

Ecological issues – green and blue – as a niche for Croatia

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Summary

Croatia, as a relatively new member state of the European Union, has an interest to find a niche in foreign policy. The importance of specialization of Croatian foreign policy is emphasized by current trends in the world, and by the need to distinguish itself in the international community. Ecological issues and the protection of the sea and rivers, the preservation of the marine – so-called blue economy – and terrestrial environment, as well as organic farming, are the areas in which Croatia needs to find its niche in foreign policy. Consequently, it is extremely important that Croatia's foreign policy plays an active role in promoting ecological issues in both the European Union and in the whole Mediterranean region. The foreign policy of specialization in the field of ecology is supported by Croatian recognition in the world for its natural beauty and for it being one of the most ecologically preserved countries in Europe.

Key words: Croatian foreign policy, niche, European Union, Mediterranean, ecological issues, environmental and water governance.

Introduction

This paper discusses the importance of finding a niche in Croatia's foreign policy due to Croatia's membership in the European Union. The essay argues that ecological issues – the protection of the sea and rivers, the preservation of the marine, so-called blue economy,¹ terrestrial environment and organic farming – are the areas in which Croatia needs to find a niche in foreign policy, that is, it must specialize in one parti-

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1 More: Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Blue Economy, http://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2015-11-17-declaration-on-blue-economy_en.pdf, retrieved on May 23, 2016.

cular area. Croatia is a tourist-oriented Mediterranean country, so it is in its vital interest to protect the Adriatic Sea from omnipresent pollution and to preserve all living species. Therefore, ecological issues linked to the onshore section of the country and to the Croatian maritime are of vital interest. Consequently, it is extremely important that Croatia's foreign policy plays an active role in promoting ecological issues in both the European Union and in the whole Mediterranean region.

I will try to justify this conclusion in three segments. In the first one, I will attempt to explain why it is important that Croatia finds its niche in the foreign policy due to its membership in the European Union, and I will briefly present the reasons for the importance of finding a niche in order to explain how other countries achieved that or how they deal with the issue. In the second segment, I will sum up different arguments, setting out the areas in which Croatian foreign policy can specialize, and I will suggest ecological issues as a niche. In the last segment, I will try to explain why it is that ecological issues specifically, especially the "blue economy", can become an area in which Croatian foreign policy must specialize, especially in the Mediterranean region and particularly participating in the areas of environmental and water governance. I support this view with Croatian recognisability for its natural beauty and by it being one of the best preserved ecological countries in Europe, as well as by the results of the research on the perception of Croatia. Environment and water governance in the Mediterranean, currently in the shadow of the migration crisis and security issues², are still very important topics, internationally.

Why is it important to find a niche?

As a relatively new member state of the European Union, it is very important for Croatia to set clearly its new international goals within its foreign policy, as well as within its foreign economic policy and its government policy in general. In addition, it is extremely important that Croatia's foreign policy finds a niche now after it has become a member state of the EU, which can serve as the perfect stimulus. According to Hill's (in Jović, 2011) classification of foreign policy capabilities, small countries (Hill describes them as "countries that do not have instruments to shape the international environment") involve defensive strategies and "foreign policy is focused on one specific task or specialization, so-called 'niche'". Small states studies tend to focus on one particular policy area (Nasra, 2011).

2 Topics such as migration crisis and security issues should be elaborated separately.

Niche³ diplomacy is traditionally seen as the active foreign policy specialisation that small states, such as Croatia, use to wield influence, because small states do not have the capacity to be active in all sectors. A policy domain can be called a niche if it abides by the three criteria: specific knowledge provision that is international in demand and scarce/competitive; long-term investments, activity and a broad network in a related policy (sub-) area; niche recognition in the form of institutional responsibility (Genderen, Rood, 2011).

From the political market perspective, two factors are important for niche development. On the one hand, international demand for knowledge is essential (Genderen, Rood, 2011). Great powers like the United States and China – or regional powers like Germany, France and the United Kingdom in Europe – have the capacity to set the agenda for other states, but that is less true for small and middle powers. Croatia therefore has a larger possibility of contributing to the international community if it addresses issues of international relevance.

