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THESIS

**CROATIAN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO:
ONE OF THE CRUCIAL PREREQUISITES FOR
STABILIZATION OF SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

by

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ONE OF THE CRUCIAL PREREQUISITES FOR STABILIZATION OF
SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the past and present development of Croatia and the Euro-Atlantic political, military and economic spheres. It suggests that the next logical step on the way to a stable and prosperous Southeastern Europe is Croatian admittance to NATO. Croatian membership in NATO is arguably *conditio sine qua non* for the process of regional stabilization and democratization. This policy became obvious when democratic developments in Croatia in 2000 caused positive changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Serbia. The changes in Croatia, accompanied by promising economic achievements and sufficient civilian control over the military, opened the door for Croatia to enter Euro-Atlantic institutions.

All the aforementioned achievements, along with Croatia's contribution to Partnership for Peace and increasing international cooperation in other areas, strongly suggest Croatia's potential for becoming a full-fledged NATO member and is a significant factor in increasing the security of the region. The thesis argues by providing historical, economic and political facts, that in the present situation, all necessary requirements for NATO membership have been satisfied by Croatia. Therefore, acceptance itself is thus only a political decision of the NATO members.

The thesis provides evidence that Croatia has become equally or better prepared than other serious aspirants to be a member of NATO by providing a comparative overview of the basic data considered for admission to NATO. It also demonstrates that Croatian membership represents a significant benefit to the Alliance and contributes to the achievement of the basic NATO goals in Southeastern Europe. Additionally, the thesis addresses various benefits that the neighboring countries might reap from Croatian membership in the Alliance, which will enhance not only regional, but also European security.

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I. INTRODUCTION

All of Europe's new democracies, from the Baltic to the Black Sea and all that lie between, should have the same chance for security and freedom – and the same chance to join the institutions of Europe – as Europe's old democracies have ... I believe in NATO membership for all of Europe's democracies that seek it and are ready to share responsibilities that NATO brings ... as we plan to enlarge NATO, no nation should be used as a pawn in the agenda of others ... we will not trade away the fate of free European peoples ... no more Munichs ... no more Yaltas ... as we plan the Prague Summit, we should not calculate how little we can get away with, but how much we can do to advance the cause of freedom.¹ The US President George W. Bush, Warsaw, 15 June 2001.

Since the end of the Cold War, membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions has been the top priority issue in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and particularly applies to membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). Croatia, sharing the same goals and values, is no exception to such trends. However, during the past decade it has encountered tremendous obstacles to integration into those institutions. Obviously, Croatia could not have thought about acceptance into NATO and the EU during the period when the struggle for national independence overshadowed all other issues. In achieving independence in 1991, Croatia paid a high price socio-politically and economically, to say nothing of human losses. In essence, one could argue that Croatia fell behind the normal pace of participation in Western integration by at least ten years. This setback happened primarily due to Serbian aggression, but also because of the lingering Western stereotypes about Croatia and divergent political interests of European powers in the region, and, to a lesser extent, due to problems of domestic politics that reverberated beyond Croatia's borders. In early 2000, significant socio-political changes began to unfold in Croatia, and during the subsequent two years all formal barriers to Croatia's integration into Western institutions disappeared.

¹ 197th Congress, 1st Session, 24 October 2001, Statement of the US President George W. Bush in his speech in Warsaw on 15 June 2001, <http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/Enlargement/documents/enlargement241001.pdf>.

A. HYPOTHESIS

This thesis seeks to provide sufficient evidence that Croatia is equally or better prepared to become a member of NATO than many other serious aspirants. Undoubtedly, Croatia is among the best-prepared aspirant countries for NATO membership in terms of its political, economic and military status. Moreover, thanks to its geo-strategic position, Croatia can offer NATO numerous advantages that other aspiring nations cannot. However, the question of why Croatia has not achieved membership much earlier in Euro-Atlantic institutions, and particularly NATO, has emerged. An answer to this question must include a broader picture of the crucial moments that occurred both inside Croatia and its surrounding areas during the 20th century and especially during the 1990s. This broader picture will provide the context that unambiguously shows that the next logical step toward the stabilization of Southeastern Europe is Croatia's membership in NATO. It will also address various benefits that the neighboring countries might reap from Croatian membership in the Alliance.

B. THESIS RELEVANCE

Croatia believes that its chances for membership are outstanding in comparison with other aspirant nations because of its ability to offer more benefits with less risk than other NATO candidates. At the same time, membership in NATO will increase the level of security within Croatia, which is important because of region instability. Although Croatia encounters difficulties on its path toward the desired membership in NATO and the EU, Croatia is positioned to overcome these obstacles with greater speed than expected. However, the influence and level of support of the international community, especially the United States and other members of NATO and the EU, are essential to the success or failure of Croatia's aspirations for membership.

This thesis will argue that if Croatia becomes a NATO member in 2002, its membership will provide enhanced stability to Southeastern Europe and therefore reduce the area of instability to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina only. Thus, the zone of stability in Europe will grow, allowing the probability for future conflicts in Southeastern Europe to become more an object of speculation than a real concern.

C. BACKGROUND

Two unexpected events tremendously changed the recent political map of the world with unforeseeable consequences for the future development of mankind. The first event was the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. It marked the end of communism and the ideological division of Europe and the World. The second event occurred in 2001 when 'fortress America' was attacked, which arguably ended American isolationism of the early 1990s. Although the September 11 attacks are too recent for a full analysis, the consequences have already manifested a remarkable new set of challenges and strategic alignments.² In light of those two events, the further consolidation and strengthening of democratic forces around the world is evident. This is especially obvious in Europe, where the initial steps toward a democratically integrated and secure continent have already been taken, although there remains a considerable amount of work to be done in the near and the distant future.

After the mighty communist empire simply imploded and disappeared in front of a shocked Western audience, Europe found itself in a radically new security environment. Together with the Berlin Wall, the Soviet threat was gone, which automatically raised the question of the purposefulness of *Pax Americana* in the forthcoming period. Moreover, "the general reluctance on the part of major powers ... to attain George Bush's *Pax Universalis*, built upon shared responsibilities and aspirations,"³ deepened differences about the future security composition of Europe. This, along with German unification, caused the mutual suspiciousness among old European powers and resurrected their alignment according to the lines of 1914 and 1940. This alignment was most obvious during the European engagement in the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. Under the circumstances where the need for collective defense declined, and with the United States (US) preoccupied with the Gulf crisis, NATO underwent the period of questioning its *raison d'être*. Thus, some sort of security vacuum emerged in Europe and lasted for a few

² "The establishment of the anti-terrorist coalition represents the beginning of deep and far-reaching changes on the world political scene. I am speaking about the changes in relations between countries or groups of countries, and the changes in the nature and way of functioning of international alliances, such as NATO for example, as well as international organizations." Speech of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Mr. Stjepan Mesic, at the UN General Assembly on 11 November 2001, http://www.predsjednik.hr/english/speeches/11_11_2001_3.html.

³ Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press 1995) p. 144.

years, until the US decided to stop Serbian aggression in 1994/95, and to bring peace to Southeastern Europe. The consequences of reestablished US leadership in Europe quickly resulted in the decline of tensions among allies and in numerous initiatives that improved the European security picture. It also enabled the process of European integration, despite existing obstacles, to continue to advance, and bring more and more nations to the European mainstream.

These integrations occurred on two parallel fronts. The first was NATO enlargement and the close cooperation among members and partner states and the second was economic prosperity through membership in the EU and its related programs. Thus, “NATO and EU enlargements are closely linked both politically and strategically.”⁴ Consequently, “[for CEE countries] the EU ... will be the engine of Europe’s prosperity ... and NATO would be the instrument of their *Wirtschaftswunder* ... as it was for Western Europeans [after WWII]”⁵. As those changes become more imminent, both positive and negative feelings emerged among European nations. On one side there is an exclusive club of Western European nations who have enjoyed democracy long enough to develop themselves economically. Their perception of a united Europe was formed through centuries of mutual conflicts and after decades of the Cold War where NATO provided security and economic support was bolstered by the US. On the other side there is the group of smaller, underdeveloped, CEE nations carrying the burden of being the object of historical deals among great powers. Although things may appear peaceful on the surface, “the question of who would ... control CEE”⁶ has shown that old European rivalries still boil within. The ten years of turmoil in the former Yugoslavia illustrated the capacity of those seemingly quiet areas to explode into an international scale problem. However, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seemed that this new age would bring the long expected prosperity, and that conditions had been met for a decisive step toward the realization of the dream of a unified Europe.

⁴ NATO Parliamentary Assembly: Political Sub-Committee on CEE, Report: NATO Enlargement, <http://www.naa.be/publications/comrep/2001/au-214-e.html#1>.

⁵ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Long Entanglement: NATO First Fifty Years*, Praeger, Westport CT, 1999, p. 198.

⁶ Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 144.

After a decade of preparations and repositioning, the first decade of the 21st century offered a unique opportunity to realize the centuries old dream of a unified Europe, a Europe without devastating wars, irreconcilable hostilities, dominating ideologies, iron curtains, and impassable borders or 'a Europe whole and free'. Although this may sound overly idealistic, the most important preconditions for such a scenario have already been fulfilled. With regard to politics, there are no major differences between the political systems in Western Europe and the new democracies in Central and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Europe. In terms of economic progress, the EU finished enormous preparations for the establishment of a common European market in 1992, and introduced a common currency on 1 January 2002. Those historical changes, coupled with the relatively successful economic transition that took place in the CEE, will facilitate a further expansion of the EU.

With regard to security, NATO successfully overcame its identity crisis, conducted a major consolidation and reorganization, and continued to serve as the main pillar of security and stability throughout Europe. Despite the initial skepticism about NATO enlargement and some catastrophic predictions,⁷ practice showed that acceptance of new NATO members improved the European security picture. Those points being considered, further EU expansion and NATO enlargement offer much room for optimism.

1. Crisis in Former Yugoslavia

The only remaining problematic area in the relatively promising European environment is the region of Southeastern Europe or, more specifically, the former Yugoslavia. Finding an appropriate solution for the sequence of events that hit the region during the 1990s is a difficult task. "The divergent approaches ... taken by the major EU countries was informed both by differing perceptions of the conflict and by a disparity in objectives at various times."⁸ Beside major European powers, Russia and the US have maintained divergent interests in the region, which created a highly complicated situation in which everybody wants to have a say, but no one wants to take full responsibility for a

⁷ Illustration of the views on NATO is Kenneth Waltz's statement: "NATO is disappearing thing. It is a question of how long it is going to remain as a significant institution even though its name may linger on." Quoted in Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation Among Democracies*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics, 1997, p. 220.

⁸ James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, Columbia University Press, NY, 1997, p. 182.

long-lasting stabilization and economic recovery of the region. There is no doubt that the major blame for the crises and wars during the 1990s is to be put on the Serbs. Their actions caused the wars and can be blamed for some of the most unspeakable atrocities seen in Europe since the Nazi times. However, the international community must also claim an equal amount of responsibility for the United Nations (UN) Security Council's failure to prevent or stop Serbian aggression against neighboring nations.

The lack of interest and political will is clearly described in General Shalikashvili's statement "What took place at that moment was what I would call a holiday from leadership. The Europeans were not yet up to it, and the Americans were for a variety of reasons taking time off."⁹ That situation actually helped the Serbs to carry out attacks on their disarmed neighbors, especially after the UN imposed an arms embargo that prevented the nations attacked from defending themselves, while Serbia "was almost self-sufficient as an arms producer."¹⁰ This caused an enormous number of casualties and millions of refugees. Unfortunately, three NATO countries, the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and France, are permanent members of the UN Security Council and they consequently share a certain amount of responsibility for the present situation in the region. This presents Croatia with a frustrating situation that cannot be easily resolved. Under such circumstances, any position that Croatia takes is connected with incalculable risks.

If Croatia attempts to raise the question of Western rejection of its independence in 1991 and inexcusable behavior of the West during the Serbian aggression against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia's chances for membership in Western integration would be diminished. On the contrary, if Croatia acknowledges that Western policy during the 1990s was satisfactory, it would represent the acceptance of almost equal responsibility with the Serbs for the wars between 1991-95. This creates the situation in which Croatia is a hostage of its ambition to join Western institutions where it historically, culturally and naturally belongs. Even worse, Croatia has been continuously seen as mainly responsible for the destruction of the beloved Yugoslavia of Tito's era.

⁹ David Halberstam, War in a Time of Peace, Scribner, New York, 2001, p. 88.

¹⁰ Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson eds, International Perspective of the Yugoslav Conflict, St. Martin Press, Inc., 1996, p. 153.

Such double standards used by the Western powers, especially the UK and France, caused the crisis to worsen and produced catastrophic side effects including ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Despite the fact that from the very beginning of its existence Croatia strived for closer relationships with Western European countries and the US, it was not warmly welcomed by either. Paradoxically, Western support was given to Milosevic's communists who later transformed into some kind of national-socialist hybrid closely resembling the Nazis. Also it was "intolerable that, 18 months after the collapse of communism ... two republics with democratically elected governments should be crushed by a communist-led army"¹¹ Croatia and Slovenia were suspected of being nationalists. Moreover, some Western governments perceived Croatia as the state that caused the breakup of Yugoslavia and consequently must bear responsibility for the crises and wars that followed the declarations of Croatian and Slovenian independence. States such as Germany¹², which tried to help Croatia escape such a destiny, were immediately accused of attempting to restore old ties from WWII.

Thus, the normal historical process of dissolution of multinational communist states, which was accepted and supported by the West in the case of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, was denied to all non-Serbian nations of the former Yugoslavia. Efforts to explain that the formation of the former Yugoslavia was the consequence of balance-of-power politics practiced in Versailles and Yalta fell on deaf ears, mostly because of the role of the same powers at both conferences. Despite this, Croatia and Slovenia, "following the example of Baltic republics of the Soviet Union,"¹³ continued with their preparation for independence. After it became obvious that the survival of Yugoslavia, unwanted by most of its constitutive nations, would be impossible, the West unwillingly recognized Croatia and Slovenia. But, the recognition by the West also brought many challenges to Croatia.

¹¹ The Independent, 4 July 1991, quoted in James Gow, Triumph of the Lack of Will, Columbia University Press, NY, 1997, p. 49.

¹² Actually UK, France, Spain and Greece were against the recognition, while all others European states were in favor. James Gow, Triumph of the Lack of Will, Columbia University Press, NY, 1997, p. 160.

¹³ Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson eds., International Perspective of the Yugoslav Conflict, St. Martin Press, Inc., 1996, p. 130.

According to the Milosevic-Kucan deal, Slovenia was allowed to walk away from the continuing crisis in the region while Croatia was forced to remain deeply involved in the chaos caused by the Serbian occupation of one third of Croatian territory in concert with the unresolved situation in BiH.¹⁴ Faced with the aforementioned circumstances, Croatia fought desperately for its very survival during 1991 with little or no support from the outside world except from the Croatian diaspora. The outnumbered, outgunned and inadequately equipped Croatian Army, struggling with the challenges of its recent formation, somehow succeeded in defending most of the Croatian territory. Despite suffering severe casualties, the Croatian Army protected its civilian population as much as it could and only failed to do so in the case of Vukovar. After three years of preparations, the Croatian Army liberated most of the occupied territory receiving compliments even from the US side, “for the first time I realize how much the Croatian offensive in the Krajina has profoundly changed the nature of Balkan game and thus our diplomatic offensive.”¹⁵ Beside being successful in defending and liberating Croatia’s territory under the given circumstances, the Croatian Army decisively contributed in 1995 to the US and NATO efforts to end the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

However, Croatian politicians failed to do their part by ensuring an adequate international position for the young republic. This failure later became one of the most troublesome issues during Croatian attempts to join Euro-Atlantic institutions. Indecisive domestic politics coupled with a lack of international support resulted in a vicious cycle. The cause of this cycle is hard to define, but the results are evident. Croatia is still not a member of the core Euro-Atlantic institutions, NATO and the EU. Worse still is the fact that Croatia is forced to remain categorized with other Western Balkan¹⁶ countries that cannot match the basic requirements for membership involved with any serious integration.

¹⁴ “Milosevic and Kucan ... agreed on Slovenia’s departure from the federation ... and, in fact, destroyed federal Yugoslavia, Richard Hoolbrooke, To End a War, Random House, NY, 1998, p. 29.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁶ In 1997 the EU launched the new regional initiative called for ‘Western Balkans’ (Albania, BiH, Croatia, Macedonia, and Yugoslavia - now Serbia and Montenegro). Source: The EU’s Relations with ‘South Eastern Europe’ (the new euphemism for Western Balkans), http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/croatia/index.htm

Prior to the US direct engagement in the region in 1993, the situation was structured in favor of Serbian aggression. Western European (UK, France) policy was more concentrated on appeasement of the Serbs than on finding an appropriate countermeasure for stopping their aggression. Numerous examples from both the UN Security Council and various European institutions confirm the biased approach of European powers that allowed the Serbs to pursue their concept of a Greater Serbia for more than a decade. At the same time, the inactiveness of the international community was rife with theories about civil war, ancient hatreds and equal guilt. This frustrated the victims of aggression and resulted in their disbelief and lack of confidence in the West.

US engagement, although later than expected, cut the Gordian knot and partially solved the crisis in 1995, and again in 1999, but still left many unanswered questions about the future composition of the region. However, it evidently showed that the European security system heavily depends on US leadership, and that without the US presence, as happened after WWI and before WWII, it tends to be inefficient and even mutually destructive. The only positive aspect of the 1990s for Croatia and the remainder of the former Yugoslavia was that the Serbs were not as powerful as the Nazis, which limited the amount of damage they were able to inflict.

2. Epur si muove

The very beginning of the year 2000 brought elections in Croatia that changed the internal political landscape and resulted in numerous changes in foreign policy. In less than two years, Croatia became a member of Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Vilnius group - a group of NATO candidates, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. "What we are especially proud of is the fact that Croatia marks the 10th anniversary of its international recognition as a country which was given the index of a completely free country for the first time in a Freedom House report."¹⁷ On the domestic front, changes were introduced at a rapid pace also. Those changes included modifications to the Constitution and the legal system along with the introduction of an open market economy and an improvement

¹⁷ Prime Minister Racan's speech during a special session of the Croatian Parliament on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Croatia's recognition by the international community. <http://www.vlada.hr/bulletin/2002/january/focus-full.html>.

in human rights. Also, the democratic changes in Croatia started a chain of events in BiH and Serbia where subsequent elections ushered in new, more democratic governments, which offered increased chances for progress in the region.

However, while Croatia has progressed rapidly on the path to democratization, BiH and Serbia have taken only elementary steps. This lack of progress necessitates more help from outside agencies in coping with the serious problems which accumulated during the 1990s. Even though Croatia has the best of intentions to help BiH, it cannot solve all of its struggling neighbor's problems alone. Most of the impediments to Croatia's help to BiH arise because of perceptions from within BiH that Croatia still possesses an offensive posture towards the sovereignty of BiH. Moreover, expectations that Croatia should help Serbia, after their actions during the past decade, are unrealistic and would be possible only after the Serbian leadership takes formal and moral responsibility for Serbia's role in the war. Those factors, combined with decreasing US interest in the region, result in new challenges for Croatia.

With US support, Croatia's chances for becoming part of Western institutions are better and solutions to the crisis in the region appear to be much more attainable. Promising signals were sent from NATO Parliamentary Assembly that stated, "even though Croatia is not yet participating in MAP, NATO should extend the invitation to include it."¹⁸ Expecting such a positive development, Croatia already adapted defense-related laws and published basic strategic documents,¹⁹ preparing itself for entrance into the Membership Action Plan (MAP) by shaping its Annual National Program (ANP). After finishing those, Croatia will fulfill all formal demands for the NATO summit in Prague by the end of 2002 and will hopefully find itself among the most qualified candidates for NATO membership. Political, economic and military indicators in Croatia all favor Croatia's current position in comparison with other aspirant countries. Moreover, the general improvement of European security, following the entry of three CEE countries into NATO, bolsters optimism that aspirant nations for the next round of

¹⁸ NATO Parliamentary Assembly: Political Sub-Committee on Central and Eastern Europe, Study: NATO Enlargement, <http://www.naa.be/publications/comrep/2001/au-214-e.html#1>.

¹⁹ Croatian Parliament adopted on 15 March 2002 five defense-related laws along with National Security Strategy and Defense Strategy. Source: Vjesnik, 16 March 2002, <http://www.vjesnik.hr/html/Default.asp>.

enlargement will be accepted with less reluctance and suspicion. Thus, the zone of stability in Europe will grow, allowing the probability for future conflicts to become more an object of speculation than real concern.

However, possible US disengagement in the region is the worst thing that could happen to Croatia. Without US leadership and support for NATO enlargement, it is hardly possible for Croatia to accelerate its progress towards entering Euro-Atlantic institutions. During the worst period of Croatia's newest history, from 1991-1995, Europeans did not demonstrate very much understanding for Croatian problems. Rather, their "competing interests ... served to prevent or hold back [Croats] ... to realize their national ambition."²⁰ If Croatian democratic achievements continue to be ignored, as it mainly happened in the realm of the EU, Croatia will remain part of the slowly moving Balkan convoy progressing at a sluggish pace towards its aspirations. This scenario may seem pessimistic, but history is full of examples of Western inattention to the region.

In addition, there are two stumbling blocks which need to be addressed on the road towards Croatian membership in NATO. First, the contradictory interests of the Western European countries in the region could result in the lack of political will to accept Croatia in the relevant institutions. Secondly, there is skepticism concerning the behavior on the part of Croatian politicians who superimpose their individual interests to the good of the nation. The second obstacle is already being dealt with through the democratic political structure in Croatia. However, the solution is not as simple as a surface analysis would indicate, because it is not mutually exclusive with the first. Both issues have to be examined as parts of a whole, and a democratic process cannot have immediate results. If it did, it would certainly be suspect of even being democratic. Given that establishing a new democracy is an ongoing process, Croatia can only enhance and speed up its transition to a nation with a mature democracy through integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutions.

To have a better understanding of how the two obstacles are interconnected, it must be unequivocally stated at the outset that Croatia is sufficiently qualified to be a

²⁰ Alex N. Dragnich, Serbs and Croats: The Struggle in Yugoslavia, Harcourt Brace & Company, NY, 1992, p. xiii.

member of NATO. One could make the case, based upon the recent socio-political changes and developments in Croatia, that Croatia is one of the best-qualified candidates for acceptance into the Alliance. In spite of any qualification that Croatia may have for membership in any Western alliance, the political perception in the West is burdened with disapprobation, partly justified by viewing Croatia in the context of its association with Nazi Germany of WWII. In other words, there is an *a priori* judgment against Croatia, a pervasive obstacle for any *per fas et nefas*. Therefore, certain issues, such as human and minority rights, have been overly emphasized occasionally, e.g., Serbs in Croatia. Naturally, such tendencies have drastic consequences upon the domestic political development and the full implementation of democratic standards in Croatia.

