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A POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION BY THE CROATIAN SCIENTIFIC  
AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY TO THE TRANSFORMATION  
OF SOCIETY AS A PRECONDITION FOR ATTAINING  
EUROATLANTIC INTEGRATION

Prominent members of the Academy,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a special honour for me to address this distinguished assembly. The subject of the conference – as determined by its title – is indeed topical and inspiring, but also challenging for me personally, because something new should be added, some new things beyond the customary political discourse about this subject should be highlighted. I shall therefore frame my presentation with the title “*A potential contribution by the Croatian scientific and professional community to the transformation of society as a necessary precondition for attaining Euroatlantic integration*” and tackle in a somewhat different manner the subject-matter of Euroatlantic integration and the integration of the Republic of Croatia into the European Union, its obligations and interests in terms of regional co-operation.

Integration into the European Union is the top priority political programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. Integration into the European Union is also a Croatian national political programme, owing to a consensus achieved among all political forces. These facts are confirmed by a series of documents passed by the Croatian Parliament. However, the fact that the political programme in question has a significant motivating and developmental dimension is at times perhaps not fully comprehended. The programme sets before us high European social standards, necessitating a profound transformation of society, it opens up a huge market and allows the free movement of persons, goods and capital; in other words, it facilitates development in all segments of society and ensures links with

contemporary global processes in every aspect, including of course technology. Therefore we see no alternative to the programme.

The integration process is also a catalyst in the process of the twofold transition that Croatia has to complete. In addition to the transition process that all the new member states of the European Union have been going through, namely economic restructuring, privatisation and the democratisation of society, Croatia has to heal the wounds of war.

The European Union influences its member states, as well as candidate states and potential candidates, because of the appeal of the *soft power* principle, as well as its conscious cohesive policy. This is confirmed in the year following the big enlargement, which demonstrates that all the new member states and the European Union itself have successfully overcome the “big bang” and are all experiencing positive trends and the fulfilment of synergic effects. This is attested to by data on GDP growth, employment, the standard of living, and so on.

The European Union is not merely a group of associated states which have recognised their common political interests and become associated in order to accomplish them. It is much more than that. It is a developed self-confidence about itself and its potentials, and a need for on-going deliberations about the future development of society, individual states and the European Union as a united body, but also of an extended environment, that is, of the entire future globalised world. It is also an endeavour to have a society based on knowledge and on a responsible attitude toward development and the future.

EU member states advocate such a policy globally as well; they wish to achieve a common influence on the current global processes and to be more present in resolving global issues. They owe their influence and credibility to synergy and unity in which, nonetheless, their national identities, historic particularities and overall cultural diversity have been preserved. This mutual enrichment on the principles of accepting a common system of values, respecting national identities and multiculturalism and maintaining state functions while accepting the high principles of mutual co-operation among individual member states, and also among the institutions of the European Union and of its member states, exudes new power. Naturally, this has been recognised worldwide and has already triggered various integration processes in other parts of the world.

This power and attractiveness of the European Union has been recognised in neighbouring states as well, and the Euroatlantic integration processes have become a political programme of our immediate and extended neighbouring states. The programme has been partially realised, for example in Slovenia and Hungary, whilst it is in various phases of the Stabilisation and Association Process in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, and Albania. We

strongly support such processes in the region because of everything that the EU framework provides: security, peace, the rule of law, and developmental prospects. Unifying our strength by our own will and a conscious commitment, harmonising social, democratic and all other standards at a higher developmental level, equality and clearly defined rules of behaviour, intense co-operation, mutual knowledge and understanding are the guarantees of peace, stability and development in the region. These are the guarantees that we in Croatia accept and offer to our neighbours in regional co-operation.

However, carrying out such an ambitious political programme requires the support of all segments of society, especially the scientific and professional community, educational institutions, and the media. This support should not be merely declarative: it is necessary to explore the existing situation, to search for and develop solutions within the EU frameworks, to offer the required scientifically and professionally based arguments. In other words, science in society should provoke, criticise, amend and stimulate politics to implement optimal solutions. Obviously, I'm thinking primarily of science dealing with the area of social problems, science which has not, at least until now, become sufficiently involved in all these processes. Science is rightly expected to be a leader in social self-awareness, to open up new issues, to explore and perceive, to become actively involved in resolving all relevant issues on its own initiative, to demand changes, to seek and offer potential solutions. And, of course, to re-examine itself during that process.

Science may also find a role in the negotiations. Based on research and simulation of the results of legislative alignment, we are going to be able to negotiate more easily and achieve our goal faster. Science must become involved in other areas of research as well, especially those linked to the Lisbon strategy which is one of the foundations for boosting competitiveness.

Croatian science must become part of the European science network, it must become more active and creative in contemplating everything that surrounds us. In addition, it must tackle issues dealt with by the international community, issues relevant to the future of the world, even if they are seemingly not directly linked to Croatia. It has to deal more with the region that surrounds us the way Europe does – by analysing the causes and consequences of current events promptly and without fear. Time has become a too precious and irrecoverable resource – we cannot waste it by waiting for something to take care of itself. European institutions discuss topical subjects of their own choice or in accord with politics. Croatian scientific institutions should also adopt such a method of working.

It is necessary to communicate to a much greater extent with our environment – within the region and in other parts of Europe. Science may achieve what

politics cannot in certain moments or where it faces certain limitations. Due to geographic proximity, common history and knowledge of the region, Croatia is rightly expected to make a quality contribution to solutions to problems in the region; such an approach is expected from a mature country and a candidate for membership of the European Union.

To sum up, Croatian science must focus on topical issues and the environment that surrounds us. In doing so, it can come face to face with the scientific positions of the neighbouring states, organise round tables, symposia, and so on. Such an approach is also an integral part of our integration process, of our becoming fit for contemplating what we are dealing with, for behaving in the same manner as most of the EU member states. Efficient thought about our present and our neighbourhood, and seeking and proposing solutions with a spark of originality may be our specific contribution to European science and European thought. Such an approach may make Croatia an appealing and reliable interlocutor and partner in the European Union and the international community.

The European Union is also connected by the knowledge and associated scientific and professional capacities of its member states. This principle is becoming increasingly important and a fundamental prerequisite for achieving the goal of making the European Union the most developed part of the world. If Croatia wishes to be a part of all this, it must join that part of the integration process as well – it must become a competent interpreter of events and current processes not only in the region, but also in Europe and worldwide. A considerable contribution by Croatian science and professions is most definitely expected in this regard.