On the other hand, a state can only claim a niche on the basis of the uniqueness of the product, service or knowledge due to its scarcity or competitive position (Genderen, Rood, 2011). Human rights are a notable example. Canada, for instance, “specialized” in the area of peacekeeping missions, and its troops have played a far more significant role than they normally would have, given the size of its population (Jović, 2011). Norway specializes in humanitarian diplomacy,⁴ which enabled a far greater presence in the post-Yugoslav countries than it would have been expected based on their only power. In both cases, there has been an overarching ideology: “good” ideas –well-articulated concepts of “sustainable development”, more recently, “human security”, and now, also, “the responsibility to protect”. This has been recognized.⁵

For the Netherlands, water diplomacy has had a great potential as a foreign policy niche, and water diplomacy activity is possible within a chain that starts from conflict prevention to increasingly more severe measures of intervention, including: good offices, mediation, fact-finding, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication (Genderen,

3 Gareth Evans, serving as a foreign minister of middle-power Australia, gave “niche diplomacy” its name. For Evans, the term meant, essentially, specialization. It suggested “concentrating resources in specific areas best able to generate returns worth having, rather than trying to cover the field”. Henrikson, K. Alan: “Niche diplomacy in the world public arena: The global ‘corners’ of Canada and Norway”, <http://campus.diplomacy.edu/env/scripts/Pool/GetBin.asp?IDPool=952>, retrieved on February 12, 2013.

4 As demonstrated in Sri Lanka, it has also generated resistance, with the Norwegian peace facilitators being called by a political critic in that country “salmon-eating busybodies”.

5 More in Henrikson, K. Alan: “Niche diplomacy in the world public arena: The global ‘corners’ of Canada and Norway”, <http://campus.diplomacy.edu/env/scripts/Pool/GetBin.asp?IDPool=952>, retrieved on February 12, 2013.

Rood, 2011).⁶ In Switzerland, the importance of civilian peacebuilding as a part of Swiss foreign policy has increased (Möckli, 2008). The crucial factors are the domestic ones. The accession to the UN in 2002 imparted additional legitimacy and dynamics to Switzerland's peace policy. At the same time, non-membership in the EU allows Switzerland to pursue an autonomous niche policy as a conflict mediator.⁷

However, boosting the general standing of a country is not sufficient ground to implement niche diplomacy (Genderen, Rood, 2011). Such grounds include the following: contributing to global public goods; cost-saving, economic diplomacy, improved bilateral relations, assisting to foster positive image in regions where that image is very negative, and increasing regional or international stability.

The experience of Nordic countries shows how active foreign engagement works alongside economic strength of states, and how by connecting the leading companies in a region it can contribute to the economic strength of their countries, and thus influence the foreign policy. Nordic countries have an impressive number of globally competitive companies.⁸ They have thrived, according to *The Economist*, in well-defined global niches. Lego dominates the market for interlocking bricks. Sandvik is a machine-tool superpower. Volvo trucks produce the world's best high-quality lorries. Nichification protects high-cost companies from emerging-markets competitors.

However, focusing on Croatia, it should opt for a policy niche and a highly specialised policy for one specific area that can provide exceptional contributions, and it will have to find a new sense of foreign policy activities (Jović, 2011). It will find a market for the economy, at least for what remains of it, or if something new occurs. Could Croatia, a small state, profit from the experiences of Canada, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Nordic countries in finding a niche? Each of them, it has been said, "punches above its weight" in the world public arena.

6 The Scientific Council for Government Policy has recently advised the Dutch Government to engage in niche diplomacy. The key words are specialisation, sustainability, visible foreign policy, individual agenda-setting, and knowledge. Genderen, van Ruben, Rood, Jan (2011): "Water Diplomacy: a Niche for the Netherlands?"; Netherlands Institute of International Relations. "Clingendael", http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2011/20111200_cling_report_waterdiplomacy_rggenderen_jrood.pdf, retrieved on February 12, 2013.

7 Finally, the expansion of civilian peacebuilding is also due to the preferences of the decision-makers currently in place at the Swiss Foreign Ministry. The budget of Political Affairs Division IV, which has responsibility for civilian peacebuilding efforts, has grown markedly. The decision to qualify the priority of Europe and expand bilateral relations with key non-European states was made by the Federal Council in May 2005. Möckli, Daniel (2008): "Swiss foreign policy: Strategies of a niche player", *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 44

8 More in Special Report The Nordic Countries "Northern Lights", *The Economist*, February 2013, The Economist Newspaper Limited.

