure, which will need some time to be developed, the OESC, where Croatia is an active participant, could be viewed as the highest level of political foundations of the security system, while the NATO would be the executioner of military affairs. Such division on po-

<sup>17</sup>It is significant that the crisis in the area of former Yugoslavia has sped up the commitment of the neighbouring countries to the Partnership for Peace, as well as it has strengthened their determination for, as fast as possible, inclusion to the NATO. The Romanian example, which was the first of the ex-socialistic states to join the Partnership, in January 1994, has been followed by: Bulgaria, Albania, Slovenia and Macedonia. By this, a sort of NATO shield has been formed around Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia.

F. Carr, K. Ifantis: *NATO in the New European Order*, London, 1996, p. 143.

litical and military dimension could be, of course, further elaborated within the EU efforts to develop its own military strategy of action<sup>18</sup>. In any case, for the small countries it is essential that the political principles be harmonised with the possibilities for the concrete military protection of their security. And a small country like Croatia, that has gone through such hard experiences in the process of its establishing, is ready to actively support for any security system that will guarantee a peaceful development and the opportunity to rise the quality of life of its citizens. The New Europe that is being created in this direction, offers an opportunity to Croatian policy as well, to contemplate on such relations that will grant the safer future and stronger involvement in European system, than it was the case in the days when the Croatian state has been built.

<sup>18</sup>A whole set of authors agrees that the crisis in the area of former Yugoslavia has punched a lethal blow to the idea of creation of unique foreign and security policy within the EU. Therefore the possibility of efficient functioning of CFSP is being viewed as unlikely as well. M. Welsh: *Europe United? The European Union and the Retreat from Federalism*, London, 1996, pp. 124-125.