
National Interests and National Security of Croatia

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Summary

The concept of security today frequently includes a whole set of different aspects of human existence and activity in society and nature. Conscious efforts to establish security is a civilisational and cultural category which encompasses all aspects of contemporary security such as economic, social, cultural, political, legal, ecological and defensive, i.e. all those manifestations of social life which come under the heading of social values.

The efficiency of national security system today not only testifies to the capacity of the state to protect its fundamental social values from external and internal perils i.e. to preserve peace and liberty, prevent danger and fear, but also to its ability to ensure economic, political, scientific, technological and generally social development as well as people's social, cultural, ecological prosperity. Analyzing the national security of the Republic of Croatia in that context, it seems that not only has the process of democratic transition not been completed, but it has not properly commenced. In many areas the institutions and relations that might guarantee the type of development in keeping with Croatia's diverse potentials have not been created. Croatia, as one of the last transitional countries is only at the beginning of the second alteration of government, the precondition for the consolidation of a democratic regime.

Introduction

The concept of security today frequently includes a whole set of different aspects of human existence and activity in society and nature. Conscious efforts to establish security is a civilisational and cultural category which encompasses all aspects of contemporary security such as economic, social, cultural, political, legal, ecological and defensive, i.e. all those manifestations of social life which come under the heading of social values. Today, forms of social organisation include national, regional, and international security which, as a structural element of society, contains the condition (or a certain property of the condition), as well as the activity (or the system).

Though the processes which should be conducive to European security as the condition and as the system have made headway, European security is still based on the national security of individual states. National security of democratic states includes: the

security of national territory, the protection of human lives and their property, the preservation and maintaining of national sovereignty and the realization of the basic functions of the society (social, economic, political, cultural, ecological, defense, and others). In this, one should point out that the processes of internationalisation and globalization today have already led to the abandonment of some viewpoints, characteristic of the classic concept of the sovereignty of the nation-state. Namely, this concept includes almost complete control of the nation-state over its territory, people and natural resources within the national borders. However, today's degree of social development is the reason that the nation-state has been losing its former monopolistic role in that field, as well as its exclusive definition by means of the territory. The main reason is that individuals, social groups and associations, and civic society in general engage directly, bypassing the nation-state, and often even transnationally. Internationalization and globalization lead to a higher degree of uniformity of the entire world order as compared to the system of sovereign states, the circumstance which will in the future affect the content of the national-security strategies of contemporary states.

Despite the global dimensions of contemporary security, its national (state) dimension remains an important constant. On that, national level, contemporary states achieve security for their citizens through the implementation of the national security system. The efficiency of that system today not only testifies to the capacity of the state to protect its fundamental social values from external and internal perils i.e. to preserve peace and liberty, prevent danger and fear, but also to its ability to ensure economic, political, scientific, technological and generally social development as well as people's social, cultural, ecological prosperity. Analyzing the national security of the Republic of Croatia in that context, it seems that not only has the process of democratic transition not been completed, but it has not properly commenced. In many areas the institutions and relations that might guarantee the type of development in keeping with Croatia's diverse potentials have not been created. Croatia, as one of the last transitional countries is only at the beginning of the second alteration of government, the precondition for the consolidation of a democratic regime. Only now the process of social, political and institutional changes may commence; these changes will have to be well-thought out and, due to Croatia's present unenviable social, economic and political situation, will have to yield concrete results in all departments. Particularly important will be the changes in the national security system and its most significant part, the armed forces. Because of the secretiveness of the security and military structures and the high level of public trust the Croatian army enjoys, combined with the lack of competent civil politicians and experts, this is going to be perhaps the most daunting task of the new government. Unless well-thought out and level-headed changes are initiated, or they fail for whatever reason, the control over the national security system may be lost, and this may jeopardize the continuation of the democratic transition and the survival of democracy.

The accommodation of the national security system to the existing political changes and democratic standards cannot only be the question of new laws and the security-defence system. The formal/legal and organizational changes must be followed by the change in the political climate that is going to foster the reconciliation of the national security system and the armed forces with democratic standards. This will require a democratic dialogue and the participation of the public in, among other things, identifying the Croatian national interests, the strategy of national security, the manner of con-

trolling security forces and the position of the armed forces in the society. Above all, the first step must be the definition of our national interests and the challenges to them, as the grounds for defining the strategy of national security and the security organization of the society; this is the topic of this article.