In addition, Croatia's foreign policy will no longer be one-targeted (Jović, 2011). Even if it opts for a policy niche and a highly specialized policy for one specific area that can provide exceptional contributions, the nature of the foreign policy of the European Union will force it to be open to a range of other issues.

Zagreb will have to find its niche and a new sense of foreign policy activities (Jakovina, 2010). It will find a market for our economy, at least for what remains of it, or if something new occurs. Croatia certainly may attempt to clear up the past, to achieve consensus within itself in order not to be burdened with unresolved issues, to clearly identify the main trends in the world, to find a niche in which to invest more and better. It should ensure the creation or direct the existing institutes in order to promote flexibility, knowledge and recognition of global trends. Small countries can do very well, but because of the lack of resources, they do have to think harder, be smarter, and operate creatively (Mellisen, 2004).

In Croatia, according to the Europe 2020 strategy, there should be more than quadruple the amount of money in research and development, in order to fulfil the aim of spending three percent of GDP for that purpose. A significant portion of the funds may be available from the EU budget. The Strategy of Smart Specialization is one of the mandatory conditions for the withdrawal of funds from the European Structural and Investment Funds. Part of the Strategy, the action plan covers the anticipated activities to be implemented in 2016 and 2017. By adopting the Strategy, the allocated funds within the Operational Programme Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014-2020 in the amount of 664 million euro are to be "unlocked" and focused on stimulating scientific excellence and strengthening the competitiveness of the Croatian economy through research, technological development and innovation. The key objectives of the Strategy are fostering economic growth and job creation, with the focus on the cooperation between economic and scientific-research sectors. The thematic priority areas are: health and quality of life; energy and sustainable environment; transport and mobility; security; food and bio-economy.⁹ It is officially known which areas Croatia will concentrate on, in consultations with the European Commission, when using cohesion money, and everything indicates that it will opt for "smart specialization".¹⁰ The question is how it will be implemented.¹¹ In which area should Croatia look for a niche?

9 More: <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//Sjednice/2016/12%20sjednica%20Vlade//12%20-%201.pdf>

10 More in the Commission's "Smart Specialisation Platform" to further boost innovation in the EU regions, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-776_en.htm, and in the Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation, Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/smart_specialisation_en.pdf, retrieved on May 23, 2016.

11 It would be good if the project research and business centre were implemented in Split. It should be taken into account that Split is almost in the centre of the future Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, which

Ecological issues as a niche

Among possible areas that could come into consideration for such specialization, there are regional cooperation, Mediterranean cooperation, collaboration with post-conflict countries, and possibly with the countries that have had similar experiences of transition from one political, economic and state system to another (Jović, 2011). Croatia will not contribute to the EU market with its banks, hotels and important factories. That part of our assets the EU members already possess (Jakovina, 2010). We will not bring to the EU institutes our knowledge that can be used to understand Southeast Europe or Central Europe. And certainly, not a large number of soldiers (referring to the NATO), nor sophisticated technology. Croatia will not bring particular historical legacy, nor a beautiful coastline and delicious food that can already be found in Greece, Spain or Italy (Jakovina, 2010). However, the different “bio” sectors, such as biotechnology, bioenergy, agriculture and water management, are the areas, says the European Commission, which have the opportunity for further growth and development with regard to cleanliness and biodiversity of the country, but Croatia itself must identify strategic sectors and specialize in them, with the EU as its partner.¹² Germany, for example, in the words of the former German ambassador to Croatia, Bernd Fischer, is looking forward to Croatia entering the Union because “it will open up to us, as the European Union, other important areas in which they will together be able to be more active. Granted that it can be compared with the entry of Spain and Portugal into the European Union because it is only from this moment that Europe in Latin America became a ‘household word’”. Previously, we had almost no representation there, whatsoever.¹³

The European Union will not have countries of North Africa along its borders, but the Union for the Mediterranean. This shows that Europe must continue to think of it more (Jakovina, 2010). The world is much broader than Europe and the main European countries recognized centuries ago. Could one of Croatian specificities be better knowledge of distant countries, from Afghanistan to Africa? Could this be a niche of Croatia, and could the Croatian ports be an embarkation place for their products to Europe and vice versa?

should consist of Croatia, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Serbia. This could be an EU project that builds other EU projects, as well as the one that would attract private investment. Kotur, Goran, “Croatia took recessionary bonus”, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, March 2, 2013, pp. 8.