The domestic policy in Croatia between 1990 and 2000 may have been somewhat chaotic, disorganized and prone to *ad hoc* solutions as opposed to having standardized approaches and mechanisms in place for problem solving. Such a situation is not too surprising, either, considering that a newly created, inexperienced government had to deal not only with establishing a functioning system, but also had to organize a defensive war against a much stronger enemy. The transitional processes that took place within most other CEE countries were, therefore, postponed, and had to take place in the second half of the decade. Even then, the processes of democratization and privatization did not flow smoothly, as the country was burdened by a significant number of refugees, mainly from BiH, and by the devastation and casualties left after the war. That period, however, was not used for strengthening the state institutions necessary for the transition process, which further postponed the stabilization of the country. Nevertheless, the potentials and the capability for it were there. The government elected in 2000 has proven that the major transition processes could be accomplished within a relatively short time in spite of the delays.

Those recent achievements and the current Croatian ambition for Western integrations are not very new, as a brief overview of the Croatian history will show. Many times in history there have been attempts and tendencies in Croatia to form coalitions and partnerships with its western neighbors. For a variety of reasons, those attempts and tendencies remained fruitless, mainly because of the complex geopolitical

position of Croatia and the frequently repeated international pressure upon Croatia to build coalitions with its eastern neighbors during the 20th century.

D. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

To facilitate the uninterrupted flow of this thesis, the content is divided in four chapters. Chapter II covers a short historical overview of Croatia including the major events that bring it to the beginning of the 21st century. This chapter attempts to explain Croatia's centuries old dream of full independence. It also contains reasons that forced Croatians to respond in the way they did regardless of human sacrifice or obstacles imposed from external factors. That tendency culminated by the end of 1980s and beginning of the 1990s with only one possible result: international recognition of a sovereign Croatian state. In the aftermath of the wars in the 1990s, the results of international involvement were actually not successful for Croatia, and left Croatians feeling as though their interests had been sacrificed for the 'higher ideals' of European stability

Chapter III examines the establishment and the development of NATO and its role during the Cold War and the wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, particularly during the war in BiH. Within that period, Croatia became a sort of 'silent NATO partner', helping the US and NATO resolve the crisis in BiH which resulted in the signing of the (un)successful Dayton Agreement, which brought an end to the war. Those developments allowed the US to regain a strategic initiative resulting in the creation of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and NATO membership for three CEE countries. However, following the NATO intervention in Kosovo and the political changes in Croatia, a new set of circumstances offers a more cooperative approach from all sides, which might result in Croatia's transition from a silent partner to full membership.

Chapter IV deals with changes in Croatia that occurred between 2000 and 2002. Those changes included the establishment of a new framework for cooperation with the West, along with the prospect of Croatia's future participation in Euro-Atlantic institutions. During that period, Croatia became a member of a variety of international institutions, except the two most important, NATO and the EU. However, this increased Croatia's participation in various regional initiatives and improved the possibility of

Croatia to become a NATO member. Croatian institutions made serious efforts to achieve the status of a MAP country. The final decision regarding Croatia's NATO membership will be made during NATO's Prague summit in November 2002. Croatia believes that its chances for membership are outstanding in comparison with other aspirant nations because of its ability to offer more benefits with less risk than other NATO candidates. This chapter explores what positive consequences might result from Croatian membership in NATO. It will also show the inevitability of changes in the international community's approach to Croatia, and offer possible solutions when, combined with Croatian NATO membership, can improve regional stability in a relatively short period of time. Thus, the most complicated crisis in Europe following WWII can be brought to a close.

Finally, the conclusions suggest that the most logical contribution to stability and prosperity of the region and Europe is a swift and decisive inauguration of Croatia into NATO and other Western institutions. It would also be the next logical step in the Western approach that has proven itself as successful as with other CEE countries.

II. CROATIA – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

There is no force in the world that could quash Croatian aspirations. Sooner will Velebit mountains collapse into the sea, sooner will the Drava and the Sava run dry, than we may see the Croats to give up their aspirations for preservation and free development of their identity.²¹ Svetozar Pribicevic, political leader of Croatian Serbs during 1920s.

Croatia's location in an extremely exposed geo-strategic position has brought it more troubles than benefits. Centuries of existence on the frontlines under foreign domination have resulted in the decimation of the population and a loss of territory. After the early medieval Croatian state vanished in 1102, Croatia spent the following eight centuries as part of several common states. Croatia was first part of the Croatian-Hungarian Kingdom, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and finally a part of Yugoslavia from 1918-1991. Despite their lack of independence for a period of almost nine centuries, Croats always maintained their own government. The Croatian viceroy or *ban* and the Croatian parliament or *Sabor*²², remained more or less independent from the central state throughout this lengthy period. In addition to their long tradition of (semi) self-government, Croats are extremely sensitive about their Catholicism and centuries old connection with Western Europe.

Croats accepted Christianity immediately after their migration in the 7th century. Christianity decisively shaped their culture until current times, and became a matter of huge significance during the 20th century. A short overview of Croatian history is necessary for a clear understanding of the Croatian position in the region and Europe. Knowledge of Croatian persistence in its struggle for independence may shed some light on Croatia's eagerness for membership in Western institutions. An overview of history will also illuminate the complexity of the situation in a region where the mixture of nations, languages and religions makes any solution extremely complicated. A further

²¹ Svetozar Pribicevic, *The Dictatorship of King Aleksandar*, 1933, quoted in Ivo Peric, *A History of the Croats*, CTT, Zagreb 1998, p. 205. Pribicevic was the leader of Croatian Serbs and proponent of a Greater Serbia who, by using all possible tricks, fraudulently made the creation of a common state possible.

²² The only, but significant, exception was the period between 1929-1939 when the Serbian king, through the royal coup, banned political parties and abandoned the Croatian parliament.

issue of importance is the strangest phenomena to occur in the Balkans during last 150 years or the concept of a Greater Serbia, which frequently caused tremors on a regional, European and even global level. That concept, based on a policy of deceit and violence, and supported by myths about a 'chosen people,' resulted in the usage "of different means, from armed aggression to the systematic spreading of untruths ... trying to prove that ... their projects were humanitarian, rightful, progressive and noble."²³ On the contrary, "within the project of Serbian expansionism, a global system of spreading untruths was persistently constructed, ranging from marginalization to open denial of the cultural and ethnic features and rights"²⁴ of neighboring nations, especially Croats.

A. CROATIA UNTIL 1918

Croatian statehood appears as early as the late 8th century and was interrupted when Charlemagne's Franks conquered most of Europe including Croatia whose dukes became Franks' vassals.²⁵ Regaining full independence in the second half of 9th century, Croatian dukes consolidated the state that became powerful and reached its zenith under Tomislav (910-928), the first Croatian King, who received all royal insignia from the Pope. King Tomislav fought successfully against the Hungarians in the North, and the Bulgarians in the East, allowing the establishment of a Croatian Kingdom that covered an area approximately the size of today's Croatia and BiH combined.²⁶ The Kingdom lasted for almost two centuries, and most of the time, the capitol was the city of Knin.

The Croatian part of the Kingdom lasted until 1102 when the last Croatian king died without descendants. The Bosnian part became separate and lasted until the Ottomans occupied Bosnia. Croatian nobles could not agree on his successor but his wife and a sister to the Hungarian King succeeded in merging the two kingdoms. The Queen's brother Coloman (Kalman) became the first Croatian-Hungarian king. This agreement between the Hungarians and Croats is known as the *Pacta conventa*.²⁷ The signing of that document represented the beginning of the personal union between Croatia and Hungary

²³ Boze Covic ed., Roots of Serbian Aggression, Center for Foreign Languages and AGM d.o.o., Zagreb, 1993, p. 15.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 7-8.

²⁶ Vjekoslav Klaic: Povijest Hrvata (The History of Croats), Volume I. Nakladni Zavod Matice Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1985, pp. 98-107.

²⁷ King Coloman assumed the title: King of Hungary, Croatia and Dalmatia, p. 152.

which lasted more than four centuries. It was not an idyllic relationship and, similar to the rest of Europe, was full of intrigues and plots resulting from time to time in the overthrow of ruling kings and the inauguration of new ones, but it lasted long enough to be considered a stable kingdom.

However, during the 15th century, the Croatian-Hungarian kingdom began to decline, losing territories along the Adriatic coast to Venice while at the same time facing an increasing threat from the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had conquered the remains of the Serbian kingdom during the second half of the 14th century and had occupied Bosnia by 1463. The constant Croatian-Hungarian fight against the Ottomans during the second half of the 15th century and first decades of the 16th century resulted in heavy territorial and human losses and eventually led to the final Ottoman victory in Mohacs in 1526. This final battle was lost mainly because of a lack of support from Europe against the Ottomans. The lack of European support can be at least partially attributed to the declining influence of the Pope following the Diet of Worms in 1521.²⁸ “The outcome of Mohacs held great significance for the future of Central Europe ... [and] opened [Ottomans] the road to the heart of the continent.”²⁹ Thus, the destiny of Croatia was again redirected, bringing about circumstances in which the Croatian gentry had to choose a new ruler.

Their choice was the Austrian King Ferdinand I Habsburg, brother of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. It is apparent that Ferdinand was elected because of the belief “that the union with Austria would make defense against the Ottomans more effective.”³⁰ Although the Austrians made huge efforts to protect their new possessions, the Ottomans advanced steadily and captured more than half of Hungary and almost three-quarters of Croatia by the end of the 16th century. These extensive Ottoman gains reduced Croatia to ‘remains of remains’ (*reliquiae reliquiarum*). Still another problem was the displacement of the Croatian population toward the northwest in an attempt to escape Ottoman brutalities. Ottoman occupation also resulted in the arrival of the Walachians, an Orthodox nomadic tribe, to the depopulated Croatian territories.

²⁸ Hagen Schulze, *States, Nations and Nationalism*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, p. 43.

²⁹ Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 34.

³⁰ Ivo Peric, *A History of the Croats*, CTT, Zagreb 1998, p. 87.

The Austrians responded by bringing more Walachians³¹ and by the creation of the Military Frontier or *Vojna Krajina* directly subordinated to Vienna. This resulted in the division of Croatia among the Ottomans, Venetians, Austrians and Hungarians. Only the small area around Zagreb remained under Croatian control. Compliments that the Croats represented the bulwark of Christianity (*antemuralis Christianitatis*), although true, were not accompanied by any external assistance from other Christian powers inside Europe. The Austrians remained preoccupied with problems in Western Europe and competition with the Hungarians, leaving Croatia isolated and abandoned during its most crucial times³². Moreover, the consequence of Prince Eugen's retreat from Serbia and Bosnia in 1689 brought a large number of Serbs to Croatian territory. Interestingly, the French Revolution caused a significant impact on the Croatian territories. Although the French rule of Croatia lasted only from 1806 to 1815, under the name of the 'Illyrian Provinces', this period was long enough to begin the process of a national awakening. Of further interest is the fact that current Croatian southeastern borders are similar to those established during the Napoleonic period.

Following the 1815 Congress of Vienna, Austria regained territories in Croatia, but divided them between Vienna and Budapest. The search for a Croatian national identity and resistance against Germanization and Magyarization became the primary struggle during the 19th century. That struggle was most apparent in 1848 when the Croatian National Revival succeeded in the formation of foundations for the emerging

³¹ Interestingly, according to some historians, the Serbian name appeared relatively late. "As Austrian consul in Sarajevo, Herkalovic later stated that the first time the Serbian name became known in Bosnia was in 1862. Before that, those that later called themselves Serbs were called Walachians, Hrkaci, Christians, and Roma ... The Serbian Orthodox priest Petranovic went to Bosnia with the explicit purpose to found a society that would propagate the Serbian name among the Orthodox in BiH. In 1866 ... an Orthodox seminary was established, ... [but] students spent more time training for guerilla warfare than studying for the priesthood." Francis S. Eterovich and Christopher Spalatin, eds., *Croatia: Land, People, Culture*, Volume III, Croatian Franciscan Press, Chicago, IL, 1998, p. 99.

³² In fact, every time the Ottomans were close to a major defeat, the Emperors pulled troops out of the region. Numerous situations such as the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and the War of Spanish succession that caused the retreat of Prince Eugen of Savoy together with Serbs who feared Ottoman revenge after the Holy League (Austria, Poland and Venice) actually won, the Vienna War (1683-1689), the War for Austrian succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years War (1756-1763) are examples of Austrian engagement on the completely opposite side of the Empire. The last abolishment of a campaign against the Ottomans occurred in 1790, as a consequence of the French Revolution. The Austrian Emperor signed a peace agreement under unfavorable conditions and gave already recaptured Croatian territories back to the Ottomans. More detailed explanations can be found in Vjekoslav Klaic: *Povijest Hrvata (The History of Croats)*, Volume V. Nakladni Zavod Matice Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1985.

modern Croatian nation.³³ That same year was marked by unrest throughout the Empire, resulting in the resignation of Metternich, the symbol of absolutism. The first signs of dissatisfaction inside the multinational state also began to appear. Beside Austrian and Hungarian nationalisms, the idea of Russia-sponsored panslavism was introduced. At the same time, the Croatian *ban* Jelacic helped Vienna to consolidate its power in Hungary by participating in the crackdown on the Hungarian revolution of 1849. He hoped that the Croatian position inside the Empire would be enhanced, but a new deal between Vienna and Budapest took place, allowing absolutism to be restored again at the expense of Croatia.³⁴ As a result of those many events, the Croats became more cognizant of the fact that only their own state could protect their best interests.

By the mid 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was crumbling while Austria and Russia hoped to annex the region into their empires. That move introduced new major players into the region. Russia which declared herself the protector of the Slavs, and Britain who tried to oppose both Austrian and Russian expansion in order to protect its interests in the Mediterranean. The final result was the Bismarck sponsored Berlin Congress, which established a new order in the region with Serbia and Montenegro being recognized as fully independent states while Austrians would administer BiH.

The hope that BiH, after being occupied by the Empire in 1878, would become part of Croatia was unrealistic because neither the Austrians nor the Hungarians wanted a third strong player in their power game and, also, because of a possible unification with the Serbs, which could endanger the very existence of the Empire. On the contrary, the idea of a common state of Southern Slavs was strongly supported by Russia which tried to broaden its influence in the only accessible area in Europe: the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, which was the sick man of Europe since “the failure of the siege of Vienna in 1683.”³⁵ Nevertheless, during the 19th century, the situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire became almost equally complicated. Nationalisms were on the rise and the state could not respond to all the demands.

³³ ‘Neither with Vienna nor with Budapest’ was the slogan launched by Croatian Bishop Strossmayer. Later, that became the foundation for the idea of South-Slavism (Yugoslavia). Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 94.

³⁴ Jill A. Irvine, The Croat Question, Westview Press, 1993, p. 23.

³⁵ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 52.

Moreover, the Emperor provoked further alienation within the empire by trying to appease two core nations, the Austrians and Hungarians, by giving them dominant positions. The Croats were especially boisterous in their demands for increased autonomy and in their resistance to ongoing Magyarization. This led to deterioration in relations and the 1905 formation of the block of political parties known as the 'New Course.' Those parties maintained a majority in the Parliament and strongly opposed Hungarian domination. They additionally sought increased cooperation with the Serbs, while forgetting that the Serbs continued to pursue the idea of a Greater Serbia. The Serbs were already preparing the basis for assimilation of the Croats. Karadzic wrote that, "those of the Roman Catholic Church [Croats] find it difficult to call themselves Serbs but will get used to it little by little, for if they do not want to be Serbs they have no other choice."³⁶

During the first decade of the 20th century, other important events occurred. After Russia's defeat in the war with Japan in 1904, they turned westward.³⁷ In 1905, the Serbian king was murdered by a secret organization and replaced with a pro-Russian one. That event, along with the Young Turks movement and the Austrian annexation of BiH, caused tremors within the delicate equilibrium of the region. In October of 1912, the four Balkan countries of Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria attacked Turkey and after one month gained a complete victory. At an international conference in London in 1913, a compromise about the territories was reached ³⁸, and through outside pressure, a separate state of Albania was created. Serbia managed to gain the Albanian province of Kosovo at the same conference.

As a result of the first and second Balkan Wars, Serbia doubled its previous territory, further raising its appetite for becoming the leading power in the Balkans. Serbian expansion also caused increased conflict with almost all of its neighboring nations. With those events occurring in its backyard, Austria became nervous, and started to behave aggressively. That, along with the earlier formation of two alliances between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria and Italy) and the Triple Entente (France, Britain

³⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

³⁷ Alex N. Dragich, Serbs and Croats: The Struggle in Yugoslavia, Harcourt Brace and Company, NY, 1992, p. 11.

³⁸ Since the boundaries were drawn up by the great powers, none of the Balkan countries were entirely happy, which created the need for a revision of the borders until recently.

and Russia) who backed Serbia, had resulted in the formation of highly unstable conditions within the region. In fact, everything was prepared for war. Just a good excuse was needed.

This excuse came with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo³⁹ that opened a Pandora's box of events by activating obligations derived from secret treaties among leading European powers. That successive chain of attacks proceeded as follows. Austria declared war on Serbia, Russia then declared war on Austria, Germany on Russia, France on Germany and so on. Within days of its commencement, World War I developed into the biggest disaster that the world had ever experienced. During WWI, Serbia was heavily defeated with the help of German forces who occupied almost the entire Balkan Peninsula. However, Serbia managed to stay on the right side at the right time, which became a decisive detail during the Treaty of Versailles.

B. CROATIA UNDER SERBIAN DOMINATION 1918-1991

Following the failure of the German offensive during the spring of 1918, it became obvious that the Austro-Hungarian Empire had come to an end. Constituent nations started to declare independence and the Empire disintegrated. Under the strong influence of President Wilson's 14 points⁴⁰, Croatia, Slovenia and BiH proclaimed the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs on 29 October 1918. At the urging of Britain and France, talks about unification with the Serbian Kingdom began shortly thereafter in Geneva. "The negotiations were hard and tedious thanks to the clash of two irreconcilable visions of the future union – of full equality advocated by the Croats and Slovenes, and of Serb hegemony, as demanded by the Serbs"⁴¹. This same tone would characterize the common tone of the Yugoslavian state until its final dissolution in 1991. Under pressure from the French, Serbia signed the Geneva Accord, thereby accepting equality by

³⁹ Prominent British historian Joll gives interesting opinion about that event. According to him "Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a member of a group of Serbian and Croatian nationalists." James Joll, The origins of the First World War, Pearson Education Limited, Second Edition, 1992, p. 10. That statement is highly problematic, because Serbs themselves claimed that "the assassin was a Serb ... [connected] with Serbian intelligence. Alex N. Dragnich, Serbs and Croats: The Struggle in Yugoslavia, Harcourt Brace and Company, NY, 1992, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Point nine specified that Italy's boundaries should be readjusted along clearly recognizable lines of nationality and point ten demanded that the peoples of Austro-Hungary be granted an opportunity for free autonomous development. Stephen Gazi, A History of Croatia, Barnes & Noble Books, 1973, p. 261.

⁴¹ Ivo Peric, A History of the Croats, CTT, Zagreb 1998. p. 196.

unification. This caused dissatisfaction within Serbia and the resignation of officials who signed the accord. Those resignations were later used by advocates of hegemony as a confirmation that “the accord was invalid, as if it had never been signed”⁴². Meanwhile, the Serbs continued to treat the former Austro-Hungarian provinces as conquered territories.

Disappointment with the new state was also noticeable in Zagreb after Pribicevic, the leader of the Croatian Serbs, succeeded in his attempts to invite Serbian troops on to Croatian soil. The leader of the Croatian Peasants Party (HSS), Stjepan Radic, strongly opposed that policy and accused members of the Croatian delegation of naiveté and jeopardizing national interests. However, with help from Italy⁴³, the Serbs succeeded in their desire to form a centralized kingdom under the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS). Britain and France strongly supported the Serbs as rulers over parts of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire with the intention of blocking the restoration of the Empire while at same time containing Soviet expansion.

Despite those events, the kingdom was doomed from its very inception. Five days after the kingdom was formed, Croatian protesters, provoked by a Serbian celebration of the new state, clashed with the police in Zagreb which “resulted in fifteen deaths and twenty wounded.”⁴⁴ This would prove to be only the beginning of a series of crimes throughout the newly formed state. In BiH, local Serbs killed Muslims by the hundreds, aided by passive or active assistance from the Serbian Army. In Montenegro, an open war between pro-Serb and pro-Montenegrin sectarians lasted until 1923. During the following years, Croatian expectations regarding promises of equality within the common state quickly disappeared. Croatian parties were occasionally banned and their leaders

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Italy did poorly during the war, but later started to occupy territories along the Croatian coast promised to Italy by the London Agreement as compensation for joining the Triple Entente. The Italian conquest was formalized by the Treaty of Rapallo on 20 November 1920. A detailed description appears in Stephen Gazi, A History of Croatia, Barnes & Noble Books, 1973, p. 284.

⁴⁴ Ivo Peric, A History of the Croats, CTT, Zagreb 1998. p. 198

imprisoned. At the same time territorial reorganization carved up the Croatian territories⁴⁵ while Serbian domination overwhelmed every aspect of life.

The dissatisfaction of the Croatian people culminated after a member of the Serbian radicals opened fire on Croatian leaders in their parliamentary benches, killing two and wounding three during a parliamentary session in June of 1928. Such an act had never been witnessed before in a European parliament. One of the wounded was the leader of the strongest Croatian party, HSS. Stjepan Radic died of his wounds a few weeks later. The death of Radic marked a major turn of events with even Pribicevic, the leader of the Croatian Serbs and a strong apologist of hegemony, turning his back on the idea of a Greater Serbia. Pribicevic even went as far as to accuse the King of organizing the assassinations.⁴⁶ Croatia's rage following the incident resulted in huge demonstrations throughout Croatia. In January 1929, the King reacted with a royal coup, declared the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, seized full power, banned political parties and abolished the parliament. A Serbian general assumed the role of prime minister. The King abolished all national institutions, renamed the Serbian Army, and interestingly that name was official until 1929,⁴⁷ and moved rapidly toward a fully centralized government. Serbian repression and domination within the kingdom increased. The ratio of Serbs' overrepresentation was probably the most obvious in the military (161 Serbian generals, 2 Croatian) and diplomacy (20 Serbian ambassadors, 2 Croatian).⁴⁸ The Serbs behaved as though the name Yugoslavia was synonymous with a Greater Serbia. Actually, that was the truth. Yugoslavia was the greatest Serbia ever.

The royal coup ended a period of farcing democracy that had included 24 different cabinets and seven prime ministers during a ten-year period.⁴⁹ The royal coup additionally caused the emigration of Croats and Croatian politicians and the subsequent

⁴⁵ "The tiny units were intended to prevent along national lines. The Serbs sought to destroy historic-ethnic that had promoted separatism and to foster emergence of Yugoslav nation." Ivan T. Berend, Decades of Crisis, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1998, p. 172.

⁴⁶ Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 110.