Defining national interests

National security and national interests are closely linked. National interests are the values and objectives directed towards the development of the national community, while the national security is an activity organized with the aim of protecting these interests and being the instrument for their realization. This is the reason why in defining national security one should take into account the awareness of the nonexistence of the threats to national interests¹ or the existence of the means sufficient to eliminate all the potential threats. In defining national interests one should by all means determine and assess which are the national capacities for these interests to be realized. Expanding our interests beyond our capacities can lead to a collapse. Such behaviour of a state some authors call “autodestructive”. They claim that “every new expansion of interests has a higher price than the previous interest. In that sense, the price may surpass the capacities, the process of expansion of interests is interrupted and the too broad structure of interests begins to cave in.”²

The definition of national interests depends on various changeable and unchangeable factors such as: the relationships within the international community, the conditions in the immediate environment, the internal situation in the state, the interests of different social groups, the relations among the political forces, and alike. The definition of national interests, apart from the need to have them defined, depends on the available information in the possession of the government agencies which are responsible for protecting them. The perception of threats, the degree of importance given to certain social problems and the possible alternatives, also influence the definition of national interests. In democratic states, it is not enough for competent state agencies to define national interests, but they also have to obtain the citizens’ legitimacy via the public arena, otherwise they do not have the necessary critical mass for their realization.³

Every state has been trying to maximize its power to ensure its geopolitical, demographic, economic, cultural and other survival. In history, such efforts have been attempted in two ways: by stepping up the protection by increasing military might and by getting involved in the international community (via cooperation or conflict). If the defined national interests go counter to the national interests of other, particularly the neighbouring states, and if there is no political will for accommodation, then the state

¹ Orvik, N., *The Threat: Problems of Analysis*, *International Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Autumn 1974, pp. 675-85.

² Butron, J. W., *Systems, States, Diplomacy and Rules*, London, 1968. Quoted from: *Strategic Disarmament, Verification and National Security*, SIPRI, Stockholm, 1977, p. 52.

³ Cvrtila V., *Nacionalni interesi i nacionalna sigurnost*, *Politička misao*, vol. 32. no. 2/1995, p. 64.

sees a way out in strengthening the military component of its national security, which leads to confrontations and wars. In order to avoid this, it is necessary to curb the realization of national interests so that the national security of a state does not represent a threat to other countries in the international community. It means that the fundamental rights of states are mutually respected, such as the right to survival, independence, equality, international traffic, and alike. To reach that goal, a multifarious integration of a state into the international community is necessary, from political and economic integration to security.

National interests of the Republic of Croatia

If, based on what we have said, we try to get a comprehensive view of Croatia's national interests, we can start by saying that the primary and the vital national interests of the Republic of Croatia are permanent and unalterable, and refer to the protection of the highest values as they are defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. These interests at the same time represent basic goals of national security, understood as both the condition and the organized system.⁴

The first vital national interest is the survival in peace and freedom and the protection of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Croatia. This unconditional and most fundamental interest includes:

- the survival of the independent and autonomous state;
- maintaining permanent peace;
- an adequate degree of independence and sovereignty and respect for the independence of the internal and external policies and actions;
- the territorial integrity, inviolability and the protection and defence of the national territory and borders;
- the demographic reproduction of the population;
- the protection of the population and its basic needs;
- the neutralization and foiling of all threats to survival and thwarting and repelling, any aggression;
- the preservation of environment and the protection from ecological threats;
- the protection of the population from health risks.

To achieve this most important interest, and to eliminate all external threats, all available resources should be utilized, since a loss or endangering the state's survival stands in the way of realizing all other interests and objectives. This interest at the same time represents the fundamental national security interest; it is the reason why a state's defence is organized, including the armed forces, and why a designed defence policy is implemented. Although other interests may occasionally find themselves in bigger and more serious peril, this interest is more important than the rest and should be a perma-

⁴ On the Croatian national interests see: Tatalović, S., *Europska sigurnost i nacionalni interesi Republike Hrvatske*, Informator, no. 4758-4759, 1999, (Prilog *Europska unija*, pp. 6-9) and Group of authors: *Hrvatska vojska 2000 Nacionalna sigurnost, oružane snage i demokracija, Strateška istraživanja i SDP*, Zagreb, 1999, pp. 232-44.

ment focus of Croatia's national interest. This interest involves the protection against a whole range of threats which, besides the military ones, may include natural and technological catastrophes. In all these and similar circumstances, the population's survival must be ensured, unobstructed by the key institutions, and the vital installations and all the most important social and economic services must be operational.

The second vital interest is the economic prosperity and welfare of all Croatian citizens. This interest implies:

- free access to resources, technologies, communications, markets, services, and capital at the global and the regional level, as a prerequisite of civilisational and economic development;
- unhindered development and growth of the economy in a propitious environment;
- eradication of poverty, and alike.