12 European Commissioner for Regional and Urban Policy Johannes Hahn has recently said at the conference “The smart specialization” in Zagreb. More in Hahn, “Croatia has a growth potential in ‘bio’ sectors”, www.hina.hr, retrieved on February 12, 2013.

13 Fischer, Bernd, former Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany on the set “Public diplomacy: the nation’s image and branding”, organized by the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Zagreb, 2011.

In addition, a large part of the Croatian international economic cooperation refers to the member states of the Union for the Mediterranean and, according to estimates, 78 percent of exports and 73 percent of trade.¹⁴ These are the markets with the potential for a variety of goods. There is also great potential in ecological issues.

Be it as it may, while the competition is primarily commercial, and the scene primarily the market and not the arena, there is room for niche players, and small countries can have an unexpected impact on international relations due to prominent quality of culture, history, intellect and spirit (Anholt, 2007). Could that be ecological issues, which have been “in” in the world for a long time, and which will become increasingly important in the future? The fact that Croatia has an image of a “green” and “blue” country and one of the ecologically cleanest countries in Europe today is invaluable, and it is precisely because of this, that Croatia is recognizable in the world.

However, it is of utmost importance that it, as soon as possible, expands its protected areas, or puts under protection the greater part of the territory, in order to preserve them from future devastation, because only such natural conditions could allow Croatia to develop and present itself as an oasis of peace and rest (Kovačić, Skoko, 2009).¹⁵ In this respect, clean industry, the production of healthy food, innovative programmes of rest and recreation and the strengthening of cultural and health tourism should be encouraged.

Croatian recognisability for its natural beauty

There are many grounds for making an ecological issue a niche and a foreign policy priority. The main reason is that trans-boundary ecological issues are an area in which Croatia, with its rich, diverse and well-preserved nature, and huge potentials in the future, can add to the global public goods. In the introduction, the main arguments why ecological issues can be a niche of Croatian foreign policy have been presented, but attention should be drawn to the following.

Regarding its natural beauty and ecological preservation, Croatia has significant advantages and strong points. Many Croatian and foreign authors describe it as one of the most beautiful countries in the Mediterranean, or the country with one of the most beautiful seas in the world (Kovačić, Skoko, 2009). Since this is a subjective category,

14 By comparison, the EU trade with the countries of the Mediterranean (excluding Turkey) makes up only 5 percent of total extra-Union trade. Toperich, Sasha, Mullins, Andy (2012): “A New Paradigm for the Mediterranean: EU-U.S.-North Africa-Southeast Europe, Unfinished Business: The Western Balkans and the International Community”, CTR, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, pp. 240.

15 Tourism, as estimated, makes between 8 and 10 percent of gross domestic product of Croatia, with the potential for growth.

we can safely make the following claims, which can be substantiated: 1178 km of the Adriatic coast is one of the most distinctive and most rugged coastlines in the world, with 1185 islands, islets and rocks – a truly unique, beautiful and attractive natural phenomenon.

In support of this, the results of research conducted in 2003 on the perception of Croatia in the eyes of the domestic public, published in the media,¹⁶ clearly show that 28 percent of respondents believe that tourism can represent Croatia in the world in the best way (which is not surprising when one knows how much money is invested in the promotion of tourism and where the most visible results of that promotion are) (Bach, 2004: 50). The following are: our coast, islands, the Adriatic Sea, maritime and marine products (13 percent) and food, national cuisine, cuisine and gastronomy (12 percent).¹⁷

In ecological terms, Croatia has very clean and clear water, which sometimes reaches visibility of up to 50 m. It is considered the cleanest in the Mediterranean and the 12th according to purity in the world. It is also among five countries with the largest reserves of drinking water in Europe. Croatia is one of the most naturally diverse and ecologically preserved countries in Europe. Today, it has 10.83 percent of protected surface area in national parks, or another physical protection regime, and it is an extremely valuable ecological reservation in the heart of Europe. Is it possible that, therefore, green economy becomes the future of Croatia in the EU, as Croatia has put more emphasis on that in recent years?¹⁸

Huge potential for the strengthening of Croatian foreign policy influence in the field of ecology lies in the Mediterranean. According to the European Commission,

16 Monthly *Poslovni magazin* and political weekly *Globus*.

17 In the fourth place, there was Podravka and its most famous product Vegeta (10 per cent of respondents). Among the top 20 most frequent responses, there were even agriculture and agricultural products; Dubrovnik, wine, national parks and natural beauty, sport and athletes, Kraš products, Plitvice lakes, Pliva company, cheese (as well as ham and Pag lace), olives and olive oil; artistic monuments and cultural heritage; pure nature and natural beauty; Slavonia, *kulen*, breads, and specialties. Considering natural beauties, the most cited were the Plitvice lakes, Bjelolasica, Cetina, Kornati, Krka, Kopački rit, Brijuni, cave Vranjača, Paklenica, Velebit, Zadar peninsula. More in a special edition of the magazine *Globus* – “Naj hrvatsko – brandovi za EU”, 2004.