⁴⁷ In 1929, King prohibited all national symbols also, except the Yugoslav and Serbian flag. Ivo Peric, A History of the Croats, CTT, Zagreb 1998, p. 204.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 207.

⁴⁹ Juan J. Linz, Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration: The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes, The John Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 111.

formation of the illegal nationalist movement led by the radical Ustashas,⁵⁰ which became the leading political force in Croatia during WWII. Despite the historical agreement between the Serbs and Croats in August of 1939, which allowed Croatian autonomy in territories with a predominant Croatian population, the Serbs and Croats were both only waiting for favorable circumstances in which to pursue their nationalistic agendas, and the situation in Europe by the end of 1930s was more than favorable.

1. World War II

Axis forces attacked Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941 following the military coup in Belgrade in which the Prince Regent was overthrown after having joined the Axis only a few days before. After only 11 days, the Yugoslav army was defeated, primarily because of the reluctance of non-Serbian nations to fight for the Serbian dominated state. Macedonia was added to Bulgaria, Kosovo to Albania, parts of Vojvodina to Hungary, and Slovenia was divided between Italy and Germany. Three new states were formed: Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia. The new Croatian state, first proclaimed in Bjelovar on 8 April 1941, and then officially declared in Zagreb two days later,⁵¹ included the territory of current Croatia and BiH.

Aside from being a puppet state under the direct control of Germany and Italy, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was generally supported by a majority of Croats and Muslims⁵², but opposed by the Serbs. “The declaration of NDH ... was greeted with a wave of enthusiasm in Zagreb not unlike that which had swept through the town in 1918 when the ties with Hungary were severed.”⁵³ However, the Ustashas regime was actually a dictatorship under the leadership of Pavelic who accepted the Nazi form of rule, including its racial laws. Ustashas killed thousands of Serbs, Gypsies, Jews and Croats who showed opposition to their government. The worst Ustashas crimes happened in a concentration camp in Jasenovac, where thousands were executed in a Nazi-like manner. The Ustashas rule is definitely the worst part of Croatian history with disastrous

⁵⁰ Ustasha’s movement, under leadership of Ante Pavelic, was formed on 7 January 1929. “It pledged to use all means to fight for an independent Croatian state, encompassing BiH, which would grant political rights only to Croats.” Jill A. Irvine, The Croat Question, Westview Press, 1993, p. 50.

⁵¹ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 141.

⁵² In the Yugoslav parliament of 1924, and later on, all the Bosnian Muslim deputies, except one, identified themselves as Croats. Noel Malcolm, Bosnia: A Short History, New York University Press, 1994, p. 165.

⁵³ Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 115.

results for Croatia: division of the nation into two uncompromising ideological camps and the inclusion of Croatia in the list of evil dictatorships during WWII.

The fact that a Croat named Josip Broz Tito led the communist resistance did not improve Croatia's post-war image. Also, it was easily overlooked that the Serbs created the plan for a homogenous Serbia produced by Chetniks in June 1941 where they planned to form a Greater Serbia at the expense of others. According to that plan, Serbs will illuminate others “with the Serbian spirit ... [as part of] their historical mission. The Serbs must have hegemony in the Balkans, and to accomplish it they must first have hegemony in Yugoslavia.”⁵⁴ After reestablishing power, the Serbs continued to spread propaganda, some of which became accepted by Western scholars. The Serbs were also far from innocent with regard to atrocities during WWII. Serbian extremists, Chetniks, were committing grave atrocities against Muslims and Croats in Sanjak and BiH,⁵⁵ and especially in Italian controlled areas of Croatia.⁵⁶ Moreover, except for a short period in 1941, there was no resistance movement in Serbia during the war. Serbia remained under the control of the Chetniks who collaborated with the Nazis.

The Serbs joined forces with the Partisans following the Red Army's crossing of Yugoslav borders. At this point, Tito was forced to accept them because of “the aim to reach Belgrade before the Red Army got there ... and setting up a Soviet puppet government. ...[Partisans] did not find a single Communist Party member in Belgrade.”⁵⁷ Tito declared a state of common amnesty in 1944 when many Chetniks just changed their clothes and became Partisans. This explains the ease with which Serbian Partisans committed crimes against Croatian soldiers and civilians who had surrendered to the British near Bleiburg in Austria. Those civilians and prisoners of war were returned to the Partisans and then either killed or forced to walk from the Austrian to the Greek border,

⁵⁴ Boze Covic ed., Roots of Serbian Aggression, Center for Foreign Languages and AGM d.o.o., Zagreb, 1993, p. 155.

⁵⁵ During the trial against Mihailovic, the leader of the Serbian Chetniks, he was accused for operations against Muslim population. Subordinated commander informed him, “operations [in part of Sanjak and eastern Bosnia] were executed according to orders ... During operations complete annihilation of the Muslim population was undertaken, regardless sex and age. Victims ... among the Muslims, about 1,200 fighters and up to 8,000 other civilians; women, old men, and children.” Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000. pp. 120-121.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 122-129.

⁵⁷ Boze Covic ed., Roots of Serbian Aggression, Center for Foreign Languages and AGM d.o.o., Zagreb, 1993, p. 271.

which became known as the 'Way of the Cross'. Thousands of Croats died in these Partisan massacres following the end of the war. The Partisan treatment of Croatian civilians and soldiers was quite different from the British policy toward Chetniks. "20,000 former Chetniks ... were sent to a camp at Eboli in southern Italy. Technically they were 'Surrendered Enemy Personnel', but they were mostly looked on with considerable sympathy."⁵⁸

A particularly interesting aspect of WWII was the politicization of statistics that took place after the war. Officially it was announced, but never documented, that the overall losses in Yugoslavia totaled 1.7 million people. The Croats were accused of killing almost more Serbs than physically inhabited the area of the NDH. Two scholars, one Serb and one Croat, separately concluded that the total number of deaths was about 1 million, which was significantly lower than official 'statistics'. Those numbers have never been denied. From that number of 1 million, 307,000 Serbs and 246,000 Croats and Muslims were killed⁵⁹ in the territory of NDH. Also, from 37,000 Jews living in NDH about 80 percent were killed either in Croatia or in Germany.⁶⁰ However, that was not enough for Serbian propaganda. They estimated the numbers to be around 50,000.⁶¹ Although it was obvious that Ustashas were primarily responsible for the killing of the Serbs, the question regarding responsibility for Croatian casualties remains unanswered. Scholars who tried to deal with those discrepancies were accused of being nationalists and either imprisoned or forced into exile. Still the overall numbers refute the Serbian theory of being the only victim during WWII.⁶² It was later explained that all of those exaggerated numbers were a result of reparation needs. As a result, the new Serbian myth about (non-existent) victory in war was born, a new seed of evil had been planted, and a new war was waiting as a bad omen.

⁵⁸Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 124.

⁵⁹ Norman Cigar, The Serbo-Croatian War, 1991: Political and Military Dimensions, The Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 1993) pp. 297-338, p. 300.

⁶⁰ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 149.

⁶¹ Alex N. Dragnich, Serbs and Croats: The Struggle in Yugoslavia, Harcourt Brace & Company, NY, 1992, p. 103.

⁶² Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000. pp. 338-339. Figures show that Serbian population almost doubled from 4,665,000 or 38,83% (Serbs and Montenegrins) in 1918 to 8,319,000 or 44.85% in 1961. During the same period, the number of Croats in Yugoslavia rose from 2,856,000 to 4,293,000, but the percentage fell from 23.77% to 23.15%. Those figures definitely cannot confirm the premise about Serbs being the only victims of WWII.

2. Communist Yugoslavia

The new Yugoslavia was yet another example of the influence of the Great Powers. This time is originated from Yalta. This repeat influence of the Great Powers ensured that the situation for the Croats would be similar to that of previous times. Although the period of Tito's leadership was perceived idealistically from the outside, the actual situation inside Yugoslavia was not so wonderful. However, Tito managed to suppress tensions among nations and avoid conflict. A new constitution defined Yugoslavia as a federal state consisting of the six republics of Slovenia, Croatia, BiH, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. The republics were allowed formal autonomy. Additionally, Kosovo and Vojvodina were given autonomy within Serbia. In contrast, the communist party remained the only choice during elections, although this did not prevent Western support of Tito's regime. Tito's 1948 break with Stalin, the 1949 cessation of assistance to communists in Greece, Stalin's death in 1953, and the 1954 agreement about Trieste all bolstered Western support for his regime.

During the next few decades, Tito successfully exploited an uneasy balance between two antagonistic blocs. Tito managed to receive significant economic help from the West, while at the same time maintaining close contact with the East. During the 1960s, the economic situation in Yugoslavia deteriorated to the point where the usual economic aid from the West was not enough. This forced Tito to open Yugoslavia's borders with the West and allowed hundreds of thousands of guest workers (*gastarbeiters*) to seek work in Germany. By 1973 "about 1.1 million workers and dependants were living outside Yugoslavia's borders", and half of them were Croats, but by 1981 "a 40 percent drop in the number of reported Croatian guest workers caused speculations that many Croats were adopting permanent foreign residency."⁶³ This brought the question of why so many Croats chose to emigrate when they were second in economic strength only to Slovenia. To address this phenomenon the political and economic relations among the republics must be further explored.

⁶³ Glenn E. Curdis, ed., Yugoslavia: A Country Study, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Third Edition, 1992, pp. 104-105.

The introduction of a mixture of communist-style economics with some elements of capitalism during the 1960s caused a weakening of the overall communist grip in Yugoslavia. The state remained centralized and highly bureaucratized with an overrepresentation of Serbs in state administrations and the military. Slovenia and Croatia, although having a combined population of 6.5 million of the total population of 22.5 million, contributed more than 50 percent⁶⁴ of the federal budget, which in turn, had very little influence on fiscal expenditures within the government. Money was officially spent on projects in underdeveloped parts of the country such as Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, with an overbearing influence from Belgrade.⁶⁵ The amount of money that ‘disappeared’ for use on military, federal, and Serbian projects during these years remains a mystery.

Those events coupled with constant Serbian pressure for even stronger centralization and unification caused discontent between the intellectual and ruling elites in Croatia. Their discontent culminated in the 1971 movement known as the Croatian Spring.⁶⁶ Tito suppressed this movement by putting Croatian political leaders under house arrest, and intellectuals in prison.

When they fell, an entire generation that included the majority of the most talented people in Croatia went to prison or into exile, or was forced into obscurity. In the place of that generation came time-servers, police spies and nonentities whose main talent was often a proven ability to spy or denounce their colleagues.⁶⁷

The consequences of the Croatian Spring created the new political term ‘Croatian silence,’ or quiet resistance, that characterized the Croats’ behavior during the following period. Moreover, the Croats continued to leave the communist party. “By 1981 ... Serbs

⁶⁴ Croatian contribution was 31.11 percent, and Slovenian was 20.11 percent. Sime Djodan, Hrvatsko pitanje (Croatian Question) 1918-1990, Alfa, Zagreb, 1991, p. 104.

⁶⁵ From the federal budget Croatia received 18.89 percent and Serbia 68.13 percent. Ibid., p. 105.

⁶⁶ The most important part of the Croatian Spring was, beside the economic questions, Croatian cultural identity, especially the position of the Croatian language that was threatened by assimilation from Serbian or a newly established Serbo-Croatian language. Payam Akhavan and Robert Howse, eds., Yugoslavia: the Former and Future, The Brookings Institution/Washington and The UN Research Institute for Social Development/Geneva, 1995, pp. 115-120.

⁶⁷ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 202.

made up 47 percent of the Party ... [while] only 14 percent ... were Croats.”⁶⁸ However, the result was the 1974 Constitution that granted the republics more independence from Belgrade and confirmed the republic's rights to self-determination, including separation. Somehow, Tito and his closest partner Kardelj, had anticipated forthcoming events, and had unwillingly opened the door for the future independence of the republics.

During the 1970s, Yugoslavia's economic situation continued to worsen as a result of the oil crises and policy of détente. Yugoslavia's foreign debt rose from \$2 billion in the beginning of the 1970s to \$18 billion by the beginning of the 1980s.⁶⁹ The main reason for Yugoslavia's ballooning debt was its unrealistic investments in non-profitable political projects such as the railroad Belgrade-Bar. Yugoslavia's financial spiral was further exacerbated by huge military expenditures of about 50 percent of the federal budget along with an unparalleled appetite for weapons. Tito's death in May of 1980 left a country in economic chaos. Complicated interrelations among the republics coupled with an uncontrollable military further deepened the political instability within the country. This set the stage for a period of increasing turmoil within Yugoslavia where the eight-headed collective federal presidency would rapidly unravel as the world watched.

3. Turmoil during the 1980s

On one side of Yugoslavia, Croatia and Slovenia wanted more Western-like development with mutual political ties similar to those of the EC. On the other side, Serbia did not want to lose its central position of authority, which would result in the loss of the ability to manipulate the common policy and economic structure. Unfavorable circumstances had once again fallen into place and the players watched carefully as the last remnants of Yugoslavia began to unravel. During riots in Kosovo in April 1981, the Albanian minority demanded full equality with the other nationalities and also raised the question of the prospect of a separate republic within Yugoslavia. The initial reaction of Serbian and federal authorities was harsh but, during the time, other members of the crumbling federation became increasingly reluctant to participate in the events in

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 204.

⁶⁹ Glenn E. Curdis, ed., Yugoslavia: A Country Study, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Third Edition, 1992, p. 155.

Kosovo. The situation undulated back and forth until 1986 when the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) published its notorious Memorandum, and an ambitious new leader appeared on the scene in the form of Slobodon Milosevic.

The Memorandum was produced by prominent Serbian academicians and was immediately accepted as the new foundation for the newest wave of emerging Serbian nationalism. The vocabulary hidden behind expressed concern for the future of the Serbian nation actually represented a call for revenge against Albanians and Croats. Croatia was accused of being similar to the NDH and of jeopardizing the lives of Serbs within its territory. “But for the period of the existence of the NDH, Serbs in Croatia have never been as threatened as they are nowadays.”⁷⁰ This was hardly the case since 11.5 percent of Serbs living within Croatia occupied more than a third of the prestigious positions along with an even larger share of military positions.⁷¹ Moreover, even the leader of the Croatian communist party was a Serb.

The famous words “no one should dare to beat you”⁷² promoted Milosevic as the new central figure of Serbian politics. This now famous statement paved the way for his absolute rule of Serbia for more than a decade. Unlike Gorbachev who tried to democratize the Soviet Union, Milosevic promoted a strange (or normal) mixture of communism and extreme nationalism, which became the dominant and identifiable characteristic of the Serbian state. This rise of nationalism started with mass rallies all over Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro during 1988. The grand finale occurred on 28 June 1989, the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Battle where Milosevic said, “Six centuries later, again we are in battles and quarrels. They are not armed battles, though such things should not be excluded yet.”⁷³

By his use of mass rallies and demonstrations, Milosevic succeeded in ending the autonomous status of both Kosovo and Vojvodina, but took their votes within the collective presidency. Milosevic was also successful in the establishment of a pro-Serbian

⁷⁰ The SANU ‘Memorandum,’ published in Boze Covic ed., Roots of Serbian Aggression, Center for Foreign Languages and AGM d.o.o., Zagreb, 1993, p. 329.

⁷¹ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 212.

⁷² Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 162.

⁷³ Tim Judah, Kosovo: War nad Revenge, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 56.

government in Montenegro. This would assure Milosevic four out of eight votes within the collective presidency, but he would require one more to realize his ambitions of ruling Yugoslavia.

The rest of the country was scared and almost hypnotized with the speed of Milosevic's success, particularly after the announcement that the Serbs were ready to use all institutional and non-institutional methods to achieve their goals. This served as an open threat causing all parties to seek protection against the threat of Serbian aggression. Croatia and Slovenia expected that they would receive support from the democratic West. These expectations were bolstered with the fall of the Berlin Wall in October of 1989 and further strengthened by the wave of democratization that spread across Central Europe. An additional reason for optimism was the destiny of Ceaucescu in Romania. By the end of 1989, it seemed apparent that communism could not resist the onslaught of emerging changes. The logical sequence of events would seem to be the replacement of communists in Serbia with a more democratically oriented leadership that would allow a peaceful settlement to the rapidly deteriorating situation.

In reaction to these imminent changes, the Croatian communist party allowed the formation of new political parties. During the second half of 1989, a large number of political parties were created bringing a revival to the political scene and an almost surrealistic feeling of liberty and freedom of expression. The picture of political life was colored with a broad diapason of ideas ranging from that of an asymmetric federation to a more loose confederation with the rest of Yugoslavia.⁷⁴ Others argued for independence within the current borders and even restoration of the old medieval Kingdom. Despite the broad range of political ideologies, nobody within Croatia ever predicted the forthcoming conflict with Serbia, or the disastrous war that would devastate Croatia and BiH.

Milosevic became keenly aware of the shape of things to come when both the Slovenians and Croatians walked out of the January 1990 Conference of the Communist Party. The Croats and Slovenes did so following a barrage of criticism from the Serbian

⁷⁴ On 4 October 1990 Croatia had proposed, jointly with Slovenia, a 'confederal model for Yugoslavia as a loose grouping of states modeled on the European Community.' Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson eds., International Perspective of the Yugoslav Conflict, St. Martin Press, Inc., 1996, p. 131.

block. Milosevic did not feel that he needed the cooperation of the Slovenes or Croats since he was confident after his recent galvanization of Serbian opinion over the question of Kosovo. He also had found a new ally in the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), which further solidified his confidence in victory. The JNA joined Milosevic not only because of the vast majority of Serbs of which it was comprised, but also because with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the JNA had lost its employer, and *raison d'être*. More specifically, the Serbs were not all that concerned about the loss of Slovenia. Their true belief was that with Slovenia out of the way, Croatia would be easier prey. Nevertheless, January of 1990 marked the beginning of the end of the common state. While others tried to democratize and organize the first free elections since WWII, the Serbs started, with the assistance of JNA, to draw future maps⁷⁵ illustrating which part of what country would be taken and when. It was obvious that there was no clash between nationalistic options. Instead, there was a clash between communistic-nationalistic and democratic ideas, between hegemony and federalism, and between the past and the future. The future that Croatia expected would be in Western security and economic integration.

C. HOMELAND WAR AND CROATIAN INDEPENDENCE

The first free elections in the former Yugoslavia were held in Slovenia in April of 1990, and were followed by elections in Croatia. Similar to post Cold War elections in other ex-communist countries, the communist party was heavily defeated, and a new democratic government was elected. Unlike other parties which did not offer a clear perspective for the future or may have been perceived as too radical, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), led by Franjo Tudjman, presented a relatively clear platform with regard to possible independence. It is apparent that the HDZ moderate position and focus on Croatian independence was key to their success during the elections. The Serbian frenzied campaign of accusing all Croats of being Ustashas also contributed to the HDZ victory. Their charges of a Croatian genocidal nature created feelings of humiliation and frustration among Croats. Indecisiveness of other politicians coupled with their failure to assume a clear position with regards to Milosevic's demands also hurt some Croatian candidates. Yet another factor leading to the HDZ victory was

⁷⁵ Tim Judah, The Serbs, p. 168, Conversation among Milosevic, Jovic (Serbian member in federal presidency) and General Kadijevic (the head of JNA) about the coming war took place on 13 February 1990, cited from Jovic's diaries.

Milosevic's aggressive and perfectly orchestrated rallies throughout Serbian areas of Croatia which provoked more and more tension.

After winning elections in Croatia, the HDZ automatically received the right to send a representative to the federal presidency. Their choice was Stjepan Mesic, the current Croatian President. Although the federal presidency played only a formal role, there were still some expectations that through it a worse case scenario might be avoided. Those hopes arose following economic reforms under Premier Markovic who had achieved excellent results. However, to the Serbs, the mere presence of an elected non-communist member of the rotating presidency was offensive, mostly because of the pending Croatian turn to assume its one-year top position in 1991.⁷⁶ Serbian reaction came rapidly. Following the idea that Serbia existed anywhere that Serbs lived, Croatian Serbs blocked the main highways and railroads halfway between Zagreb and the Dalmatian coast on the 17th of August 1990. By no accident, this occurred in the middle of the tourist season and caused enormous losses to the Croatian economy. That event also made it clear that the new Croatian government had spent most of its time celebrating an electoral victory when it should have been preparing the country for the disaster that was approaching from the east.

As a result of the Serbian elections in December 1990, which Milosevic's communists decisively won, Milosevic was allowed to eliminate his next obstacle or the very popular Premier Markovic. The plan was simple. Serbia stole \$1.8 billion from the National Bank,⁷⁷ which effectively eradicated all economic results achieved during that year and further deepened the gap between Serbia and the other republics. In response, Slovenia held a referendum in which the Slovenes voted for possible independence and Croatia adopted a new Constitution on 22 December 1990, which opened the door for its potential independence. The last attempt to facilitate Serbian domination occurred in January 1991 when exceptionally harsh pressure was put on the BiH member of the presidency. Mr. Bogicevic was a Serb who could guarantee the 5:3 ratio in favor of using

⁷⁶ Mesic's inauguration was blocked by four Serbian votes in the federal presidency. Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 247.

⁷⁷ Warren Zimmermann, Origins of a Catastrophe, Times Books, 1999. p. 92.

the JNA against Croatia and Slovenia which would be required during voting. He refused.

1. Initial Stages of Homeland War

Croatian Serbs, living in the already self-isolated Krajina region, declared independence from Croatia on the 15th of March 1991.⁷⁸ The following day Milosevic announced that 'Yugoslavia is finished' and that Serbia would no longer respect the federal authority of Yugoslavia. In effect, Serbia had seceded from Yugoslavia well before the Croats and Slovenes were to declare their independence.⁷⁹ Encouraged by that turn of events, the Serbs in the Krajina region started to behave in an aggressive manner. They first blocked all forms of communication, and then began expelling non-Serbs from the area. Attacks on police forces happened first in Pakrac, Plitvice during March, and then in Borovo Selo where on 2 May 1991 twelve Croatian policemen were killed. This was the first massacre to occur in Croatia. Most of the policemen had had their eyes gouged out which was to become an omen of future activities that would take place in Croatia, and sent a clear message to anybody opposed to the idea of a Greater Serbia.

The chain of events that ensued was catastrophic. The Serbs first refused to accept the Croatian member of the presidency as *primus inter pares*, while an overwhelming majority supported the Croatian referendum for independence⁸⁰. The JNA then switched from a position of faking neutrality to open support of the Serbs. US Secretary of State James Baker visited Yugoslavia in an attempt to find some resolution to the rapidly escalating situation, but failed to do so. His Pythian diplomatic sentences were accepted as the green light, or at a minimum, not a deterrent to Serbian action, and the way for unbridled aggression was opened.

Croatia and Slovenia both declared full independence on 25 June 1991 without support from either European countries or the US. However, while Slovenia was thoroughly prepared, the Croatian authorities were strong in rhetoric and weak in practicalities. The Croatian leadership was completely unprepared for the possible

⁷⁸ Tim Judah, *The Serbs*, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 174.