In order to realize this national interest, and achieve economic prosperity and welfare, the Republic of Croatia should promote the following medium-term goals:

- joining all the most important economic and trade world and continental organizations;
- increasing domestic production;
- normalizing capital flow (solvency, bank system);
- creating jobs and decreasing unemployment;
- increasing social security and standard of living;
- maintaining low or at least controllable inflation rate;
- increasing exports to a level much higher than imports;
- decreasing the deficit and balancing the budget;
- decreasing foreign debts;
- decreasing government spending and its reallocation into social and economic development;
- mastering new technologies;
- stressing and promoting comparative national economic advantages.

Achieving an appropriate and adequate degree of prosperity is one of the most significant factors of internal stability and consequently important for national security. On the other hand, economic development is the basis of national strength which is, in turn, another prerequisite for a satisfactory level of national security since it enables a bigger scope for action, a smoother amortization of insalubrious global developments so that the allocations for the national security system are economically and socially easier to bear.⁵

The third vital national interest is an auspicious environment of Croatia and the regional cooperation. Comprehensive national security can be accomplished only within

⁵ The total expenditure for the core system of Croatia's national security in 1999 was for the Ministry of Defence 6,083,997,000 kunas, the Ministry of the Interior 3,303,649,000 kn, the Office for National Security 82,267,000 kn, the Ministry of Croatian Defenders 2,611,600,000 kn or a total of 12,082,512,000 kunas (\$1,938,815,000). *Narodne novine*, no. 167/1999.

the framework of regional security since only this guarantees national security without overburdening national resources. This interest includes:

- peace in the region and peaceful solution of conflicts;
- promoting democracy, free market and the rule of law;
- joining of the Republic of Croatia and the biggest possible number of the neighbouring and other states into the global, regional and subregional multilateral integrations;
- reliable and stable relations with its allies and partners in economic, political, ecological, and military fields and acquiring new allies and partners;
- promoting good bilateral relations and cooperation with the neighbouring states;
- solving the issue of national minorities, particularly the Serbian minority;
- repairing the war damages in the broader region.

The fourth vital national interest is the protection and promotion of national assets and the preservation of the resources. This interest refers to spiritual, human and material resources and includes:

- respect for personal freedoms, human rights and equality;
- preservation and promotion of national identity, national culture, traditions and cultural heritage;
- developing and strengthening basic political and social institutions;
- the rule of law, independent judiciary and equality before the law;
- creating conditions for a favourable demographic development;
- rehabilitation, protection and preservation of natural environment and introduction of clean technologies;
- protecting minorities, their cultures and their cultural distinctions as a part of Croatia's cultural wealth;
- protection, rational utilisation and control over the national material and energetic resources.

The means, organization, and measures which may achieve and largely protect vital national interests and goals are a matter of basic political orientation of a nation and are based on a consensus. This should be the foundation on which to build a national strategy, which ought to primarily include those national interests and goals whose endangerment or impossibility of realization would mean a threat to the national survival and prosperity. Thus the national security strategy necessarily presupposes basic goals of the general national strategy, but also looks at them from the point of their protection and unhindered realization.⁶

⁶ Croatia does not yet have clearly defined national interests and the corresponding national security strategy. Because of that, the newly elected Croatian Parliament has the duty to, by means of a broad public debate and the participation of the most important political and scientific institutions, design as soon as possible the appropriate documents which will define the Croatian national interests and the strategy of national security. This is included in the pre-electoral promises of the winners' coalition of SDP-HSLS.

Threats to national interests

In every discussion on the strategy of Croatia's national security, it is important not only to start from the defined national interests, but also from the threats they are faced with. The assessment of the threats to national interests, i.e. to Croatia's national security, is the fundamental assumption and one of the major starting-points for defining the strategy and the system of national security. Strategic and organizational solutions must correspond to the real needs and be efficient in predictable security circumstances and identify the necessary capacities and dimensions of national security. A system that is too big for actual needs, spends more national resources and is a burden for society. On the other hand, too weak a system of insufficient security and defence capacities can create difficulties in the realization of national interests, and can also fail in deterring and eliminating threats, which can lead to a war and the loss of independence.