18 Craftsmen construction initiated the signing of the Universal Declaration “Green Economy & Sustainable Energy in Croatia”, which combines elements of shared beliefs and supports the development of the Croatian green economy in all segments, with special emphasis on sustainable development. The craftsmen construction company investments are worth 1.5 billion euro. It is about wind farms, solar plants, geothermal power plants, factories for processing pallets and the like. “We believe there is still insufficient awareness among users on energy efficiency and there is so much room to work. Consider that Croatia will enter the European Union and the liberation of certain fees in the customs system and energy-efficient technologies in the Croatian market will become more accessible to ordinary people, says Marjanović”, “The green economy is the future of the EU”, *Glas Slavonije*, March 4, 2013, pp. 8.

now is the time for a qualitative step forward in trans-Mediterranean relations, and Croatia needs to look over the Mediterranean in the context of EU policy toward these areas.¹⁹ The European Commission allocated 3.2 million euro within the IPA for the participation of five EU candidates and prospective candidate states (Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Turkey) in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue on the projects involving environmental and water protection, civil defence and transport within the Union for the Mediterranean.

In the context of ecological issues, an especially important area and a great opportunity for Croatia may be to participate, for example, in the area of environmental and water governance. The Mediterranean faces environmental threats to its biodiversity, natural resources, habitable and health areas. While the South is confronted with water scarcity and droughts, the North is a victim of floods and fires. Thus the Environment and Water division, which works closely with the European Commission, UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan member countries experts and several other institutions that help counter these threats, is focusing on four major regional priorities: H2020 initiative to de-pollute the Mediterranean, UfM Water Agenda based on the Draft Water Strategy for the Mediterranean; Protection of Marine Environment and Major Impact Projects.²⁰

In addition, five countries are participating in the first phase of this project on the Mediterranean Water Governance, with an overall budget of 2 million euro: Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, Albania and Palestine. The project has the financial support of the EIB. The promoters and the UfM Secretariat will mobilize other donors for the remaining financing needs.²¹ All the above-mentioned are possible challenges in the specialization of Croatian foreign policy in the field of ecology, water and environmental protection.

19 Participating in the activities of the Union for the Mediterranean, Croatia has enabled its institutional and equal involvement in the Mediterranean policy of the European Union in the period before achieving the status of acceding country, and regular dialogue with the countries of the southern Mediterranean. Such Croatian position in the European Union opened a new geostrategic perception of Croatia, which is in the context of European enlargement policy accommodated only to the Western Balkans. Participation in the Union also accelerated profiling of the Mediterranean dimension of the Croatian foreign policy. More: www.mvep.hr/_old/custompages/static/hrv/files/godisnjak2011/pdf/Godisnjak_MVEP_2011.pdf

20 Horizon 2020 Initiative for a Cleaner Mediterranean, more: <http://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/H2020workprogramme-EN.pdf>, retrieved on May 23, 2016.

21 Senior Officials of the 43 country members of the UfM recently approved the project entitled "Overcoming governance challenges to the mobilization of financing for the Mediterranean water sector", promoted jointly by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean, <http://www.ufmsecretariat.org/en/mediterranean-water-governance/>, retrieved on February 28, 2013.