⁷⁹ Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, Times Books, 1999. p. 103.

⁸⁰ A referendum was held on 19 May 1991. 83 percent of the citizens participated, and 94 percent voted for independence. Source: Croatian daily newspaper *Vecernji list*, 19 May 1990.

implications of their declaration of independence. Two days later after the declaration of independence, the JNA simulated an attack on Slovenia,⁸¹ while in fact pulling out troops, and concentrating them for assaults on Croatia. However, the Croatian leadership remained preoccupied with the internal trivia, such as the development of state emblems and the Presidential insignia. In doing so, Croatia missed the opportunity to develop a broad international support for Croatian independence. Instead, it promoted a picture of a small xenophobic nation, which was exactly what the opponents of Croatian independence wanted.

During the summer of 1991, fighting erupted throughout Croatia bringing with it casualties, and an increasing number of refugees expelled from their homes by the Serbian military, paramilitary and local militia forces. Croatian authorities, caught unprepared, tried to arm police forces and to form military units⁸², while at the same time maneuvering at the diplomatic level. During those first few months, the Croatian population began to learn the real meaning of the words international politics, political realism, political pragmatism, great powers, the UN Security Council, international community, balance of power, humanitarian aid, and so on. Moreover, the UN Security Council imposed an unselective arms embargo upon all of Yugoslavia in September and left current and future victims of Serbian aggression virtually disarmed. Consequently, until the autumn of 1991, almost one third of Croatia remained under Serbian control despite the fact that less than half of the 532,000⁸³ Croatian Serbs lived in that area. However, the defensive character of the war, the bravery of Croatian soldiers, and the patriotism of its citizens compensated for the lack of military knowledge and very obvious lack of any strategic vision by political leaders.

A new term, ‘ethnic cleansing’ surfaced during the war in Croatia, marking the way in which the Serbs tried to achieve their objective of a Greater Serbia. Before the

⁸¹ Tudjman stated that, “this so-called war was practically agreed between the army and the Slovenes.” Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 250.

⁸² In 1991, JNA had 205,000 soldiers (70,000 already in Croatia), 1,850 tanks, 500 armed personnel carriers, 2,000 pieces of artillery, 489 combat aircrafts, and 165 helicopters. Croatia had 34,000 policemen and guardsmen with light arms. Norman Cigar, The Serbo-Croatian War, 1991: Political and Military Dimensions, The Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 1993) pp. 297-338, p. 300.

⁸³ The fact that another half of Croatian Serbs remained to live in Croatia is usually ignored. Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 342.

eyes of the international community, thousands were killed and massacred and hundreds of thousands became refugees simply because they were not Serbs. The city of Vukovar fell following a heroic defense and its reduction to rubble during three months of the siege.⁸⁴ Perhaps the worst scene in the war in Croatia took place in Vukovar when drunken Chetniks marched among the ruins and dead bodies, celebrating victory and singing, “Slobodan [Milosevic] bring the salad, there will be meat, we’re slaughtering the Croats.”⁸⁵ Massacres against wounded soldiers and civilians only strengthened the Croatian determination to resist at any cost. During the autumn of 1991, the front lines were mostly stabilized, and despite the fall of Vukovar, a counteroffensive in Western Slavonia brought the first success to the young Croatian Army. Bearing in mind that the Croats fought under extremely unfavorable conditions such as the lack of weapons, ammunition, organization, uniforms, and above all international support, the very survival of the state was thought to be impossible, and their success on the frontlines was nothing short of a miracle.

The Homeland War, in spite of bringing suffering and misery to the Croatian people, proved to be an epic of courage that made international recognition of the Republic of Croatia possible. International recognition of Croatia was announced during the EC ministerial summit on 16 December 1991.⁸⁶ Formal recognition followed on 15 January 1992 along with the introduction of UN troops to Croatian territory. These events facilitated Milosevic’s exit strategy by partitioning one quarter of Croatia with UN troops, and allowing him to shift his center of gravity to BiH. He probably believed that once the partition had taken place, as in Cyprus, history would make it permanent. The aggression on BiH that began in April of 1992 immediately shed light on even worse atrocities than those committed in Croatia. These atrocities included Nazi-like concentration camps, and ethnic cleansing on larger scale than had been perpetrated in Croatia, which ultimately resulted in genocide.

⁸⁴ “The JNA claimed to be ‘defending Yugoslavia’ as well as giving some indication of an alleged ‘peacekeeping’ role ... even during the sieges of Vukovar and Dubrovnik.” James Gow, Triumph of the Lack of Will, Columbia University Press, NY, 1997, p. 35.

⁸⁵ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 266.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 273.

After the liberation of Dubrovnik in summer 1992, one quarter of Croatia remained occupied for the next three years. This occupation further caused Croatia's shattered economy to deteriorate. The massive and increasing number of refugees arriving from neighboring BiH further contributed to the unbearable conditions in Croatia. At the end of 1992 there were about 700,000 refugees in Croatia⁸⁷ which resulted in enormous pressure on its weak economy. Such an immense number of refugees caused unsolvable humanitarian problems, but also endangered social and economic stability. Unable to ensure enough housing, the government housed refugees in tourist facilities which resulted in their devastation and long term consequences for tourism.

2. War Moves to Bosnia – 1992-1993

Serbian aggression also produced extremely complicated circumstances in BiH. The BiH authorities, counting on international help and the prevention of Serbian attacks, did not prepare the population for the horrific scenario that followed. Caught totally off guard, disarmed, and abandoned by the international community, Muslim leaders tried to organize some form of resistance, but the Serb advance was so rapid that there was not enough time for an appropriate response. The Muslim leader Izetbegovic unintentionally contributed to the tragedy in BiH⁸⁸ by hoping that the world would remember what the Serbs had done in Croatia. He hoped that international recognition of BiH would also bring international protection.⁸⁹ His hopes were shattered when the news of Serbian massacres in eastern BiH broke, along with waves of refugees, first from Eastern BiH, and then from all parts where the Serbs tried to enforce their policy of a Greater Serbia.

After the UN imposed an economic embargo on the remainder of Yugoslavia (Resolution 757, on 30 May 1992)⁹⁰, it appeared that the Serbs would be denied their attempts to seize territories and to expel Muslims and Croats. Numerous statements given

⁸⁷ According to the Croatian Office for refugees and displaced persons, the total number of refugees declined through following months thanks to Germany which alone accepted more than 300,000, but in March 1993, Croatia still had more than 650,000 refugees and 350,000 from BiH. Vecernji List, 11 March 1993.

⁸⁸ Izetbegovic "was paid for trusting the West and for playing its 'civilized' game by the total destruction of his country. When Western promises proved void and the army did attack, the West quickly threw up its hands and assumed the convenient posture of a distant observer, appalled at the outburst of 'primitive Balkan passions.'" Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz eds., Why Bosnia?, The Pamphleteer's Press, Inc., 1993, p. xxii.

⁸⁹ BiH was "the only UN-recognized independent sovereign state denied the means to defend itself" Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson eds., International Perspective of the Yugoslav Conflict, St. Martin Press, Inc., 1996, p. 153.

⁹⁰ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 285.

by various officials led to this conclusion. However, impressive speeches, promising statements and an economic embargo did not prevent Serbian continued aggression, and the realities of everyday life in BiH went from bad to worse. The Serbs ignored this international isolation and continued with their campaign of ethnic cleansing and the broadening of Serbian controlled areas in BiH.

In August 1992, the world was shocked by evidence that the Serbs had held Muslims and Croats in concentration camps. These atrocities, although widely known throughout Croatia and BiH, were confirmed worldwide along with the mistreatment of civilians, expulsion, robbery, the rape of women and children and the execution or mass condemnation of men to concentration camps. Most disturbing was that these atrocities, unknown in Europe since the demise of the Nazis, were planned and organized by authorities in Serbia in concert with academics in top positions among BiH Serbs. Such an open ignorance of international rules and norms disallows any excuse for those who tried to balance culpability and pretended to be misinformed.

Of course, Croatian fronts were also active during 1992. This was especially true near Dubrovnik, where the Croatian Army liberated the city, and helped Croats and Muslims defend their territories in BiH. Military cooperation between Croatia and BiH was officially confirmed by the “Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation” signed by Tudjman and Izetbegovic on 22 July in Zagreb⁹¹. Although it was not clear who was supposed to defend BiH, Croatia was accused for having troops inside the country's borders. Paradoxically, during a period of the worst Serbian atrocities against Muslims, an international campaign was launched against Croatia for its actions in BiH. These phenomena clearly illustrated the worst problem for Croatia which was the lack of powerful allies, and worse still, the willingness of the international community to appease the Serbs in spite of their unspeakable crimes.

A new problem emerged as a consequence of the Serbian conquest. The Muslim and Croat populations were squeezed into less than 30 percent of the BiH territory. Sparks were ignited as a general feeling of distrust overtook the BiH Croats and Muslims and the two former allies waged war for territories that remained unoccupied. This suited

⁹¹ “Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation between Croatia and BiH,” Vecernji List, 22 July 1992.

well the interests of many of the parties involved and especially politicians who refused to help BiH under the premise of ancient hatreds. Croats and Muslims, the primary victims of Serbian aggression in BiH, fought each other for the few square kilometers of arid land instead of combining their efforts against the Serbs. This fighting destroyed their mutual alliance which was their only hope for success in war and “caused a certain grim satisfaction among pro-Serb circles in France and Britain.”⁹² However, when the situation became unbearable, a new powerful player emerged in the region – the US. With the commencement of US engagement in the conflict came new hope for the agonized population.

3. End of War

As a consequence of US engagement in the region, suddenly everything changed for Croatia. In February of 1994 the Croat-Muslim Federation was formed. That crucial alliance stopped the fighting between BiH Croats and Muslims and allowed a period of rebuilding mutual trust.⁹³ Although it began to appear that the tide had turned for the new federation, it took an entire year for final victory over Serb aggression to occur. Serbian unwillingness to accept any proposal of the now US led international community meant that the Serbs had to be defeated militarily. At the same time, however, the countries engaged in peacekeeping operations were not willing to suffer casualties in any potential fight against the Serbs. This created a paradoxical situation. Everybody wanted to have a say or, at least, some influence in ending the BiH crisis, but no country was willing to accept casualties as a price for their commitment.

The solution to that challenge was found in an unprecedented and interesting way. The Croatian Army was, in effect, employed as a NATO ground force. However, Croatia needed military assistance which came in an advisory form through the US company Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), along with heavy armaments from the black market. After almost a year of preparations, the Croatian Army struck three times during 1995. Operation ‘Flash’ on May 1 was more like a rehearsal for Operation ‘Storm’, which took place on August 4. During that operation, the Croatian Army liberated significant parts of occupied Croatian territory, along with the Bihac pocket, a

⁹² Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 291.

⁹³ Under strong American pressure, they agreed to form a Croat-Muslim federation in BiH.” Ibid., p. 292.

UN 'safe area' in BiH. "Predictably, Britain, France and Russia condemned the entire operation. But Germany and the US did not."⁹⁴ Croatian Forces then struck a third time in concert with the BiH 5th Corps. This highly successful operation liberated more than 20 percent of BiH territory, while achieving a fifty-fifty ratio of controlled territory. This was exactly what the international community and the US wanted to stabilize the situation in BiH. Still at issue with regard to these highly successful campaigns are questions about the alleged removal of the Serbian population from Croatia and BiH during these operations.

The war was finally ended by a peace agreement negotiated in Dayton, Ohio in November, and then signed in Paris in December of 1995. The Dayton Agreement was more an attempt to stop the war at any cost than any durable plan for the region's future. Although celebrated as a Croatian diplomatic victory, the Dayton Agreement brought to Croatia numerous obligations with few benefits. Most insulting to the Croatian people was to be treated similarly to the Serbs who caused the wars and misery in the region. Consequently, the implementation of the Dayton Agreement is slow and results are mixed.

4. Period from 1996-1999

President Franjo Tudjman deserves much of the credit for Croatian independence and the achievement of the 'thousand years old dream' about Croatian sovereignty. During the initial years of his rule, especially in 1991, he formed the Government of National Unity along with calling for increased dialog between descendants of Ustasas and Partisans. His actions showed a sense of compromise and the necessity of national consensus. Additionally, his contribution to the strengthening of the Croatian position in the region is truly remarkable. "He was a strong leader during difficult times," says Slobodan Lang, President Tudjman's adviser on humanitarian affairs. "Times when Europe lacked vision."⁹⁵ Aside from his many achievements, Tudjman probably forgot that "even the ultimate outcome of war is not always to be regarded as final."⁹⁶ The second part of his leadership was characterized by numerous mistakes both in

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 298.

⁹⁵ Nick Thorpe, Analysis: Contemplating Life without Tudjman, 11 December 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_526000/526115.stm

⁹⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton, NJ, 1989, p. 80.

international relations and internal affairs which led to Croatia's semi-isolation along with an impediment to its access to Euro-Atlantic integration. Worse still was the reversing process of democratization inside the country coupled with the near-collapse of the country's economy. With little affinity for nuances, President Tudjman identified himself with the nation that as time passed turned into authoritarianism and an attitude that everything good for him was automatically good for Croatia. Surrounded by a camarilla of advisors who always agreed with him and fed his (un)justified fears about an international complot against Croatia, Tudjman created an enormous gap between himself and the people of Croatia. Later, when he became seriously ill, Croatia was practically paralyzed because nobody could make a decision without his approval.

The lack of democratic transformation and serious mistakes in privatization marked the last few years of Tudjman's presidency. His style of ruling was definitely incompatible with the *Zeitgeist* in Europe (failure to understand 'end of history'), and had placed Croatia in an extremely difficult international position. Of equal importance was the way in which the economic transition had been conducted and remained one of the worst periods of early medieval capitalism. Further worsening the situation, state enterprises were distributed along political and party lines to new entrepreneurs who were then obligated to finance HDZ moguls. Moreover, undefined amounts of money were carried out of the country for private and party purposes, producing widespread dissatisfaction with the government. Those factors, along with the drain of national wealth and resources involved with financing the HDZ in BiH, resulted in a rapidly growing indebtedness and an overall decrease in the standard of living. Croatia became dangerously close to the type of government usually called a *mafocracy*.

Croatia's position within the international community deteriorated at a similar tempo. Western institutions wanted nothing to do with Tudjman's regime, mostly because he refused to accept dictates and requests from Western powers. As a result of its increasing alienation from the European mainstream, Croatia missed an opportunity to join PfP. Consequently, it missed the 1999 Madrid summit, and with it the chance to become one of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) countries. Croatia's relationship with the EU was even worse. This could be attributed to Tudjman's refusal of Croatian

membership in the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA) in 1992. His explanation was that Croatia would join the EU directly although this never came to fruition. Even worse, the EU cancelled all negotiations after Croatia started to liberate its territories in 1995. Consequently, Croatia's only hope was its still promising relationship with the US, the only important country that continuously encouraged democratic changes and offered optimism for the future of Croatia.

The death of the first Croatian President in December 1999 was accepted with some sort of relief from the population after so many years of sharing his best and worst hours. Tudjman's death also marked the beginning of a new era in Croatian politics that definitely would be different, if not better, than the era of Tudjman. However, instead of leaving behind a consolidated democracy, he left a nation divided, without any sustainable strategy or a comprehensive plan for the future development of the country.

D. CONCLUSION

Aside from the medieval Kingdom, the Croats spent almost nine centuries living in common statehood with Hungary, Austria and Serbia. During most of this time, others dominated the Croats and decisions about Croatian faith were made in Budapest, Vienna or Belgrade. Although unpleasant, the life in the Austro-Hungarian Empire kept Croatia constantly connected with *Mitteleuropa* and the West which, along with Catholicism, formed a specific cultural and political identity. However, Croatia suffered mostly because of being a borderland, which often included the fate “to be buffeted in one direction or the other, to be trampled on, crossed over, colonized, defended and abandoned in turn of stronger neighboring powers.”⁹⁷ The formation of a common state with Serbia and Slovenia brought the challenge of being assimilated by aggressive Serbian nationalism that characterized both pre- and post-WWII Yugoslavia to Croatia.

In order to contain Germany, the British, French and Russians supported the idea of Yugoslavia under Serbian domination, which fueled the constant conflict between Serbian hegemonism and Croatian federalism, and produced almost unsolvable problems for Croatia in achieving independence. Additionally, communist rule and the strategic position of Yugoslavia during the Cold War prevented Croatia from undertaking any

⁹⁷ Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. x.

significant step towards independence. After the end of the Cold War, all circumstances for the dissolution of Yugoslavia were met. The process of disintegration was the logical consequence of numerous “differences in the level of economic development, demographic movements, ethnic structure, civilization and cultural levels, tradition, habits, psychology, and outlook,”⁹⁸ of the Yugoslavia’s nations. However, Croatia’s attempt to become independent was not accepted with enthusiasm by powerful members of the international community which resulted in the ordeal that Croatia had to suffer. This lack of international support for Croatia bolstered the Serbian desire for more territories and the continuation of the Greater Serbia policy and the strategy of ethnic cleansing that culminated in thousands killed and the destruction of Croatia’s economy.

The aftermath of the war is still reflected not only in Croatia’s economic situation, but also politically, both in domestic and international realms. Despite Croatian cooperation with the West during the BiH crisis and the fact that Croatia needs the West and vice versa, mutual distrust prevails by producing paradoxical circumstances where neither side was satisfied with the existing arrangement but at the same time was incapable of changing the unfavorable status quo. Thus, during the second half of the 1990s, Croatia remained “on the outside of Europe looking in, perched uncomfortably where it had been so often in its embattled and tragic past, on the ramparts of Christianity.”⁹⁹ However, the positive developments, once started in Croatia and Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall, continue to advance through the Euro-Atlantic integration processes by closing the previous gap and offering a more promising future.

⁹⁸ Payam Akhavan and Robert Howse, eds., Yugoslavia: the Former and Future, The Brookings Institution/Washington and The UN Research Institute for Social Development/Geneva, 1995, p. xvi.

⁹⁹ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 304.

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III. NATO – FROM THE BEGINNING TO ITS REINVENTION

The Parties [NATO members] are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defense and for preservation of peace and security.¹⁰⁰

The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.¹⁰¹

A synopsis of Croatian history would not be complete without a discussion of the circumstances that shaped European relations during the second half of the 20th century. This would be impossible without presenting the evidence for the need for the creation of a US backed NATO Alliance and its position as the main pillar of European security after WWII. That, along with direct and indirect US influence on European security, has always been of crucial importance not only for Western European countries, but also for CEE countries that have waited for decades for the opportunity to escape the oppression of communism. Croatia maintained similar aspirations by the end of the 1980s, but unfavorable circumstances during the 1990s hindered its ability to move forward toward Western integration until just recently.

Since its inception in 1949, the NATO Alliance offers a unique opportunity for promoting peace, stability and friendly relations throughout the North-Atlantic area. In addition, NATO guaranteed protection to the member states from a possible Soviet threat. During this time, and under strong US influence, NATO became the most important instrument for trans-Atlantic cooperation in political, military and economic fields. However, the end of the Cold War shook the Alliance and raised the basic questions of European security and the necessity of a NATO existence under new circumstances. The crisis in the former Yugoslavia and the inefficiency of other collective security mechanisms, especially European ones, proved the necessity of NATO's existence. Moreover, the only way out of this complicated situation that caused the biggest

¹⁰⁰ Lawrence S. Kaplan, The Long Entanglement, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, Appendix, The North Atlantic Treaty, p. 239.

¹⁰¹ Article 10, North Atlantic Treaty, Gerald B. Solomon, The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990-1997, Praeger Publishers, CSIS, Westport, CT, 1998, p. 1.

challenge to European security since WWII was the US-led NATO engagement. The US attempt to turn “a major security issue entirely over to the Europeans”¹⁰² resulted in the clear demonstration of Europe’s inability of rising to such a demanding task.

A similar situation happened with the process of NATO enlargement where mutual suspicions and frictions prevented the Europeans from taking a more affirmative approach. Again, US leadership was needed for NATO enlargement during the 1990s. However, the NATO enlargement, along with the NATO sponsored Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, visibly improved European security, and contributed to the stabilization of existing and potential crisis areas. That stabilization released all fears and suspicions about the possible negative repercussions of such activities, and brought a sense of security to smaller European nations along with the harmonization of mutual relations.

Croatia’s relationship with NATO, although currently at an all time high, needs to be addressed from various perspectives. Above all, several NATO countries strongly rejected the idea of Croatian independence, which later affected attempts at building mutual trust. Also, since NATO *per se* did not become directly engaged in the crisis in Yugoslavia until 1993, Croatia’s relations with NATO are best observed through the prism of the relationship between Croatia and individual NATO members instead of the Alliance as a whole. This is especially important to note because some of the NATO members’ dubious approach to the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in BiH, decisively influenced NATO’s relationship with Croatia. However, even when Croatia became an NATO ally in BiH, suspicions from the West did not completely disappear along with stereotypes about Croatia, which continuously complicated Croatia's relations with Western states.

A. NATO IN THE COLD WAR

The period after the end of WWII, similar to tremors following an earthquake, was full of trembling and turmoil that lasted into the mid 1950s. The ultimate challenge for all countries, and the Europeans in particular, was the search for a reliable security mechanism for avoiding future socio-political disasters of WWII proportion. Despite the creation of the UN as a collective security mechanism and some sort of Great Powers

¹⁰² Richard Hoolbrooke, To End a War, Random House, NY, 1998, p. 27.

directorate,¹⁰³ the questions of individual and collective defense remained open. The situation in Europe after the end of WWII was characterized by an overall decline in the importance of European powers, along with the shift of gravity centers towards either the US or the Soviet Union. The combined economic and military strength of the great European powers had been drastically diminished as in the case of Britain and France, or totally removed as in the case of Germany and Italy. This resulted in a loss of their significance within the confines of the newly established world order as defined at Yalta.