An assessment of the threats confronting Croatia must complement the definition of national interests, since threats refer primarily to national interests so they should be considered as potential obstacles to their achievement and accomplishment. In this account, national security is a system and the condition for removing the obstacles and resistance which affect the realization of national interests. Both in the short run, but perhaps also in the long run, Croatia must exclude from its immediate surroundings the possibility of a radical armed aggression that would be aimed at its destruction as an independent state.⁷ In other words, the first, the vital, and the ultimate national interest, the survival of the Republic of Croatia, is not directly jeopardized. It should be noted here that this judgement does not rest on the trust in the principle of inviolability of sovereignty and integrity of a member of the international community, but on the assessment of the interests and the realistic possibilities of the security setting and the military/political conditions in it. A slight prospect of an armed aggression does not necessarily imply an absence of all forms of threats, particularly the non-military ones. The Republic of Croatia must be prepared and must count on different forms of national security threats from its immediate surroundings. The potential military i.e. armed threats include:

– the failure of a political, social and economic reconstruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its disintegration, and the consequent launching of military campaigns for defining the new borders following the division of that country.⁸ In this case, the Republic of Croatia would have to intervene, alone or together with the international community;

⁷ A group of authors, *Hrvatska vojska 2000 Nacionalna sigurnost, oružane snage i demokracija, Strateška istraživanja i SDP, Zagreb, 1999, p. 252.*

⁸ The weakened international position of Croatia due to its involvement in the Bosnian war, prompted the opposition to undertake more decisive actions against the politics of the then ruling HDZ. The opposition launched caustic public campaigns against the Croatian military engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this did not prevent the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina to have a pernicious effect on Croatia's international position and divide its citizens. HDZ was also torn apart by the internal divisions and occasional power struggles in which weaker fractions were eliminated.

- unresolved border issues with the neighbouring countries (particularly the case of Prevlaka);
- deepening of the political crisis in SR Yugoslavia can lead to large-scale military conflicts in that country and their spreading into Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Republic of Croatia need not be directly endangered, but it would be endangered by the very fact that the biggest portion of its borders has been engulfed by a conflagration.

Croatia's national interests may be threatened by inauspicious developments of internal political, social, and economic relations which may trigger off the destabilization of the country and the deterioration of its international position. These threats include: land mines, economic stagnation, social insecurity of the citizens, rampant crime, ecological and other problems.

An analysis of the threats that can emerge in the wider or more immediate security environment or locally show that there is a bigger possibility of non-military i.e. non-armed threats and the threats that ensue from internal crises than from classical military threats, while the possibility of an armed aggression with a radical or a limited goal is very small. Also, an analysis would show that the prospect of a more serious peril to the national interests, particularly the national survival, is in the long run thwarted by NATO's deployment in the Croatia's immediate security environment. Its forces, positioned in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, the very regions that can become a source of greatest risks and most serious threats to the security and interests of the Republic of Croatia, have the tasks and interests which coincide with Croatia's national interests.

Croatia can exploit the favourable circumstance that NATO's forces (SFOR, KFOR) have been deployed in its immediate security environment, since this has to a big extent internationalized Croatia's security. This fact guarantees Croatia a long period of security and provides time necessary for transforming the national security system and the armed forces from the wartime into the peacetime organization, without further burdening national resources. The existence of the relatively significant cooperative neighbourhood (Italy, Slovenia, Hungary) is also advantageous for Croatia's national security. Croatia's membership in the Euro-Atlantic security associations should, even after the withdrawal of SFOR and other peacekeeping forces, provide a necessary degree of the internationalization of its security. Rehabilitating the currently dysfunctional states and forging closer links with the European and Euro-Atlantic associations might lead to the creation of a cooperative neighbourhood in a greater portion of Croatia's surroundings, and thus improve even more its security situation and the prospects for a long peace and successful realization of national interests.

The entire defence system and the armed forces today are in the transitional phase or, more precisely, in the transition from the wartime to the peacetime defence standards. Croatia has not yet designed its basic strategic documents on national security. Because of this, Croatia's military mission is still ambivalent, as it used to be during the war. The army was created in the Patriotic War, and after a time it became a participant in an armed conflict waged on the territory of another internationally recognized state. Now, in peacetime, the military mission of the Croatian army must be urgently rede-

fined, not an easy task it seems, due both to the internal relations and the military position of Croatia.

The Croatian army, like the state itself, is faced with serious changes. The external threats that were until 1995 so efficient in maintaining the political status quo in Croatia suddenly vanished. The former regime had lost the alibi of the war as well as the alibi of the Serbian issue in Croatia and for the first time was faced with the challenge of its functioning in peacetime conditions. Since it had failed to come up with the right answers to all those economic and social issues, the regime collapsed after the parliamentary elections in January of 2000. Consequently, the Croatian army had to continue the transformation in line with the new situation which will mark the beginning of its entry in the Euro-Atlantic security organizations.

The military threats and the resulting psychosis undoubtedly used to be a cohesive force in the Croatian society. Now that the hostilities are over, the situation has changed dramatically. Croatian citizens, supporters of HDZ's politics during the war, have become much more critical. Following the second alteration of government, Croatia is faced with some challenges which have already been overcome by other post-communist countries: the peaceful transfer of power via elections by the first post-communist government to another political power in the country.

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