Table 1. Foreign policy niche

Country	Niche
Canada	peacekeeping missions
The Netherlands	water diplomacy
Nordic countries	globally competitive companies
Norway	humanitarian diplomacy
Switzerland	civilian peacebuilding/conflict mediator
Croatia	ecological issues – green and blue

Source: prepared by author

Finally, an ecological issue as a niche in foreign policy can contribute to the image of the country that is closely linked with public perception. Therefore, all responsible governments, on behalf of their people, their institutions and companies, must learn what the perception of their countries in the world is and develop strategies to manage it. A key part of their job is to try to build a reputation that is honest, truthful, powerful, attractive, truly beneficial to their economic, political and social goals, and one that honestly reflects the spirit, ingenuity and the will of the people. This huge task has become a primary skill of the government in the 21st century (Anholt, 2007: 1).²²

Decisions to be made regarding a niche in the foreign policy depend on economic and political orientations within the country, as well as on the specialization of others countries in the EU and globally. Therefore, the definition of foreign policy priorities assumes, first of all, the understanding of what is happening in the immediate environment, the existence of clear goals and the determination to reach the goals (Turek, 2001). Such an approach assumes a new kind of politicians that are managers to a degree, because these tasks appear more political than ideological and national or of narrow interest, rather managerial and aimed to enable a good life with assured access to the best and cheapest goods and services anywhere in the world (Ohmae in Turek, 2001). In addition, the connection between foreign and economic policies is extremely important in order to achieve greater synergy in specialization, but also for the achievement of the overall governmental objectives and influence in certain countries. That is why the modern international system demands a perpetual awareness of the outside world and an active diplomacy for the most part conducted in a wide variety of multilateral fora and by most agencies of the state, not just foreign ministries (Hill, 2003). This requires coordination at home and abroad, and imposes heavy demands on politicians and bureaucrats on all levels.

²² However, the image of the country and a niche in foreign policy could be topics of another essay.

Conclusion

Croatia will face any new challenges that EU membership brings along. It will have to devise a new strategy and a new sense of its foreign policy. In addition, it is extremely important to find a niche in foreign policy as soon as possible, and its membership in the EU can serve as an incentive. The importance of the specialization of Croatian foreign policy is emphasized by current trends in the world, and by the need to distinguish itself in the international community. In market terminology, the success of such a niche largely depends on the “demand”, since it has to be able to “sell” the importance of its specific knowledge or contribution abroad. Accordingly, ecological issues, the protection of the sea and rivers, the preservation of the marine, so-called blue economy, and terrestrial environment, as well as organic farming, are areas in which Croatia needs to find a niche in foreign policy. Croatia is a tourist-oriented Mediterranean country, so it is in its vital interest to protect the Adriatic Sea from omnipresent pollution and to preserve all living species. Consequently, it is extremely important that Croatia’s foreign policy plays an active role in promoting ecological issues in both the European Union and in the whole Mediterranean region. According to the European Commission, now is the time for a qualitative step forward in trans-Mediterranean relations, and Croatia needs to look over the Mediterranean in the context of the EU policy toward these areas. In the context of ecological issues, an especially important area and a great opportunity for Croatia may be the participation in the environmental and water governance in the Mediterranean.

In the field of ecology, Croatian recognition in the world for its natural beauty and for being one of the most ecologically preserved countries in Europe comes in favour of foreign policy specialization, as well as the results of research on the perception of the country. But because of a lack of resources, Croatia, as a small country, has to think harder, be smarter, and operate creatively, and must constantly adapt – or perish.

Boosting specialization can provide domestic consensus on Croatian foreign policy in general, but also on linking foreign and economic policies in order to achieve greater synergy. However, all this raises the question of whether Croatia is ready for this challenging new role.

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Sažetak

Hrvatska ima, kao relativno nova članica EU-a, interes za pronalaženje niše u vanjskoj politici. Važnost specijalizacije hrvatske vanjske politike naglašena je trenutačnim svjetskim trendovima i potrebom za isticanje u međunarodnoj zajednici. Ekološka pitanja i zaštita mora i rijeka, očuvanje morskog – tzv. plavoga gospodarstva – i zemaljskog okoliša, kao i organske poljoprivrede, područja su u kojima Hrvatska treba tražiti svoju nišu u vanjskoj politici. Posljedično, krajnje je važno da hrvatska vanjska politika ima aktivnu ulogu u promicanju ekoloških pitanja u Europskoj uniji i cijeloj mediteranskoj regiji. Vanjska politika koja se specijalizira u području ekologije može naći svoj oslonac i u prepoznatljivosti Hrvatske u svijetu kao zemlje koja obiluje prirodnim ljepotama kao i jedne od ekološki najočuvanijih zemalja u Europi.

Ključne riječi: Hrvatska vanjska politika, niša, Europska unija, Mediteran, ekološka pitanja, upravljanje okolišem i vodama.