The US, now the leading world power, did not have the luxury of walking away from Europe as it had after WWI. To do so would allow the transfer of its dominant position to the Soviets.¹⁰⁴ The US realized that the only way to stop Soviet expansion and at the same time assist with the recovery of Western Europe would be the establishment of a military alliance. Such an alliance would ensure the continuity of a US presence along with the protection of Europe based on commonly shared democratic values and interests. Considering this, “Lord Ismay, the first Secretary-General of NATO, argued that NATO’s aim was to keep Russians out, the Germans down and the Americans in,”¹⁰⁵

It took until 1948 for Western Europeans to realize the necessity of this project. Disillusionment with Soviet style rule in the CEE was apparent (Berlin, Czechoslovakia). The potential of German danger became minute in comparison with the looming communist threat. The newly formed Western Union¹⁰⁶ of the UK, France and the Benelux did not appear to match the challenge of the rapidly strengthening Soviets. Additionally, the economic aftermath of war remained evident, and may have been unsolvable without the US sponsored Marshall Plan. These tenants formed the foundation of the common US-Western European alliance that would thrive during the second half of the 20th century. That Alliance succeeded in solving the European Question for half a

¹⁰³ In Roosevelt’s ‘Great Design’ of post-WWII world, the ‘four policemen’ (the US, UK, the Soviet Union and China) “would have a military power; all other states would be prevented from having military forces that could pose a serious threat to others.” To some extent, the UN Security Council fits in that idea. Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ “The new challenge of Soviet-led communism, arising from the war that oversaw the destruction of another evil empire, made it unlikely that the US would withdraw into its old shell.” Lawrence S. Kaplan, The Long Entanglement, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Rob de Wijk, Bram Boxhoorn, Niklaas Hoekstra eds., NATO after Kosovo, Royal Netherlands Military Academy (KMA) Breda, 2000, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence S. Kaplan, The Long Entanglement, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, p. 3.

century. “For Americans, by and large, that question has been how to protect the rest of the world from Europe’s destructiveness, if not necessarily to save Europe from itself.”¹⁰⁷

The need for a constant US presence in Europe was confirmed by events in Greece and Turkey during the late 1940s. It became evident that Britain could not bear the required financial burden of stabilization in the region alone.¹⁰⁸ With the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, Britain was systematically pushed aside by the new leader of the Western world – the US. This was a sort of a continuation of Roosevelt’s idea of “retirement of Europe from world politics”¹⁰⁹ along with the inauguration of the US as the global power. Although this policy seemed contradictory to Monroe’s hemispherism, the policy in fact served to supplement hemispherism on the broader world stage, with an emphasis on Europe. It became evident that Western Europe could not function without strong economical and military assistance from the US. The US government in turn seemed willing to push for a formal treaty. Following successes in winning the domestic fight against isolationists who were opposed to Article V, the last obstacle to the NATO treaty had been removed. The North Atlantic Treaty was signed on 4 April 1949 by 12 initial members: the US, UK, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Portugal and Italy.¹¹⁰

Creation of such a powerful alliance during peacetime changed the balance of power in Europe dramatically. The Soviet Union, which had previously faced only one opponent at a time, now faced a compact block of countries determined to oppose any further provocation. The Austrian settlement in 1951, NATO admittance of Greece and Turkey in 1952, a solution to the problem of Trieste in 1954, the entry of West Germany in NATO in 1955, followed by the formation of the Warsaw Pact created the newest lines of partition in Europe. On one side the Soviets controlled the entire CEE, while the West contained these Soviet block nations by controlling all access to the sea. Only a few

¹⁰⁷ John Lamberton Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, Cambridge University Press, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 95.

¹⁰⁹ John Lamberton Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, Cambridge University Press, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General information on NATO, <http://www.mvp.hr/myprh-www-eng/5-multilateral/nato/opcenito.html>.

neutral states remained, along with Yugoslavia, that was split fifty-fifty at Yalta, and it remained the stumbling block of European security until recently.

This was how Europe and the rest of the World became hopelessly divided between two uncompromising political, economic and military blocks. Under such circumstances, rivalry over Europe started and increased during that period, in time becoming the worst threat that the world had ever faced: the threat of mutual destruction by the use of nuclear weapons. An appropriate term for this stalemate situation was quickly developed - The Cold War. The Cold War became “a descriptive term that was generally adopted to characterize the hostile relationship that developed between the West (US) and the Soviet Union,”¹¹¹ that divided the World between the spheres of the superpowers’ influence where from time to time they exercised their strategy of limited war through local and regional conflicts.

Europe remained the most important range for the testing of the superpower’s bipolar influence, as well as the place where they implemented their policies and strategies. Fortunately for the World and more specifically Europe, the superpowers shared the one common interest of the prevention of World War III. This common interest was the single most important reason why their disputes never went beyond limited escalation even during the worst crises in Korea, Suez and Cuba.

1. Relaxation of Tensions

After the 1950’s, the Cold War became more relaxed and allowed a transfer of emphasis from political-military to socioeconomic priorities. NATO experienced a new set of circumstances and challenges resulting in strategies ranging from containment, massive retaliation, flexible response to the policy of détente, which brought less tension in relations between the superpowers and their military alliances. The Détente policy was followed by the *Ostpolitik* initiative launched by German Chancellor Brandt.¹¹² That initiative incorporated West Germany’s recognition of existing borders in Europe, including borders between the two German states. This warming of relations between a

¹¹¹ Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 104.

¹¹² Thomas Risse-Kappen, Cooperation Among Democracies, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics, 1997, p. 162.

divided Europe continued and resulted in the Helsinki Agreement. This agreement was signed at the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which “obliged the signatories to refrain from using force in order to change frontiers, to facilitate greater movement of peoples and ideas between the two parts of Europe, and to observe and promote the human rights of populations.”¹¹³ That served as a turning point following three decades of strained relations between the European East and West. Also, it helped in the SALT II negotiations that “began under ... Kissinger in 1972 and concluded by ... Vance in 1978.”¹¹⁴

Although Europe remained the most important area of competition among the superpowers, a myriad of other changes reshaped the rest of the world and Europe. European colonial empires declined along with an increase in their economic interdependence, which became obvious during the oil crises of 1973 and 1978. Technology advanced faster than anyone could imagine and resulted in space flights and moon landings. The superpowers remained in a stalemate position, having more than enough nuclear capability for mutual destruction, which resulted in a decline in the likelihood of using it. Those events had less of a negative effect on the West than on the Soviet Union. The ineffectiveness of communist central planning with regards to the economy could not keep pace with the rapid changes in the global economic environment, and became more and more protectionist and uncompetitive. On the contrary, flexible Western economies remained at the forefront of the new world economy and took leading roles in this process. The outcome of this dichotomy proved disastrous for the communist block. The last thing the Soviets needed was the introduction of the arms race imposed by the Reagan administration which did not allow the exhausted Soviet economy to rest.

Adaptability and sustainability of increased economic activity was the obvious main advantage of the West against the Soviets. Western Europe’s economy recovered immediately after the end of WWII thanks to the huge American assistance through the Marshall Plan. Another crucial step was made with the foundation of a European Coal

¹¹³ Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 120.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence S. Kaplan, The Long Entanglement, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, p. 117.

and Steel Community,¹¹⁵ which later became the foundation of the European Economic Community. These and other advantages produced bigger and bigger economic gaps between the two blocs and resulted in growing pressure from the masses in communist countries for higher standards of living as well as democracy. Internal pressure was growing rapidly and especially in countries where the Soviet Army had imposed communism after WWII. That pressure also increased inside the USSR republics and Russia itself. The strengthening of forbidden and almost forgotten nationalistic feelings was easily identified, and caught all planners and analysts off guard.

Another very important factor that contributed to Western victory over communism was the rapid change in leadership that occurred in the Soviet block. A generation of communist leaders from WWII came to an end in a very short period of time. This was particularly obvious in the Soviet Union where “the old communist leaders – Brezhnev, Chernenko and Andropov – passed away in rapid succession in the mid-1980s.”¹¹⁶ Similar power changes occurred at all levels of the government throughout the entire communist block. The new generation of leaders was not satisfied with the existing situation and tried steps such as perestroika and glasnost without much success. The expectations of the masses increased rapidly. The people wanted increased individual political and economic rights, which in the end, resulted in the implosion of the communist system.

Finally, the amazing growth in the area of technology, especially communications, catapulted the entire world into the global economic market. The ‘global village’ had been formed. This brought unprecedented economic interdependence and dictated a high level of cooperation throughout the world. These changes implicitly included flexibility in economic and business practices on a daily basis. The sluggish communist economy was incapable of rising to such a task. In that unexpected turn of world events, and without war, the communist system suddenly fell apart, mostly because of its inability to fulfill the expectations of its people.

¹¹⁵ John Lamberton Harper, American Visions of Europe, Cambridge University Press, p. 303.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence S. Kaplan, The Long Entanglement, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, p. 118.

2. NATO and Yugoslavia

Bearing in mind that Tito's Yugoslavia received significant Western help thanks to its semi-neutral position during the Cold War, it was obvious that the détente and, especially the end of the Cold War, would cause huge changes in its position. After Tito broke relations with Stalin in 1948, "the West was ready to overlook or minimize all other problems within Yugoslavia."¹¹⁷ Also, "there was some discussion in western chanceries about possibility of trying to bring it fully into the West."¹¹⁸ Tito's skill in foreign policy was unchallenged. He managed to maintain a balance between the East and the West by "playing one side off against the other with various benefits – in terms of trade and both financial and military assistance."¹¹⁹ At the same time, he played an important role in the non-aligned movement that, along with the soft version of communism at home, promoted him as a statesman with an excellent international reputation. However, "Yugoslavia was more important to the West as a virus which could infect the *corpus communisti* body than as a healthy member of the Western camp."¹²⁰ Consequently, with the changes in European security environment, Yugoslavia's position became delicate.

Unresolved national questions, rapid increases in foreign debt, and dissatisfaction with political progress resulted in a dangerous mixture of elements. Following Tito's death in 1980, complications arose in Kosovo, but the main events in Yugoslavia would not occur until the second half of the 1980s. The most important effects in the region were political changes in the Soviet Union, which took place immediately after Gorbachev became the Secretary General in 1985. His relaxed attitude toward rigid communist rules changed the nature of the Soviet Union to a point where it looked a lot more like Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia's strategic importance to the superpowers virtually disappeared overnight, allowing the equilibrium that had stabilized the region to disappear as well.

¹¹⁷ Richard Hoolbroke, *To End a War*, Random House, NY, 1998, p. 24.

¹¹⁸ James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, Columbia University Press, NY, 1997, p. 22.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Yugoslavia's collective presidency was not up to the challenge of dealing with this destabilization. Instead of concentrating on the future, they remained preoccupied with following Tito's path at any cost. This impotency within the government paralyzed the decision making process within the country. The very influential WWII generation, along with JNA generals, predominantly held the opinion that Yugoslavia was threatened from all sides, and especially from NATO. Moreover, JNA generals believed that their task is "to save Yugoslav socialism from nationalism and Western imperialism."¹²¹ Others maintained the same opinion since any accusation of deviation from Tito's path was synonymous with political suicide. Thus, the most developed communist country experienced Serbian militant nationalism instead of democratization. Dreams about democracy and prosperity turned into a nightmarish scene of human characters resembling a merging of antiquated post-WWII communists with primordial nationalists.

3. The End of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War resulted in colossal changes throughout Europe equal in comparison only to changes during the two World Wars. The bipolar structure of Europe disappeared through the decline of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact; Germany became reunified, and all communist multinational states, mostly relicts of Versailles, disintegrated.

Almost overnight we find ourselves in a dramatically changed world, from which all the familiar landmarks of the past decades have vanished. The Iron Curtain, which had marked the bottom line of European policy for almost half a century, has fallen, the spirit of Yalta has evaporated from Europe, and what is left is a host of national, regional, economic and social factors which have emerged reluctantly from the secure ideological retreats they occupied during the Cold War.¹²²

The disappearance of communist ideology as the legal basis for the ruling elites in the Soviet block, along with the lack of democratic alternatives, brought with it the reemergence of nationalism. This was not old-fashioned nationalism. It was more the result of the surfacing of suppressed feelings, which had been concealed during decades

¹²¹ Payam Akhavan and Robert Howse, eds., Yugoslavia: the Former and Future, The Brookings Institution/Washington and The UN Research Institute for Social Development/Geneva, 1995, p. xi.

¹²² Hagen Schulze, States, Nations and Nationalism, Blackwell Publisher Inc, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 319.

of Soviet internationalism. The dark prediction that nationalism represents the final stage of communism never came to fruition, mostly because of the relative national compactness of the CEE countries. Following a short period of time spent rediscovering national items and songs, countries began working on the more serious tasks at hand. They toiled with preparations for taking part in European political and economical activities, "viewing membership in NATO as well as the EU as essential to securing their reintegration into the West."¹²³ The only country that had failed to do so, thanks to Serbian militant nationalism, was the former Yugoslavia.

NATO and its members, although highly supportive of changes behind the Iron Curtain, were caught totally unprepared for such a large number of changes in such a short period of time. Above all, the US was surprised with that new, unipolar world structure that gave it not only an unchallenged position as a superpower, but also responsibility for everything that happened around the world. Speculation began to arise regarding the continued need for the Alliance. NATO had not anticipated being caught without an exit strategy and struggled with its own new scope and purpose. During the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, all suspicions regarding NATO's ability to operate effectively within the new paradigm became reality. Despite the fact that the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were the longest and bloodiest in Europe since WWII, NATO failed to react for almost three years.

There were various reasons for this lack of effectiveness with the most important being the lack of a Soviet threat and the absence of US leadership. The Soviet Union was in the most ambiguous position during that time. Still playing an important role in the world and Europe, although simultaneously unable to maintain the Warsaw Pact, which was dissolved in July 1991, and too preoccupied with internal confusion, its dissolution occurred by the end of 1991. The absence of the Soviet counterbalance opened a huge security vacuum in the bipolar structure of power around the world and particularly in Europe. CEE states rushed toward the West looking for NATO protection against unpredictable events in the ex-Soviet Union. However, NATO, without clear US leadership, remained lethargic. The only significant reaction was the Joint Declaration of

¹²³ Gerald B. Solomon, The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990-1997, Praeger Publishers, CSIS, Westport, CT, 1998, p. 2.

22 members of NATO and Warsaw Pact in Paris on 19 November 1990. The Declaration stated, “that they are no longer adversaries and that they recognize that security is indivisible”¹²⁴ in CSCE area.

At the same time, the US concentrated on events in the Persian Gulf and was subsequently engaged in protecting its vital interests on the Arabian Peninsula. Building a coalition among Arab states while ensuring adequate support from European allies proved to be an extremely demanding task. Under European pressure to have ‘the hour of Europe,’ the US left Western Europe and its leading power, Great Britain to demonstrate its “ability to develop a common foreign policy and to exercise political influence outside Western Europe.”¹²⁵ With this combination of events at the forefront of world politics, the importance of the emerging crisis in Yugoslavia and its repercussions on European security remained virtually ignored by US officials until 1992.

Europe was left unassisted in the middle of the colossal transition of its central and eastern parts. Consequently, the old issue of balance of power in Europe was once again resurrected following German unification with a return to the European scene of old rivalries and, automatically, divisions regarding future security arrangements. The spirit of mutual confidence was suddenly lost. However, the ultimate question in Europe was the new position of the recently unified Germany and its repercussions on the new security landscape. Political maneuvering began with the question of German unification that “without Washington’s steadfast and visionary support, would not have happened, given the opposition of Britain and France,”¹²⁶ on the issue of the crumbling Yugoslavia. Germany, seeking a buffer zone from the east that was as broad as possible, supported all emerging democracies in Europe including Slovenia and Croatia. In order to counter this rise in German influence, Britain and France immediately granted support to Serbia. It was in that manner that the simple question of national independence was elevated to a question of prestige, and eventually to the status of an international crisis.

¹²⁴ Rob de Wijk, Bram Boxhoorn, Nikolaas Hoekstra eds., NATO after Kosovo, Royal Netherlands Military Academy (KMA) Breda, 2000, p. 20.

¹²⁵ Reneo Lukic, Allen Lynch, Europe from the Balkans to the Urals: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Oxford University Press/SIPRI, 1996, p. 260.

¹²⁶ Richard Hoolbrooke, To End a War, Random House, NY, 1998, p. 28.

In this sorry sequence, Europe and the US proved to be equally misguided. Europe believed it could solve Yugoslavia without the US: Washington believed that, with the Cold War over, it could leave Yugoslavia to Europe ... It would take four years to undo these mistakes – four years before Washington belatedly and reluctantly, but decisively, stepped in and asserted leadership, with European support. But this did not happen until even more severe strain within the [NATO], and historic disaster in Bosnia.¹²⁷

Consequently, NATO became ineffective. Although nobody openly questioned NATO's position regarding collective defense, the behavior of the European allies, particularly Britain and France, clearly demonstrated the necessity for a redefinition of NATO's role in Europe. "France has been the leader in furthering both the removal of the US and the empowering of Europe as it presses its campaign for 'independent' Europe."¹²⁸ It became clear that without the Soviet threat, the heavy US presence in Europe was no longer necessary, especially if the situation in Europe continued to stabilize. That position made sense when considered in light of the planned transformation of the European Community into the European Union (EU), along with the emphasis on a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in Europe. "Obsessed with proving themselves ... and preparing the difficult arrangements for their union ... the EC was nonetheless in the vanguard of international efforts to deal with the dissolution of Yugoslavia."¹²⁹ Such a situation could also be seen as an attempt to replace US and Russian influence in Europe with influence from the European powers. Nevertheless, the rising crisis in Yugoslavia was surrounded with overall confusion and uncertainty regarding the future, particularly in terms of a sustainable security arrangement in the region. "Europeans and Americans had not been so divided since the Suez."¹³⁰

B HOW NATO FOUND ITS SOUL – THE WARS IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

The balance of power in Europe in a unipolar world seemed to be impossible, even oxymoronic. However, the example from the crises in the former Yugoslavia illustrated that it still exists. Although the disintegration of multinational communist

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

¹²⁸ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Long Entanglement*, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, p. 189.

¹²⁹ James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, Columbia University Press, NY, 1997, p. 30.

¹³⁰ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Long Entanglement*, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, p. 189.

states in Europe obviously represented a historical process, receiving support from all sides in the case of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, the ghosts of Versailles and Yalta had been resurrected. Despite the fact that an integral Yugoslavia could not, under the given circumstances, exist as a modern European democratic state, non-Serbian nations were denied their right to become independent. However, warnings that the Serbs planned to maintain a strategy of annihilation of all non-Serbs fell on deaf ears in Western nations and resulted in the lack of decisive international action even in situations where Serbian leaders openly proclaimed their aggressive intentions. Milosevic gave a speech on 28 June 1989 in Kosovo that was more a cry for war than a form of political expression where he stated, "...Six centuries later, again we are in battles and quarrels. They are not armed battles, though such things should not be excluded yet."¹³¹ The reaction of the West following such an open threat was mild, even nonexistent. Sadly, this very speech started a chain of events that would later become paramount to the problem of European security.

Without any doubt, Serbia under Milosevic's leadership represented the starting point and the source of all crises and wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Serbian policy of militant nationalism was established with the full support of the Serbian population, including both the masses and intelligentsia. Serbia broke the common state,¹³² carried out aggression, occupation and ethnic cleansing toward neighboring nations. Serbia was not prevented or stopped mostly because of contradictory interests among powerful members of the international community and their lack of understanding of what had actually happened. The policy of preservation of the former Yugoslavia prevailed during the decisive moments of 1991.¹³³ Meanwhile, the Serbs interpreted international reaction as a green light for pursuing their goals under the premise of solving internal problems. Interestingly, the permanent members of the UN Security Council, Britain, France, and Russia (in that order), and, to a much smaller extent, China and the US, instead of helping victims, deliberately, or not, arranged circumstances that

¹³¹ Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 164.

¹³² Warren Zimmermann, Origins of a Catastrophe, Times Books, 1999. p. 92.

¹³³ During his visit to Belgrade in June 1991, the US Secretary of State, James Baker stated that "the United States continues to recognize and support the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia", Mark Almond, Europe's Backyard War: The War in the Balkans, London, Mandarin, 1994, pp. 48-49.

facilitated Serbian aggression. It started with the arms embargo¹³⁴ imposed on all the former Yugoslav countries that actually helped the Serbs maintain their dominant position by keeping the vast majority of JNA weapons. This opened the door for a decade of wars, and preset their probable outcomes.

1. Controversy within NATO

Serbian aggression towards Croatia, under the pretense of protecting ‘endangered’ Croatian Serbs, opened up a whole set of controversies among NATO allies. The EC *troika*, led by Luxembourg’s foreign minister Poos,¹³⁵ ensured the withdrawal of the JNA from Slovenia in July 1991. “The Serbs insisted that Slovenia’s secession was a *fait accompli* ... [and] that the Serbs and Slovenes had sewn it all up.”¹³⁶ Such an outcome left Croatia alone with disastrous consequences: Serbian occupation of one third of Croatian territory and ethnic cleansing of all non-Serbs. After the Vukovar massacre, disagreements among European countries regarding Croatian independence gradually developed into a crisis. Germany stipulated its “cooperation with Britain over amendments to the [Maastricht] treaty in return for Britain agreeing to Croatian recognition. Germany’s behavior provoked a spasm of chauvinistic hysteria in Britain.”¹³⁷ The only supportive voice among British politicians was Lady Thatcher’s. “She not only pleaded for recognition of the new republics but roundly supported supplying them with arms as well.”¹³⁸ However, in spite of all these complications, Croatia was recognized and the pretence of European unity had been preserved.

Beside European differences, the UN Security Council hesitated in recognizing the new states and gave the Serbs more time to continue their aggression as in the case of Croatia. Even when the UN recognized a new state, as in BiH, the Security Council refused to help the state to survive by making the non-Serb population helpless victims whose destiny depended on mercy and foreign aid. It appeared as though the permanent members of the Security Council, under the pretense of the prevention of conflict

¹³⁴ “Milosevic wanted U.N. 713 because a continuing monopoly of heavy guns and armor made it easier for his ‘federal’ army to complete his program of ethnic cleansing” Albert Wohlstetter, “Why We’re In It-Still,” The Wall Street Journal, July 1, 1993.

¹³⁵ Poos’ statement that, “Europe does not need more small states” become legendary in Croatia.

¹³⁶ Marcus Tanner, Croatia: A Nation Forged in War, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 252.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 272.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

escalation, were more preoccupied with the protection or disregard of the Serbian aggressor, than with providing help for countless victims. The statement given by the Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN is, probably the best illustration of the biased approach toward the crisis:

Already nearly two hundred thousand people have died. More than two million people have been displaced from their homes. Twenty thousand women have been raped. The International Court of Justice and the World Conference on Human Rights have indicated that BiH is a victim of genocide and ethnic cleansing, among other unspeakable crimes. For this council, then, what precisely does it mean to say that violence would increase and spread?¹³⁹

Numerous examples illustrate that all permanent members of the Security Council were involved in the BiH tragedy in debatable way. However, the role of Britain was particularly revolting.

The British approach to Serbian aggression was much more comparable to the sponsorship and assistance of Serbian strategic goals than to neutral arbitration. By using their position in the UN, in the EU where Britain obtain its six-month presidency in 1992, and on the ground in BiH where the British and the French provided the majority of the 7,500 UN troops,¹⁴⁰ the British ensured to the Serbs and JNA enough time to occupy about 70 percent of the territory of BiH. Britain then assisted in the redistribution of guilt among all sides involved in the war, and proposed the plans¹⁴¹ through its negotiators for the partition of BiH. Additionally, the British refused any appropriate UN action toward

¹³⁹ Diego Arria, Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN Security Council, who was irritated by British, French and Russian objections that lifting the arms embargo would increase violence in B&H, Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds. Why Bosnia?: Writings on the Balkan War, Stony Creek, Connecticut, The Pamphleter's Press, 1993, p. xxix.

¹⁴⁰ An excellent explanation of how it worked – 14,000 UN troops in Croatia prevented Croatia from liberating territories seized by Serbs, while in Bosnia, 7,500 UN soldiers observed non-existing ceasefires and the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Serbs did not allow them to use Serbian controlled territory. Thomas G. Weiss, Military-Civilian Interactions: Intervening in Humanitarian Crises, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, 1999, pp. 38-39.

¹⁴¹ There is still a mystery as to who started mutual fights between the Croats or Muslims. The only certain moment is that it came after the announcement of the plan for the partition of BiH.

the Serbian side, which protected the Serbs from punishment¹⁴² for committing atrocities and violations in UN safe areas.

The so-called leaders of the Western world have known what is happening here for the last year and a half. They receive play-by-play reports. They talk of prosecuting war criminals, but do nothing to stop the crimes. May God forgive them. May God forgive us all.¹⁴³

Above all, they used humanitarian aid to blackmail BiH representatives¹⁴⁴ in order to facilitate the partitioning of the state. Finally, when the US assumed the lead in the BiH crisis, British politicians refused to cooperate by imposing every imaginable formal obstacle to US efforts, especially with regard to the Security Council.

Thus, it became clear that none of the European powers could become involved in crises in Europe without a heavily biased approach and favoritism toward one side. Even more important was the fact that without strong US leadership, NATO would play only a symbolic role, and might be relegated to the status of a political and military eunuch. The lack of US interest in the former Yugoslavia during the initial stages of the crisis was understandable, but later became counterproductive to US policy in the region. The US administration had entangled itself in the net of an old European quarrel without a clear vision of how to solve the problem. The US ambassador to Belgrade, Warren Zimmermann, contributed to this situation by allowing himself to be captured by Serbian

¹⁴² In the UN Security Council, Britain vetoed every attempt at authorizing the use of force or the lifting of the arms embargo. The explanation of the UK Ambassador David Hannay to the UN was prosaic: "We would have liked to have voted for this resolution. We agreed with a lot of it. But we were not prepared to vote for a paragraph that called for massive military intervention, nor for a paragraph that called for a lifting of the arms embargo." "UN General Assembly Calls for Force Against Serbia," CNN, 18 December 1992.

After the UN Secretary General published a report stating that these 'safe areas' were as dangerous as any other part of Bosnia, the British Ambassador to the UN dismissed the report as "entirely unofficial," the "work of a junior clerk," and that "hadn't myself even read it" "A Safe Haven For Death," Newsday, 2 June 1993, quoted in <http://www.domovina.net/complaint/appendix.html>.

¹⁴³ Louis Gentile, a Canadian diplomat on leave to the UNHCR, spoke as a personal eyewitness to the genocide taking place in Banja Luka. He recalled seeing the concentration camps being set up by the Serbs for Croats and Muslims, seeing children blown up by Serbian shells, watching the rape, murder and mutilation of civilians, and the destruction of Muslim property and sacred places. "In Banja Luka, Terror Seems Uncannily Normal", The New York Times, 14 January 1994, quoted in <http://www.domovina.net/complaint/appendix.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Britain stated that it will pull out all aid to BiH if BiH followed through on its promise to file a World Court lawsuit for complicity in genocide. "UN Genocide Charge Puts Army Bosnia Role Into Doubt," The Daily Telegraph, 17 November 1993.

propaganda¹⁴⁵ and further confused the causes and consequences. The Serbs often alluded to his German origin and the US “intention to turn the Balkans into a sphere of influence, sharing domination with Germany.”¹⁴⁶ In so doing, the Serbs were planning on the counter support from old European allies, but at a minimum, the US refusal to take sides. With little help from Serbian supporters, above all Eagleburger and Scowcroft, who were among the highest ranking officials in the US administration at that time, this did not seem impossible.

At the same time, there were powerful Congressmen and Senators who pushed for a more rigorous stance of the US government against Serbian aggression. However, Senator Dole’s words “We have already waited too long ... Milosevic’s policies were part of a bigger plan ... We must move beyond words to action ... Lives are at stake, democracy is at stake, and, freedom is at stake,”¹⁴⁷ fell on deaf ears. The same effect was achieved when Congressmen Lantos criticized the US approach towards the crisis in BiH and stated,

The problem is that there is an election in 90 days, and this election paralyzes the administration ... Those little children do not have 90 days ...do we join in the European failure, or do we take a position of leadership?¹⁴⁸

Obviously, the election was a bigger priority, but the topic of BiH was decisive for winning the election. President Clinton used the crisis in BiH relentlessly during his presidential campaign. Thus, the crisis in Yugoslavia became global. After Clinton took office the following problems emerged: How would he win domestic support for action in the Balkans? How could the US neutralize failures of the allies without damaging NATO? How could NATO help the thousands of suffering people in the region? In total,

¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most ridiculous information in Zimmermann’s book is that the Sava river was named after Serbian Saint Sava. Actually the name of the river came from Roman name Savus, Warren Zimmermann, Origins of a Catastrophe, Times Books, 1999, p. 30.

¹⁴⁶ Milosevic’s words to a group of American religious leaders through their visit to Yugoslavia. Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁴⁷ US Congress, Committee of Foreign Relations, “Sanctions Legislation Relating to the Yugoslav Civil War,” S.1793, 102nd Cong. 1st Sess., October 16, 1991, Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1992.

¹⁴⁸ US Congress, Committee of Foreign Affairs, “Developments in Yugoslavia and Europe – August 1992,” Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Europe and Middle East, 102nd Cong. 2nd Sess., August 4, 1992, Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993.

solving this ‘problem from hell’ with little or no support from military circles seemed impossible, but there was no alternative.

In actuality, there was no broad based opposition to further US involvement in the crisis within Congress or the administration. It was rather disagreements or confusion about a comprehensive strategy of the US involvement in the BiH crisis. The main obstacle was a reluctant military leader (Powell) who did not want to carry out any serious action on the ground in BiH. The Pentagon’s surprising willingness to send troops to Somalia “was Powell’s way of doing something humanitarian but, equally important, of not sending troops to Bosnia.”¹⁴⁹ Obviously, he was not able to move out of the scope of the Vietnam syndrome and the Weinberger doctrine. Luckily, Powell was on his way out of office, and support from Congress and the Senate was almost guaranteed because of Senator Dole’s influence on the Republican majority.

However, the first moves of the new administration were far from being successful. Nothing promising happened during Secretary of State Christopher’s trip to the European capitals in May 1993 where he tried to ensure support for the US lift and strike policy of lifting the embargo on BiH and using NATO air strikes against the Serbs following the Serbian refusal to sign the Vance-Owen plan. As in the past, the Serbs had been well informed of their pending fate, and therefore formally agreed with the Vance-Owen plan on the same day that Christopher arrived. This turned his trip into a fiasco and “provided the allies an excuse to hold off supporting, if not rejecting, the US proposal.”¹⁵⁰ Naturally, the Serbs later totally rejected the peace plan.

2. U.S. Taking Initiative within NATO

In spite of such embarrassing diplomatic events, wheels began to turn in the direction of real progress. During the summer of 1993, the US significantly changed its approach towards Western European allies. The US began to insist on a more concrete solution to the BiH crisis, and sent warnings that “the future of the Alliance was on the line. If nothing was done and Sarajevo collapsed, the NATO summit scheduled for January 1994 would be a farce, and transatlantic relations would be severely

¹⁴⁹ David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, Scribner, New York, 2001, p. 251.

¹⁵⁰ Ivo H. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 16.

damaged.”¹⁵¹ This message was clearly understood and the reaction came immediately during the North Atlantic Council meeting on 2 August 1993. “After a marathon, sixteen-hour session that was ‘as bitter and rancorous a discussion as has ever taken place in the alliance,’ the allies finally reached an agreement”¹⁵² about possible NATO engagement in BiH.

That was the turning point, and although Britain and France could continue to undermine efforts by using their veto within the UN, this moment had marked the full return of the US into European policy. Frictions between the US and allies continued for some time, although with decreasing intensity. In light of the forthcoming NATO summit along with receiving a lot of criticism from the US side, “I had the feeling that the British and French felt it was far more important to avoid lifting the arms embargo than to save the [BiH] country,”¹⁵³ the European allies reduced their opposition to US views. This opened the door not only for the harmonization of mutual relations, but also for the introduction of Partnership for Peace into the discussion, first as an idea, and then as a program adopted at the NATO Brussels summit in January of 1994.

Naturally, all of this was just the beginning of the clarification of the situation on the ground in BiH. Once the US got on board and NATO became engaged, all challenges seemed to be solvable. Stabilization of the complex situation on the ground started with pressure on Croatian and Muslim leaders to end their senseless mutual conflict. This problem was easily solved since almost the entire Muslim and Croatian populations, with the exception of a small number of extremists, did not support the conflict between the nations from the very beginning. Just a few serious warnings were enough to change Croatian policy toward the Muslims, and vice versa.¹⁵⁴ After a round of negotiations, Croats and Muslims signed the Washington Agreement on March 18, 1994, forming the Croat-Muslim Federation. This represented major progress but huge preparations were required in order to prepare for upcoming ground operations.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁵³ “Britain's Bosnia Errors, By Clinton,” Press Association Newsfile, 18 October 1993, quoted in <http://www.domovina.net/complaint/appendix.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. US Ambassador to the UN, Madeline Albright, stated that Croatia faced tough sanctions for its role in the war against the government of BiH. She noted that Croatia had regular ground troops in addition to Bosnian Croat soldiers in combat operations in Bosnia. “US Warns Croatia To Stay Out Of Bosnia,” Financial Times, 6 January 1994.

Changes in France, when Chirac became the President in the spring 1995, decisively altered the Western approach towards the BiH crisis. Chirac's "predecessor Mitterrand ... had shown pro-Serbian sentiment ... steeped in the history of Serbian [non-existent] resistance to Germany in two world wars."¹⁵⁵ Chirac's decision to end the BiH farce, through closer cooperation with and under the leadership of the US, left Britain alone and enabled a resolute solution to the crisis. Finally, in 1995, all circumstances were met for the final cut and, after Croatia liberated most of its own territory, the Serbs could be defeated and the BiH entanglement solved. Another critical moment was the Serbian massacre of the Muslim population in the UN 'safe area' of Srebrenica. "23,000 women and children were herded like a cattle out of the enclave and ... almost 8,000 men and boys were executed en masse"¹⁵⁶ in July of 1995. Following the horrific events of Srebrenica, even the most ardent opponents to the use of force against the Serbs disappeared. Serbian attempts, following abandonment by France and even by Britain, to engage their new protector, Russia, were unsuccessful.

Croatia liberated its territory in only a few days in early August which drastically changed the military balance in the region and strategically improved the position of the Croat-Muslim Federation in BiH. US eagerness to end the tragedy in BiH was bolstered after three members of Holbrooke's negotiation team died in a tragic but suspicious accident while trying to reach Sarajevo over almost impassable roads. NATO bombing eventually started by the end of August and lasted for two weeks. NATO followed the air campaign with the introduction of ground forces of the Croatian Army followed by the BiH 5th Corps that commenced with offensive operations, and by mid September, had achieved a 50:50 ratio of BiH territory.

Constant coordination conducted among Croatia, the US, and NATO resulted in the rapid resolution of a previously 'unsolvable' problem. Croatian victories clearly refuted trumped-up stories and myths about Serbs and their heroic fighting spirit. When faced with an equal force the Serbs simply ran. However, the decline of the former Yugoslavia and the BiH tragedy, had helped NATO to define its *raison d'être* as the main

¹⁵⁵ Richard Hoolbrooke, To End a War, Random House, NY, 1998, p. 65.

¹⁵⁶ Ivo H. Daalder, Getting to Dayton, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 66.

pillar of European security and further confirmed the necessity of a US presence in Europe for the unforeseeable future.

3. Dayton and Beyond

Immediately after the fighting stopped, preparation for future settlement of BiH began, and culminated with the signing of the Dayton Agreement in Paris. The Dayton Agreement was made possible only under enormous US pressure, but the US had put its credibility on the line, allowing no other option but success. At the same time, neither side involved in the conflict was in a position to complain very strongly. The Croats and Muslims were exhausted in every sense of the word, and despite their understandable desire for revenge, it seemed unlikely that their alliance would last without US sponsorship. The Serbs obviously deserved worse treatment, but the opportunity for revenge escaped with the Croatian or US failure to take Banja Luka.¹⁵⁷ It is also evident that the Serbs received far more territory than would be normal according to their percentage of the population. That led to a paradoxical situation where all sides were at the same time pleased and dissatisfied with the results of the Dayton Agreement. However, on a more global scale, Europe and its unity had been saved along with a renewal of the power and, more importantly, credibility of the NATO alliance.

Consequently, an examination of who gained what from the Dayton Agreement differs greatly depending on whose standpoint is taken. Without any doubt, NATO was the biggest winner. It regained its unity and credibility as the only respectable force within Europe. The NATO-led peacekeeping mission in BiH made it possible for NATO allies to work together as a military organization with the assistance of numerous PfP countries, including Russia. This granted a unique opportunity for military cooperation on the ground which automatically led to better mutual relationships among European nations on the political level. In fact, the US “vision of a Europe that is undivided, peaceful, and democratic was well on the way to becoming a reality.”¹⁵⁸ Also, NATO leadership during the UN-sponsored operation contributed to the establishment of a framework for future interaction between NATO and the UN. Finally, NATO had been

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 124-125, Holbrooke and US Ambassador to Croatia Galbraith met with President Tudjman on September 17 to tell him not to take Banja Luka. Unfortunately, Tudjman agreed.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 179.

elevated in the eyes of the common people, inside and outside of the region and became a symbol of reliability and protection throughout the world.

On yet another front, stood the international community represented by its various organizations that, despite sharing a considerable amount of responsibility for the tragedies of BiH, became by some measures *de facto* rulers of BiH. Widespread skepticism, based on previous experiences regarding the efficiency of international community bodies and representatives, was extremely evident among the population of BiH. From the very beginning it was questionable as to whether or not the international community had the political will to help BiH recover. Glorious speeches and unsubstantiated promises, along with the engagement of a myriad of jobless politicians and bureaucrats, needed to be replaced with concrete measures and true progress. Unfortunately, almost none of the initial promises materialized, and the international bureaucracy became a sort of barrier to the improvement of the overall situation in BiH.

More troubling than the antics of the international bureaucracy was the fact that after all their atrocities, the Serbs received 49 percent of the land in BiH along with international recognition in the form of the Republika Srpska. This guaranteed a semi-independent position inside of BiH for the Serbs. Serbs from Serbia escaped any punishment, although they had been the *spiritus movens* of the Greater Serbia project through participation in various facets, from military forces to organized pillaging and relocation of factories, of the wars in Croatia and BiH. This third Serbian attempt during the 20th century to form a Greater Serbia was less successful than the preceding two, and again had been planned at the cost of other nations and Serbs outside of Serbia.

Milosevic's description of BiH Serbs during Dayton reads, "They are not my friends. They are not my colleagues. It is awful just to be in the same room with them for so long. They are shit."¹⁵⁹ This statement represented the best illustration of the treatment of BiH Serbs in Serbia. However, after being discarded by mother Serbia, and earning a terrible reputation for massacres during the war, the BiH Serbs still received a comfortable arrangement in Dayton. The only problem from a BiH Serb perspective is the piecemealed, excluding the Banja Luka region, shape of the territory of the Republika

¹⁵⁹ Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War*, Random House, 1998. p. 106.

Srpska that cannot fulfill basic economic and infrastructure standards, which could, in the long run, result in new complications.

The Muslim position remained ambiguous. Under the given circumstances, they received the best possible results, but were at the same time, put into such a delicate position by Serbian aggression coupled with the inactiveness of the international community. Consequently, they expected more in terms of the Dayton Agreement. Unable to defend themselves under the conditions of the arms embargo, Muslims accepted any help offered, including that from mujahedins, which led to numerous problems and strained relations with the international community. However, unsolved issues such as the eastern part of BiH that remained under Serbian control and a fragile federation with BiH Croats, continued to burden Muslim relations with surrounding countries. In addition to enormous human losses of 250,000 killed, 35,000 wounded, 26,000 disappearances, 50,000 victims tortured, 20,000 – 50,000 victims raped,¹⁶⁰ a further obstacle was the overall destruction of the BiH economy which was barely addressed in Dayton. The Dayton Agreement did, however, bring an end to the suffering along with NATO military protection for BiH Muslims.

Paradoxically, even after being such a vital contributor, along with the US and NATO, in ensuring the circumstances that led to the Dayton Agreement, the only obvious loser in this chain of events was Croatia. Such an outcome was made possible for various reasons, but primarily because of the constant lack of vision of Croatian politicians in BiH. This lack of vision caused numerous disagreements inside Croatia itself including the splintering of Tudjman's HDZ. Of equal importance was the continuous refusal by the West to view Croatia outside of a Yugoslavian frame of reference. However, under the circumstances preceding the Dayton Agreement, the Croatian leadership had missed an opportunity to obtain a better deal with the US that would have guaranteed unhindered access to Western integration. Through its actions as an unofficial NATO ground force and suffering numerous casualties in the process, Croatia deserved at a minimum membership in PfP. However, the Croatian leadership, fascinated with momentary successes and plagued by Tudjman's vanity, agreed to a solution that left BiH Croats as

¹⁶⁰ Thomas G. Weiss, Military-Civilian Interactions: Intervening in Humanitarian Crises, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, 1999, p. 131.

the smallest nation in a less than desirable position. Also, the Croatian leadership did not insist on a Serbian indictment for the wars and consequently, did not receive reparations for their devastation of the country.

Croatia furthermore agreed to a three-year interim period for eastern Slavonia, along with the unnecessary positioning of UN troops on the Prevlaka peninsula. Additionally, Croatia allowed the transfer and supply of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) over Croatian territory along with the usage of the Croatian infrastructure, which brought only symbolic or no reimbursement. Croatia also assumed numerous obligations under the Dayton Agreement, such as arms limitation, refugee and war crimes that subjected the country to constant monitoring by different international institutions along with the presence of UN troops on Croatian soil. These very factors later became the main obstacles to the development of the country, and for progress with regards to Western integration. The only positive international result was Croatian acceptance into the European Council (EC) in 1996. Self-consolation for being a 'silent NATO member,' by complying with every imaginable NATO/US request, did not bring concrete benefits, only a modicum of questionable prestige.

C. NATO'S PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE

After the war and subsequent celebrations were over, international attention declined rapidly, leaving Croatia in the position of a nation forgotten in war. Instead of focusing on the materialization of previous cooperation with the US and NATO, Tudjman decided to swim in the murky waters of European diplomatic circles while at the same time muddling in BiH internal politics. The Croatian domestic political scene went from bad to worse when the HDZ introduced the division of the Croatian people into the two categories of 'nationally constructive' and "others". This inflammatory act rapidly polarized the nation and brought about an untouchable position for the ruling elite and circles surrounding the president. US support gradually cooled, ending in only routine contacts and membership in European institutions became more of a distant dream in 1999 than it had been in 1995. Attempts to join PfP did not even reach the level of serious discussions. Without question, Croatia had become some type of European

buffer zone from BiH and Serbia, neither fully excluded nor accepted, and simply left alone with its internal struggle for democracy.

In the meantime, Europe intensified the processes of integration in many areas. In 1992, Maastrich ushered in a new way of economic unification by opening long closed European doors for new members. In January of 1994, NATO went a step further in the creation of PfP by the expansion during the next two years of 27 European countries that signed the Framework Document. Under this document, partner countries were asked to fulfill five basic objectives which included:

- to facilitate transparency in national defense planning and budgeting processes
- to ensure democratic control of defense forces
- to maintain the capability and readiness to contribute to operations under the authority of the UN and/or the responsibility of the OSCE
- to develop cooperative military relations with NATO, for the purpose of joint planning, training and exercises, in order to strengthen the ability of PfP participants to undertake missions in the field of peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian operations, and others as may subsequently be agreed upon
- to develop, over the longer term, forces that are better able to operate with those of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance¹⁶¹

During the period of PfP creation and implementation, an especially important role was performed by the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which in 1997 became the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). NACC was formed in early 1992 with the main purpose to ensure “NATO support for CSCE in dealing with ... disaster relief and refugee programs ... and other new security challenges in Europe.”¹⁶² NACC actually started the cooperation between former enemies from NATO and the Warsaw Pact by bringing them together around the negotiation table. Undoubtedly, the broad scope of PfP countries, from developed Sweden, Finland, Switzerland and Austria to ex-Soviet republics in Central Asia, clearly illustrated that all 27 countries could not meet the aforementioned criteria. However, during the first wave of PfP formation, political

¹⁶¹ NATO Handbook. <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/index.htm>.

¹⁶² Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990-1997*, Praeger Publishers, CSIS, Westport, CT, 1998, p. 13.

reasons overruled technical criteria to include the acceptance of countries that fought each other (Caucasus), or had been under the rule of a dictatorship (Belarus). PfP countries raised the number of mutual activities and transformed an extremely hostile continent into an area of cooperation that was unimaginable only a few years ago. Despite the initial doubts and reservations, particularly because of possible Russian counter reaction, PfP showed remarkable improvement in the European security picture in a very short time.

This resulted in increased Croatian expectations that some deficiencies in domestic politics and complicated international venues would be tolerated or overlooked. Evidently, political interests opposing Croatian membership were more dominant than expected in NATO circles, and Croatia remained a non-member. Under those circumstances, although somewhat tacitly, Croatia's links with the US, especially military ones, have remained. Aside from MPRI which has been working with Croatia since 1994, various activities continued through American educational programs, such as IMET, JCTP, the Marshall Center, military academies, along with bilateral cooperation, and partnership with the state of Minnesota.¹⁶³ Language training in Croatia and abroad brought the Croatian military closer to their desired level of interoperability with NATO forces. In spite of these many advances, the ruling elite always prevented finalization of the necessary steps for Croatia's advancement. Examples of strategic documents that were finished but not adopted, and the new organizational chart for the Ministry of Defense which was adopted but never fully implemented clearly showed a lack of political will for changes that might endanger certain privileged individuals.

1. NATO Enlargement

In June of 1994, Russia agreed to mutual cooperation with NATO through a Special Partnership. This decreased skepticism and allowed the idea of NATO enlargement to become a reality. Although the pressure of the Visegrad Group of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia for NATO membership began immediately after the collapse of communism, the process of NATO enlargement actually started with the 'NATO Participation Act' adopted in the US senate on the 8th of October 1994. This

¹⁶³ Presentation given by MoD Office for NATO and PfP, Zagreb, July 2001.

was a logical continuation of the 'National Security Restoration Act' proposed on 27 September, which asked for NATO membership for the Visegrad countries not later than 1999. Despite Yeltsin's warning that NATO enlargement could cause what he called a 'Cold Peace,' the US continued forward with the idea. President Clinton, while arguing with NATO enlargement opponents on 13 January 1995, stated, "They would confine the newly free peoples of Central Europe to a zone of insecurity and, therefore, instability... those visions for Europe are too narrow, too skeptical, perhaps even too cynical."¹⁶⁴ Such an unusual US position in its approach to NATO enlargement practically disarmed opponents both in the US and Europe, leaving little room for additional maneuvering. Remaining issues would have to be resolved through a process of intensified dialogue between NATO and aspirant countries.

At the NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels on 5 December 1995, two months after the North Atlantic Council (NAC) approved the enlargement study, the following goals for aspirant countries were decided. Aspirant countries would be required to

- pursue 'intensified dialogue' through bilateral and multilateral consultations with partners, build on the foundation of enlargement study
- strengthen the PfP, which some partners will facilitate their ability to assume the responsibilities of membership
- consider what internal adaptation are necessary to ensure that enlargement preserves the effectiveness of the alliance, particularly resource and staffing implications¹⁶⁵

The following two years were spent in preparation and adaptation of aspirant countries. During the NATO summit in Madrid in July 1997 the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were invited to become full NATO members in the year 1999. This event ended the exhausting process of breaking the Iron Curtain, and finally made faster European integration for CEE countries possible.

¹⁶⁴ Gerald B. Solomon, The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990-1997, Praeger Publishers, CSIS, Westport, CT, 1998, pp. 72-73.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 88.

2. Kosovo Crisis

Everything appeared almost perfect in preparation for the 50th anniversary of NATO in Washington. Only one detail was unpredictable: the Serbs. Following their well-known pattern of provocation throughout the former Yugoslavia, the Serbs instigated a crisis in Kosovo. Although not widely reported, Kosovo remained turbulent during the wars in Croatia and BiH, but thanks to Gandhi-style Albanian resistance, and the ignorance of the international community, the situation in Kosovo never escalated beyond sporadic clashes between Serbian police and (para)military forces and Albanian protestors. However, by the end of the 1990s, the situation began to deteriorate rapidly. Serbs living in Kosovo complained that despite Milosevic's promises that Kosovo would be a Serb homeland again, and Serb control of power, privileges and jobs, they still remained a threatened minority. The Serbian government, in order to modify the unfavorable national structure of the population of Kosovo (90 percent Albanians) tried to resettle Serbs that had escaped from Croatia and BiH into Kosovo. Naturally, Albanian reaction was furious and the conflict escalated during 1998, bringing with it two hundred thousand refugees¹⁶⁶ and the development of a situation similar to that witnessed in BiH.

This time the Serbs had miscalculated the reaction of the international community that could not allow itself the embarrassment of a fiasco similar to that in BiH. Although "the Europeans were taking cover by talking about having a UN Security Council Resolution before they acted in Kosovo,"¹⁶⁷ and were counting on a Russia veto, the US dismissed such complaints. Thus, the reaction of the proverbially slow institutions like the UN and EU were relatively fast, to say nothing of the US and NATO, who wanted to reestablish their credibility after experiencing so many problems in BiH. Milosevic tried tactics similar to those he had used in BiH; but this time the US and NATO were willing to stop his actions and the threat of ethnic cleansing by using all means necessary. Despite strong Russian opposition in the UN Security Council, the US and NATO allies continued to increase pressure on the Milosevic regime and were again forced to take military action after the failure of the negotiations at Rambouillet.

¹⁶⁶ By August 1998, the UN placed the number of refugees at 200,000. David Halberstam, War in a Time of Peace, Scribner, New York, 2001, p. 399.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 397.

NATO intervention in Kosovo began without UN approval on 24 March 1999, and represented NATO's first military engagement against a rogue state inside a state's internationally recognized borders. This unprecedented approach led to international confusion and to requests for an examination of legality of the action even from European allies. However, facing the Serbian variant of the 'final solution' that caused the problem of a million refugees that nobody wanted to accept, a pragmatic approach prevailed over legal issues.¹⁶⁸ The seventy-eight days bombing were not of the same intensity as that during the Gulf War, but Milosevic's power declined, and he was forced to agree with the ceasefire set forth in UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which also mandated the presence of a NATO-led international force in Kosovo to include the Russians.

3. NATO Admits New Members

In the meantime, overshadowed by the Kosovo crisis, the most important NATO event occurred which was the 50th anniversary of NATO at the NATO Washington summit. During this summit, NATO admitted Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic as new members. In addition to the accession of three new members, NATO proclaimed an 'open door' policy, which would allow an additional NATO enlargement by the year 2002. NATO also adopted a package of measures for the Enhanced and More Operational Partnership (EMOP). This package contained four primary components:

- Political-Military Framework for NATO-led Peacekeeping Operations
- Expanded and Adapted Planning and Review Process (PARP)
- Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC)
- PfP Training and Education Enhancement Program (TEEP)¹⁶⁹

With these measures came a new wave of enthusiasm in the CEE, along with an enhanced willingness of CEE countries to continue on their path towards full membership in Western organizations. Croatia, mostly because of internal reasons, international position and aforementioned mistakes missed the Washington summit and with it, the possibility to become a NATO aspirant in 1999 through participation in MAP. Namely, all PfP partners who desired NATO membership were allowed to participate

¹⁶⁸ Tim Judah, The Serbs, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 329. The UNHCR registered 848,000 people who had either being forcibly expelled or had fled from Kosovo.

¹⁶⁹ A U.S. Strategy for the 21st Century: Strengthening Transatlantic Security, December 2000, p. 27.

automatically without particular assessments. By failing to set a course for participation in MAP, the Croatian ruling elite had created additional unfavorable circumstances for Croatia's membership in the NATO alliance.

To make matters worse, Croatia's promising tourist season had also been negatively influenced by NATO intervention in Kosovo, which resulted in a substantial decline in the GDP. Instead of the planned economic growth, Croatia's economic results dropped. Such negative effects, despite trumped-up promises announced in the newly established Stability Pact, were never reimbursed, which caused further Croatian skepticism about the factual intentions of the West.

D. CONCLUSION

The formation of the NATO Alliance in 1949 represented the crucial moment for European and world security in the second half of the 20th century. Strong US backing of Western Europe, both economically and militarily, made possible its stabilization and democratization during the Cold War. The US-led NATO secured uninterrupted development of Western Europe on the one hand. On the other hand, the lack of economic development provoked dissatisfaction and indirectly caused the decline of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. However, the unity of NATO was challenged after the Soviet threat disappeared in the late 1980s, and new kinds of threats emerged. This became most obvious during the initial stage of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia where the most powerful NATO members followed contradictory interests. Thus, the wars in the former Yugoslavia influenced not only the destiny of the region, but also redirected NATO's development.

The turning point for the continued existence of the Alliance occurred in 1993, when the US reestablished its leadership and brought the BiH quagmire to an end. The US engagement ended the war relatively quickly and created the possibility for close cooperation between NATO members and PfP countries, or former Warsaw Pact members. Through NATO sponsored PfP activities, cooperation increased along with mutual understanding which resulted in NATO membership for three CEE countries in 1999. The European division along Iron Curtain boundaries no longer existed and Europe's future looked very bright and created a completely new strategic grouping, with

the US playing a key role. NATO's 'out of area' engagements in BiH and Kosovo opened a new chapter in solving international problems and inaugurating NATO as the only reliable security institution in Europe and beyond.

Croatia, unfortunately, missed the opportunity to participate in those processes, partially because of the inability of its politicians to recognize the uniqueness of its position in the region, and partially because of inherited stereotypes about Croatia. Thus, a few years were spent on fruitless attempts by Croatian and Western politicians to outsmart each other instead of trying to solve the common problems in Southeastern Europe. The turn of the century saw a change in Croatian domestic politics and a change in the Western approach towards Croatia and offered more cooperativeness and almost certainly a promising future for all sides involved.

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IV. CROATIA'S PATH TO NATO

Even though Croatia is not yet participating in MAP, NATO should extend the invitation to include it. However, Croatia will have to meet the same criteria as all other applicant countries before it can become a member of the Alliance.¹⁷⁰

The year 2000 brought not only the symbolic turn of the millennium, but also the end of wars in the region and broad changes in the political state of affairs in most countries involved. It started on 3 January 2000 with the elections in Croatia that marked tremendous changes in Croatian domestic politics and equally significant as those that occurred at the beginning of the 1990's. It continued with fast democratization inside the country which caused positive effects on neighboring countries, and sped up the process for Croatian acceptance by the West.

The reaction of Western countries, especially the US, was surprisingly prompt, which resulted in Croatian membership in PfP, WTO and the signing of Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU within two years to mention just the most important. Following these memberships, the Croatian craving for larger participation increased together with expectations for full-fledged membership in the NATO alliance. The reasons were obvious: Croatia fulfilled most of the demands stipulated by the international community, the previous wave of NATO enlargement was more than successful, other aspirant countries were in similar or worse overall condition than Croatia according to the basic parameters, and finally Croatia can offer more benefits to NATO than any other aspirant country. In that light, Croatian membership in NATO seems to be almost a natural consequence of processes that started with the end of the Cold War.

A. CROATIA'S PRESENT SITUATION AND MEMBERSHIP IN WESTERN ASSOCIATIONS

The parliamentary and presidential elections in January 2000 resulted in the victory of the coalition of six opposition parties and the formation of the new government

¹⁷⁰ NATO Parliamentary Assembly Committee Reports: Report NATO Enlargement, VI. Conclusions
<http://www.naa.be/publications/comrep/2001/au-214-e.html#1>.

led by Prime Minister Racan. The newly elected President, Stjepan Mesic, announced immediately after the election that he would leave his party and become a non-partisan president. According to pre-election promises, he gave up most of his inherited prerogatives and became a president of new initiatives. In February, the newly elected government announced its 'Program of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the Period 2000-2004'. The main national foreign policy goals emphasized in the program were Croatian "accession to the European Union and NATO and the promotion of good-neighborly policies."¹⁷¹

This shift in Croatian policy was warmly accepted by the US and European officials who enthusiastically started visiting Zagreb after the governmental changes. During his visit to Zagreb NATO Secretary General Robertson said that, "Croatia's resolve to open a new chapter after the death of President Tudjman was among the best news at the turn of the twenty-first century."¹⁷² The US Secretary of State Albright said after talks in Zagreb with the Prime Minister Racan that, "Croatia had set an example for neighboring Serbia by turning away from ultranationalism and towards Europe."¹⁷³ Speaking to reporters in Zagreb, the European Commission President Prodi said, "the EU would help Croatia in its social and economic development and promote a stable and lasting peace in the region."¹⁷⁴ Croatian public and media, unaccustomed to so much foreign attentiveness, created a euphoric atmosphere and expectations that went beyond the country's capabilities.

During the following two years, Croatia extended tremendous efforts in different areas connected with the realization of the proclaimed goals and succeeded in coming very close to realizing these goals. However, this was not an easy path. Rather, it was a constant struggle to overcome a myriad of inherited international and domestic problems along with continuously delicate relationships among members of the ruling coalition.

¹⁷¹ Program of the government of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2000-2004, Zagreb, 8 February 2000, <http://www.vlada.hr/english/gov-program2.html#1>

¹⁷² Nato chief visits Croatia, From the newsroom of the BBC World Service, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_679000/679719.stm.

¹⁷³ Albright: Croatia example for Serbia, From the newsroom of the BBC World Service, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_629000/629040.stm.

¹⁷⁴ Prodi promises Croatia help, From the newsroom of the BBC World Service http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_604000/604466.stm.

But, the results of the new Croatian government after the first two years are satisfactory, despite some unresolved problems, and provide a firm basis for further improvement.

1. The Legacy of the 1990s

To overcome various negative influences inherited from previous eras, the new Croatian authorities faced the dilemma of which issue to tackle first. The situation was critical in many areas, but the following were the most urgent:

- International relations were at a rudimentary level and Croatia was constantly on the defensive. International semi-isolation, although never proclaimed, kept Croatia out of the European mainstream. Non-membership in the key security and economic institutions produced the situation of a gray zone. Unresolved problems with neighboring countries and the slowness in resolving these issues and the constant preoccupation with BiH and its internal problems kept Croatian politics anchored to the pandemonium in BiH.
- The political system, although semi-presidential in theory, was purely presidential in practice. The Parliament and the government were just operational tools in the hands of the President who directly jeopardized the functioning of the already fragile democratic institutions. Basic strategic documents were never adopted and disseminated, which encouraged improvisation and arbitrariness. The rule of law was dubious, which produced a lack of trust in legal institutions. The state institutions were overflowing with politically correct but incapable cadre. The majority of the media was sensationalistic and used more for propaganda purposes than for information. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) virtually did not exist.
- The economic system was heavily damaged by the war and additionally shaken with problematic privatization and omnipresent corruption. Nontransparent trading arrangements with BiH and unpaid taxes brought the state budget close to collapse. The trader's lobby almost strangled industrial production. Revitalization of areas affected by the war, occupied and devastated by the Serbs, was behind schedule which prevented the return of refugees. The number of unemployed grew rapidly while the foreign debt increased heavily and produced alarming social conditions.
- The position of the military was burdened with politicization and with the pressure to ensure more and more high posts for praetorians and politically correct cadre regardless of their knowledge and participation in the Homeland War. This resulted not only in moral erosion and the draining of the scant budget, but also blocked normal development of institutions and a decline in military readiness, to say nothing about achieving the standards necessary for membership in NATO. Planning was almost an unknown term, transparency did not exist, and investments in new

equipment were inadequate. The personal policy was to conduct business directly from the President's Office. Counterintelligence had the upper hand over intelligence and professionalism was unwelcome.

This very short illustration of the legacy of the war and of the previous regime clearly shows the number of problems that needed to be addressed in an extremely short period of time. President Mesic openly expressed his concerns that, "our public still fails to grasp completely the conditions in which the new government took over the state."¹⁷⁵ It seems that the new government was familiar with the problems to some extent, but was caught unprepared for such a large number of difficulties that had to be solved at once. Consequently, the new authorities missed the unique opportunity to meet the expectations of the people who overwhelmingly supported them during the elections. Moreover, they neither recognized that the toughest problems must be solved first nor understood the importance of the 'short-term pain for long-term gain' approach that was suggested by numerous foreign officials. Too much time was spent on intra-coalition bargaining about positions in the government and on finding adequate people from the respective parties for higher posts in state institutions which resulted in insufficient expertise and slowed down the process of domestic changes.

2. Political and Economic Achievements 2000-2002

However, after the first period of consolidation, changes became more apparent. The Constitution was changed and constitutional prerogatives shifted from the President to the Parliament and the Government. This allowed a real separation of power among the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The establishment of a full parliamentary democracy practically prevented any branch from dominating the others and established checks and balances among them which ensured a democratic state of affairs for a longer period of time. The results of such an important step forward were multifold. First of all, it eliminated the possibility for the restoration of authoritarianism in the long run which secured international support and further advancement toward a mature democracy. Secondly, the Parliament, representing the highest elected political body in the country, besides the President, resumed its powers through the adoption of organic laws and the (re)creation of parliamentary committees for overseeing particular areas so that it

¹⁷⁵ Speech of the President of the Republic of Croatia Stjepan Mesic, given to the members of the diplomatic chorus at the annual reception http://www.predsjednik.hr/english/speeches/15_1_2002_1_5.html.

possessed the mandate to change the current state of affairs and, through its authority, to overcome the inertness of the state bureaucracy.

Constitutional changes created the conditions for parliamentary and public control of the executive branch of the government, especially in terms of the transparency of budgetary issues. As a result of democratization, the majority of the media became more professional and NGOs took their place within society which resulted in a tremendous improvement in the perception of Croatian achievements. Consequently, Freedom House put Croatia among the top ten transitional CEE countries.

Of the 27 countries under review in this edition, ten are now consolidated democracies. These are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, as well as two new entrants: Bulgaria and Croatia.¹⁷⁶

Additionally, the US Department of State evaluated Croatia's democratization when it stated "The [Croatian] government generally respected the human rights of its citizens"¹⁷⁷ considering that as one of the crucial prerequisites for participation in Euro-Atlantic integration, especially for values emphasized in Article II of the Washington Treaty, Croatia became qualified to join.

Changes in the economic system followed but more slowly than expected. The chaotic economic situation needed more than administrative measures to recover and to become stable so as to ensure a constant and sustainable economic growth. The ill-managed privatization produced a large number of politically privileged entrepreneurs whose ability to face open market competition was questionable, and almost the same happened to the state owned companies. Moreover, suspicious business arrangements between Croatian and BiH companies made tax evasion possible in both countries and boosted the black markets and the gray economy. Consequently, a new wave of restrictive measures were introduced that, with the reorganization of the economic system at the macro and micro level, caused even higher unemployment along with

¹⁷⁶ Nations in Transit: Emerging Dynamics of Change, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/nitransit/2001.html>.

¹⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State: Country Reports on Human Rights, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/eur/8240.htm>.

dissatisfaction with the government. Also, the public was not satisfied because of the expected punishment of those who privatized and led companies to bankruptcy in the previous regime by shipping money out of the country. That punishment, however, has not yet been meted out.

Despite public frustration, things started to change, and the economic growth of 3.5 percent in 2000 rose to 4.5 percent in 2001, with an even more optimistic forecast for the future. Tourism began to increase and reached figures close to the record season of 1989.¹⁷⁸ Always problematic, industrial production increased positively, fiscal discipline improved, currency reserves exceeded foreign debt, internal debt was consolidated and the budgetary deficit reached acceptable numbers.¹⁷⁹ Harsh macroeconomic measures and the downsizing of the state apparatus, above all the police and military forces, increased the number of unemployed, even though these were unavoidable measures for long-term stabilization. However, Croatia entered a new phase in the economy of open market competition that, besides its positive implications, brought cruel international competition and survival of the fittest. Most of the Croatian companies had adapted to such circumstances previously, but state protected branches and companies entered the complicated process of accommodation with varying effects. Some became successful while others went bankrupt.

3. Croatia and the EU

The biggest improvement that ensured Croatia's participation in various European and global associations happened in the area of foreign policy. Although, for various reasons, Croatia had waited too long for acceptance in the European community, it finally succeeded and entered a new phase of relations with the EU. Croatia became a member of WTO and, most importantly, on 29 October 2001, signed the SAA with the EU that started the stabilization and association process which was the culmination of an intense two-year effort. These factors, along with numerous bilateral free trade agreements with the CEE and the Balkan countries, opened Croatia's economy and assured its continuous

¹⁷⁸ Industrial production rose 6 percent and tourism 11 percent during 2001, Croatian Ministry of Finance: Bureau for Macroeconomic Analysis and Planning,, <http://www.mfin.hr/stat>.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, Croatian foreign debt reaches \$11 billion, while combined state and banks currency reserves exceeded \$13 billion.

presence in European markets. Thus, Croatia moved from the stalemate international position of the 1990s and entered the European scene.

The significance of that huge step forward was emphasized in the speech delivered by the EU Commissioner Chris Patten on 29 October when he stated

The signature of this agreement today shows just how far Croatia has come in 22 months. I pay warm tribute to the Croatian people for all they have achieved in such a short time. They set the ball of democracy rolling in South East Europe two years ago: this agreement shows that their country is moving forward at an impressive pace.¹⁸⁰

This speech, besides being complimentary, specified the crucial role of Croatia in the future stabilization of the region. Somehow, that exceptionally important event was not celebrated inside Croatia as an extraordinary success for the country. That is understandable because even “under communism, Croatia enjoyed average incomes on a par with Spain's. And while the collapse of communism and the war together knocked 40% off Croatian GDP, the country is still richer than most of its neighbors.”¹⁸¹ Also, the absence of celebration happened because the Croatian people felt that the European attitude toward Croatia during the last ten years was more oriented toward the fabrication of obstacles for Croatia's admission in the EU than for actual help.

Reasons for such an opinion resulted from the Croatian Homeland War and the perception that Croatia, as the victim of aggression, was unfairly treated. The continuous efforts of some EU countries to appease the Serbs and to balance the responsibility for the war produced a sense of doubt about the real intentions of the EU. This suspicion became more vivid after Croatia liberated its territories in August 1995, and immediately received the EU announcement about breaking off all negotiations for possible Croatian membership. Croatia's punishment was its classification among the Western Balkans countries along with Albania, BiH, Yugoslavia and Macedonia. Although it was obvious that as far as the economic data was concerned that Croatia did not belong in that group, the effects of that classification were disastrous. The Croatian GDP was \$4530 and none

¹⁸⁰ Statement of Commissioner Chris Patten at the signing ceremony of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between EU and Croatia. http://www.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/news/index.htm.

¹⁸¹ Political pitfalls for Croatia's economy, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/business/newsid_1430000/1430068.stm.

of the other countries exceeded \$1660.¹⁸² Specifically, being the most developed country in such a region, Croatia received the least help from the EU. Out of the 5.5 billion Euros received from the EU for the region between 1990-2000, the Croatian amount was 366 million Euros while Yugoslavia received 1.5 billion which made any comments unnecessary.¹⁸³ Additionally, the non-existence of official candidate status for EU membership caused Croatia not to receive direct EU investments that were regular for other EU aspirants.

Interestingly, when decisions were made about the cancellation of the foreign debt, the EU cancelled two-thirds of the foreign debt for Yugoslavia because of the 'democratic changes' that occurred in 2000, but the same did not happen to Croatia, although Croatia initiated changes in the region and was the victim of Serbian aggression. Numerous donor conferences in the region preferred to spend money on political issues such as the extradition of Milosevic. In July 2001 more than \$1 billion was given to Serbia. The result was that Croatia had to cope with its problems alone with only symbolic assistance from the EU. Naturally, it did not mean that Croatia had no obligations. On the contrary; Croatia was expected to be the driving force for the region. That biased approach towards Croatia contributed to its economic difficulties and, instead of being the second most developed country in the CEE after Slovenia, Croatia is still trying to approach the economic figures from 1989.¹⁸⁴ It also suggests that Croatia cannot rely on the EU countries which too frequently forget about fairness in its relations with Croatia.

B. CROATIA'S MEMBERSHIP IN PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE

Croatian membership in PfP developed in a significantly different way. Immediately after elections, the Croatian Prime Minister visited NATO and was offered a program of PfP activities designed for Croatia. In March 2000, a team of NATO experts visited Croatia, which along with the visit of the NATO Secretary General in the same month, sped up the NATO invitation for Croatian participation in PfP. Finally, on 25 May in Florence, Italy, the Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs signed the Framework

¹⁸² Regional Strategy Paper 2002-2006 CARDS Assistance Program to the Western Balkans.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/news/ip01_1464.htm.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Croatian Ministry of Finance: Bureau for Macroeconomic Analysis and Planning <http://www.mfin.hr/stat>.

Document and Croatia officially became a PfP country. This was a small, probably routine, step for NATO, but for Croatia, it marked the first formal participation in Euro-Atlantic security integration and raised expectations for full membership in NATO. Consequently, intensified activities followed. In June, the Croatian Minister of Defense participated in the EAPC session. In the same month, the Security Agreement between Croatia and NATO was signed, the Survey of Overall PfP Interoperability was finished and on the basis of the offered Partnership Goals (PG), Croatia submitted its Individual Partnership Programme (IPP) for 2001 along with the Presentation Document.¹⁸⁵ The aforementioned activities resulted in optimistic expectations about possible Croatian admission to MAP in a relatively short period of time. This became more certain during the Bratislava meeting of MAP countries in May 2001 where Croatia entered the so-called 'Vilnius Group.'¹⁸⁶ The Vilnius Group, or V-10, actually represents nine NATO aspirants who automatically became MAP countries during the Washington summit and Croatia was included.

From the very beginning of its membership in PfP, Croatian officials expressed their desire and willingness to enter MAP and shortening the way to NATO through intensive PfP activities.¹⁸⁷ In order to achieve that strategic goal, Croatia undertook the appropriate organizational changes in MoD and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and established 'The Interagency Working Group for Cooperation Between Croatia and NATO' (Interagency Group) consisting of representatives from ten key ministries and the Office of the President with the main purpose of producing the Annual National Plan (ANP) as a basis for MAP. Also, after the Croatian Discussion Paper was created and submitted in July 2001, the process of intensified dialogue between Croatia and NATO started. Thus, the formal procedure for entering MAP arrived near the end of the process and Croatian membership in NATO became more likely. The only possible obstacles could be the unwillingness of the NATO members to recognize the great efforts of

¹⁸⁵ Presentation given by MoD Office for NATO and PfP, Zagreb, July 2001.

¹⁸⁶ On May 10-11, 2001 the meeting of the Prime Ministers of the nine NATO aspirant countries took place in Bratislava. "Vilnius Group (V-9)", the so-called group of the nine NATO aspirant countries, was enlarged by admitting Croatia. A joint statement of the nine Prime Ministers on NATO enlargement was passed at the meeting. http://www.urm.lt/data/4/EF031145629_news.htm.

¹⁸⁷ During numerous interviews with various Croatian officials, Croatian membership in NATO was emphasized as the only national priority with unison and unreserved support from within all political factors in the country.

Croatia to become a close ally, and the indecisive behavior of Croatia's political representatives in ensuring a legal basis for the country's participation in NATO.

During the same timeframe, numerous PfP activities took place and only in the second half of 2000 did Croatia participate in the 47 offered activities and 12 unplanned activities. This number rose in 2001 to more than 160 activities and events.¹⁸⁸ Plans for the year 2002 are even more ambitious. Croatia's plan is to participate in 202 different events and to be the host for 17 of them.¹⁸⁹ It includes participation with troops, PfP exercise events, and exercises 'in the spirit of PfP.' Also, the majority of designated forces for participation in NATO-led PfP operations are ready, or will be ready until the end of 2002, which guarantees further improvement of the implementation of PARP based Partnership goals. In the scope of the IPP, Croatia gives the highest priority to: Consultation, Command and Control, including Communications and Information Systems (C3), Defense Policy and Strategy (DPS), Language Training (LNG), Consumer Logistics (LOG), Military Exercises and Related Training Activities (TEX), and Military Education, Training and Doctrine (TRD).¹⁹⁰

For the purpose of the PARP process, Croatia designated forces for operations in combination with NATO forces following the accepted Partnership goals. Concerning OCC and TEEP, Croatia is able to participate in a 'pool of forces' and to contribute to training and educational aspects of PfP particularly in terms of interoperability. The main reasons for confidence are Croatia's constant involvement in NATO-led peacekeeping operations in BiH through various forms such as logistics and security since 1996. Also, the Croatian military has worked for years together with MPRI, which ensures an adequate level of interoperability, especially in terms of unit training and educational process for officers and NCO's. That, to some extent, guarantees Croatia's preparedness not only for the required level of contribution in PfP, but also the significant perspective for further improvement of individual and collective actions within NATO.

¹⁸⁸ Presentation given by MoD Office for NATO and PfP, Zagreb, July 2001.

¹⁸⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Report on National NATO/PfP activities in 2002.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

1. Croatia's Preparations for Membership Action Plan

As the Croatian President stated, “we are today a member of the PfP, and we expect inclusion in the MAP for future members of the NATO,”¹⁹¹ Croatian participation in MAP represents the next step towards membership in the Alliance. Various reasons favor Croatia's entry in the MAP process that, despite (too) long delays, could ensure that Southeastern Europe is on the secure path toward long lasting stabilization. Croatia's role in that process is crucial. Clear confirmation of this was the wave of democratization following Croatian elections in the beginning of 2000. A similar process is to be expected in the area of security, which could decrease tensions and reduce the probability of future conflicts. By showing Western support for desired democratic changes, through the acceptance of the most advanced countries in Western integrations, the entire unstable region will receive a clear message about the path that others need to follow. This was recognized by the US Congress and its “Bill to endorse the vision of further enlargement of the NATO Alliance articulated by President George W. Bush on June 15, 2001”¹⁹² that emphasized the wish of the Vilnius Group, including Croatia, to “cooperate in jointly seeking NATO membership in the next round of NATO enlargement ... and that eventual NATO membership for all of these countries would be a success for Europe and NATO.”¹⁹³ Such a clear signal resulted in additional efforts by the Interagency Group that, through the formation of working bodies for each of the five chapters of ANP and the allocation of adequate budget resources for that purpose, completed the set of preparations of the Croatian government for entering MAP. Additionally, the Parliament adopted the set of five defense-related laws and National Security Strategy and Defense Strategy¹⁹⁴ as the key strategic documents, which was necessary for legal compatibility with NATO and for transparency of the defense policy. Thus, Croatia fulfills almost all conditions for entering MAP and offers additional benefits that could not be provided by

¹⁹¹ Speech of the Croatian President Stjepan Mesic, given to the members of diplomatic corps at the annual reception, Zagreb, January 15, 2002, http://www.predsjednik.hr/english/speeches/15_1_2002_2_1.html.

¹⁹² 107th Congress, 1st Session, 24 October 2001, <http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/Enlargement/documents/enlargement241001.pdf>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Defense-related laws and two core strategies were adopted in the Parliamentary session on 15 March 2002, Vjesnik, 16 March 2002, <http://www.vjesnik.hr/html/Default.asp>.

any other NATO aspirant country. In comparison with other MAP countries, the Croatian position is among the first few which offers a moderate guarantee that Croatia will take part in the next wave of NATO enlargement.

2. Croatia's Fulfillment of the Criteria of NATO Enlargement

Even before the invitation for Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic to join NATO, the debate about the justifiability of NATO enlargement resulted in the preparation of the 'Study on NATO Enlargement', which gave the necessary answer to three crucial questions: why, how and under which principles will NATO enlarge.¹⁹⁵ This led to the establishment of the necessary criteria for aspirant countries. Criteria for the membership in the NATO alliance are defined as follows:

- Potential members must be prepared to defend the Alliance and have the professional military forces to do so
- NATO must continue to work by consensus – new members must respect this tradition and abide by it
- Military forces of new members must be capable of operating effectively with NATO forces. This means not only common doctrine, but also interoperable equipment – especially communications equipment.
- Potential new members must uphold democracy and free enterprise, respect human rights inside their borders, and must respect sovereignty outside their borders
- Their military forces must be under democratic, civilian control¹⁹⁶

Bearing these criteria in mind, Croatia is very close to fulfilling all of them. First of all, Croatia is the only aspirant country that has professional military forces. Of course, these are not comparable with the professional forces in Western countries that have developed their professional militaries for decades or even centuries.¹⁹⁷ However, these are the facts, and, according to the given criteria, must be respected. The work by consensus is merely routine and there is no doubt that all aspirant countries will fulfill that criterion. The third criterion is twofold. The first part favors Croatia because it is the

¹⁹⁵ Gerald B. Solomon, The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990-1997, Praeger Publishers, CSIS, Westport, CT, 1998, p. 86.

¹⁹⁶ The US Secretary of Defense William Perry established five fundamental principles of NATO enlargement in Norfolk, VA, June 27, 1996. Gerald B. Solomon: The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990-1997, CSIS, Washington D.C., Praeger, Westport CT, 1998, Appendix C, p. 160.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Lieutenant General Imra Agotic, Presidential Advisor for Defense and Military Affairs. During the interview, he emphasized the necessity for further improvement in military professionalism in order to achieve full interoperability with NATO countries.

only aspirant country that effectively operated with NATO forces during wartime. Moreover, the Croatian contribution to NATO's success in achieving a durable peace in BiH is more than evident which offers a unique argument in favor of Croatian aspirations. The second part is problematic for all aspirant countries. Namely, aspirant countries are squeezed between two contradictory demands, from the EU to decrease the defense budget to the level of 2.0 percent of the GDP, while at the same time from NATO, to improve their military capabilities. To accomplish both of those in a short period of time, under the present economic situation, is impossible and, consequently, can only be realized in the long run.

The fourth criterion is almost completed after Croatia, during the last period, demonstrated its devotion to democracy and the free market economy, along with respect for human rights inside its borders, and sovereignty outside its borders. However, there is the question of the other neighboring countries of BiH and Serbia and their respect for the human rights of the Croatian minority and Croatia's sovereignty. There is still no clear sign that the Republika Srpska will allow Croat and Muslim refugees to return, and that creates a problem that Croatia cannot solve in good faith, to say nothing about denying the minority status of Croats in Serbia. That, along with unsettled borders with Serbia and Montenegro (Prevlaka), puts Croatia in a hostage position. If Croatia wants to solve these problems, it would need the cooperation of Serbia and the support of the international community which is highly questionable given earlier experiences.

The fifth criterion underlined that military forces must be under democratic, civilian control. That criterion is fulfilled after the changes in the Constitution in 2000 which established the appropriate checks and balances among the three key institutions of the President, the Cabinet and the Parliament. Thus, the President is the Commander-in-Chief, the Cabinet directs and manages the military over the Minister of Defense, and the Parliament has control and oversight functions through its Committees. There is still room for improvement in terms of the creation of expert staffs in the Parliament that would consist of both civilian and military experts and provide the desired amount of

input for the Parliament's Committees.¹⁹⁸ Thus, control and oversight would be more efficient by ensuring better insight into defense matters and providing updated information for Committee members. Overall, it can be estimated that Croatia fulfilled the majority of criteria that, besides the political willingness of the Alliance members, can be the most important detail in the decision process for the acceptance of the Croatian request for joining NATO.

3. Comparison with Other Aspirant Countries

The extremely important moment in the process of accession to NATO will be an estimation of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of aspirant countries. In a very helpful study provided by Thomas Szayna, a number of different parameters were taken into consideration, providing the possibility of a comparative analysis between all aspirant countries and Croatia. Although he did not elaborate on Croatia, he stated that it depends "on NATO's own conditions in the case of Croatia,"¹⁹⁹ which clearly shows still an unresolved NATO approach towards Croatia. However, the following figures will demonstrate that in all given parameters Croatia deserves to be considered as a very serious aspirant. For the purpose of the thesis, some NATO countries are included in the analysis²⁰⁰.

Even with some reservations about the data mentioned below, there is an obvious discrepancy between Croatia's current position and its real capabilities. With the exception of Slovenia, Croatia is the most developed country among all the aspirant countries and can compete with some of the actual NATO members. Furthermore, the perspective of Croatia is more promising because it is still at 80.6 percent of the 1989 living standard and at 56.9 percent of the 1989 industrial production,²⁰¹ which can be rapidly improved under favorable circumstances, to say nothing about the potential of Croatia's tourism. All of that was achieved in spite of the war and faulty privatization. This adds to the confidence that under normal circumstances nothing except Western

198 Interview with Djurdja Adlesic, Chairwoman of National Security Committee in the Croatian Parliament. During the interview she stated that the level of Parliamentary control and oversight is still not satisfactory. Consequently, in the forthcoming period it has to be improved through the engagement of experts from different areas and with different backgrounds.

199 Thomas S. Szayna, *NATO Enlargement 2000-2015*, RAND, 2001, p. 35.

200 Ibid., data are used from various tables, pp. 53-71.

201 Croatian Ministry of Finance: Bureau for Macroeconomic Analysis and Planning, <http://www.mfin.hr/stat>.

rejection to recognize all these facts can stop Croatia's rapid development. There is also a slight possibility that because of internal power struggles, some political parties and politicians would prefer domestic prestige to the international success of the country.

Country	Population	GDP per Capita, 1999	Percentage of NATO floor	Defense expen. per Capita	Overall rating
Croatia	4,282	4,974	173.4	216	Medium-high
Albania	3,490	946	33.0	9	Low
Bulgaria	7,797	1,552	54.1	37	Medium
Estonia	1,431	3,564	124.2	40	High
Latvia	2,405	2,786	97.1	19	Medium
Lithuania	3,621	2,900	101.1	34	Medium
Macedonia	2,041	1,666	58.1	57	Low
Romania	22,411	1,508	52.6	24	Low
Slovakia	5,408	3,569	124.4	65	Medium
Slovenia	1,928	10,737	374.2	179	High
Turkey	65,667	2,869	100.0	146	
Poland	38,646	3,987	139.0	81	

Table 1. Comparative Analysis between all Aspirant Countries, some NATO Countries and Croatia.

In realm of the military, the Croatian position among MAP countries cannot be matched. None of the aspirant countries has a professional military, and none can provide troops with combat experience and real cooperation with NATO forces on the ground. That, along with many years of training based on US programs, offers an adequate quality of forces for NATO purposes. Moreover, Croatian officers are experienced in battle and, because of the civilian and military school systems, satisfactorily educated which, along with an extensively developed NCO structure, provides quality officers. Emphasis was placed on language training during the last seven years which resulted in a significant number of military personnel with exemplary language skills. Furthermore, Croatia proved that it could defend itself in a situation where it was outnumbered and outgunned against an enemy that possessed all the military advantages.²⁰² Bearing in mind that the security situation in the region has improved, there is no potential aggressor

²⁰² Interview with General Petar Stipetic, Chief of Croatian General Staff.

among neighboring countries that can harm Croatia militarily which decreases the need for a NATO military umbrella.

Some of the other aspirant countries such as Estonia (5,000) and Slovenia (9,000) have almost symbolic military forces with no possibility of a serious military engagement with NATO forces.²⁰³ Others, with the exception of Slovakia, provide an insufficient amount of resources for qualitative maintenance of the armed forces, which could only result in their decreasing effectiveness. Taking into account the strategic position of each aspirant country, Croatia offers an uninterrupted approach to the crisis area in BiH, which could improve a settlement of the crisis. Unlike the situation in the Baltic states, Croatian admission to NATO will not provoke a negative Russian reaction that could cause possible complications in the relationship between NATO and Russia. Finally, Croatian membership in NATO would strengthen its southern wing, which is, without a doubt, the weakest part of the Alliance. Such advantages for membership can be hardly expected from any other aspirant country.

Concerning the issues mentioned in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Report²⁰⁴ which elaborates on the contribution of the aspirant countries to NATO, essential areas to examine for every MAP country are membership in international associations such as the OSCE, Council of Europe and WTO, participation in NATO's programs such as EAPC, PfP and MAP, and participation in NATO-led peacekeeping operations. In addition, the importance of free and fair elections, human rights, a market economy, relationships with neighboring countries and civilian supervision over the military are also emphasized. Croatia fulfills all of the aforementioned elements with the exception of participation in MAP, which is underway, and expected to occur in the first half of 2002. Additionally, Croatia actively participates in numerous regional initiatives and projects such as the Central European initiative, Quadrilateral with Italy, Slovenia and Hungary, Alps-Adriatic and Danube Working Communities and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative. Especially important is Croatia's contribution to the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe where it

²⁰³ Military strength as in NATO Parliamentary Assembly Committee Reports: Report NATO Enlargement <http://www.naa.be/publications/comrep/2001/au-214-e.html#1>.

²⁰⁴ NATO Parliamentary Assembly Report AT-112-PC-CEE-001-3, <http://www.nato-pa.int/publications/comrep/2001/au-112-e.html> pp. 9-19.

chairs the Working Table on Security Issues and to the NATO sponsored South Eastern European Initiative (SEEI) along with related activities and programs.

The surprisingly successful Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Center (RACVIAC) in Zagreb, with 18 member countries, represents one of the best programs in the framework of the Stability Pact that, along with implementation of the sub-regional arms control established through the Dayton Agreement, offers hope for success in other areas of cooperation in the region.²⁰⁵ Additionally, the Croatian argument, besides the usage of Croatian airspace, territory, territorial waters, infrastructure and facilities, for NATO-led operations in BiH and Kosovo is the possibility for direct positive influence on the development of the political and economic processes in the region. That, along with a more dedicated engagement of the international community, could help underdeveloped countries in the region recover relatively quickly, and provide the basis for reconciliation and future prosperity.

C. MUTUAL BENEFITS OF CROATIAN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO

In terms of mutual benefits, the critical period of Croatia's fight for pure survival is over, and there is no serious threat to Croatian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Croatia's position in the region dramatically shifted from being part of the problem to becoming part of the solution. Evidently, Croatia does not need NATO for its military protection or materialistic benefits. Rather, there are mutual interests that can bind both sides in pursuing common goals. The biggest NATO interest in Europe, according to all the official statements, is the stabilization of Southeastern Europe. This is unerringly one of Croatian top priorities which offers an ideal common ground for further cooperation and honest long lasting relationships. In addition, recent historical developments have created new transnational security threats and challenges such as terrorism on a hyper-scale, international crime and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Consequently, no single country can cope with it alone, which underlines the necessity of mutual cooperation among countries that share the same democratic values, and Croatia is undoubtedly one of them. Although having limited capabilities, Croatia's visible

²⁰⁵ Interview with Col. Nikola Nogolica, Commander of the RACVIAC.

contribution to the worldwide antiterrorist coalition illustrates that even small countries can be extremely helpful when mutual cooperation exists.

1. Croatian Benefits

The list of possible benefits of NATO membership for Croatia is much shorter than would be expected. Namely, in addition to feeling as if belonging to a group of nations that share the same values and “are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded of principles of democracy, individual liberty and rule of law,”²⁰⁶ Croatia’s benefits would basically be in political and economic areas, or in other words, collective security without emphasizing its military component. The experience of the NATO enlargement in 1999 clearly shows that its effects are most dramatic in the realms of security in general and, more specifically, in politics and the economy. Namely, since the introduction of the previous wave of NATO enlargement in 1997, all new members registered only increasing economic numbers and particularly in the area of foreign investment. The security picture in Europe improved also, and “none of the fears of Enlargement opponents materialized: NATO military effectiveness, political cohesion and decision making were not weakened.”²⁰⁷ Additionally, domestic politics inside newcomer states showed impressive stability, which became yet another motivating element for other aspirant countries. The least improvement actually occurred in the area of the military where the cost of economic transformation and budget limitations prevented extensive modernization. However, after economic consolidation, there is enough room for improvement in the military sphere also.

Naturally, Croatia expects that it can avoid the negative consequences of being treated as a part of Daytonland or the Western Balkans through NATO membership. That position is closely connected with gloomy stereotypes and, consequently, with the perceived instability that automatically prevents any substantial amount of foreign investment and decreases economic growth. As a member of NATO, Croatia will be perceived differently, and all its potential will be brought forth which will bring more

²⁰⁶ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Long NATO Entanglement*, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1999, Appendix, *The North Atlantic Treaty*, p. 239.

²⁰⁷ NATO Parliamentary Assembly Report AT-112-PC-CEE-001-3, <http://www.nato-pa.int/publications/comrep/2001/au-112-e.html>, p. 5.

prosperity not only to the Croatian people, but also to Croatia's neighboring countries. By reducing the number of insecure areas, Croatia will actually help the international community concentrate on problems in BiH and Serbia.²⁰⁸ Consequently, without the Balkan's hypothecation, Croatia can improve its economy and, as in the case of Slovenia, become one of the most prosperous transition countries in the CEE. With NATO membership, the Croatian economy can flourish, especially through the development of 1,700 kilometers of the most beautiful coastal area in Europe. As a result, economic prosperity automatically stimulates other aspects of societal life and ensures positive trends in both security and politics.

The next benefit for Croatia is the implementation of certain standards politically that incorporate institutional behavior according to strict rules, which is necessary for Croatia's still underdeveloped state institutions. By being part of a bigger system, smaller and inexperienced countries often imitate proven solutions used by mature democracies, which spare them years of searching for applicable models along with the resources spent for such purposes. With NATO membership, some standards are *conditio sine qua non* for normal functioning, which inevitably results in an accelerated tempo of adaptation of the state apparatus to new circumstances. A new automatism in bureaucratic behavior would convert the currently 'unsolvable political problems' into routinely handled and solved matters. The desirable functioning of state institutions, at least those connected with security matters, and the establishment of routinely performed democratic procedures is beneficial to Croatia and equally important economically.

Finally, the most important benefit to Croatia will be the feeling of belonging to a circle of countries that share the same values.²⁰⁹ It will be a kind of payback for the centuries of Croatian attempts to escape buffer zones, divisions, wars, expulsions, ethnic cleansings and forced emigrations, and to take its worthy place among European nations. Obviously, Croatia is not asking for a privileged position, but also cannot accept an underestimated one. All that Croatia needs is an appropriate place according to its real potentials. In short, what would be most beneficial to Croatia would be to offer it a

²⁰⁸ Interview with Romana Vlahutin, Head of Department for Political Analysis and Documentation in Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Tomislav Jakic, Foreign Policy Advisor to the President.

chance to prove itself in normal competition, under equal rules, and without any biased approach. NATO's benefits in that case will by far be greater, and what NATO gains from such a position by Croatia is already obvious.

2. NATO Benefits

Paradoxically, Croatian membership in NATO offers more benefits to NATO than to Croatia. First of all, there is the increase in the security and stability zone in the most troublesome region of Europe or Southeastern Europe.²¹⁰ With Croatia in the Alliance, NATO can encompass most of the Adriatic area and transform it into a highly stable zone that will ensure more security to Italy and Slovenia, and provide an uninterrupted territorial continuum from the Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea. Expansion of the stability area automatically decreases the likelihood of any aggressive attempt or conflicting situation in the region, especially inside BiH, but also in Kosovo. From a psychological point of view, Croatian membership will create positive competition inside Serbia that will result in greater Serbian cooperativeness with the international community and, eventually, in real democratization instead of the current quasi-democracy and provisional solutions. With that achievement, the crises in BiH and Kosovo will be solvable in a democratic way, without unnecessary tensions and constant pressure on an already exhausted population. Also, it will make it possible that, after many years of engagement of all imaginable international organizations, the stalemate situation in BiH would start to improve and finally stabilize. Probably, the resolution of the BiH crisis will represent one of NATO's biggest achievements and an end to the process that commenced more than a decade ago. Additionally, if Bulgaria and Romania become NATO members, along with Albania's and Montenegro's obvious democratization, the crisis region will be contained to the smallest area possible.

Geo-strategically, Croatian membership will provide NATO with an opportunity to cover one of Europe's most momentous junctions of transit corridors.²¹¹ Being at the same time a Central European, Mediterranean and Danubian country, Croatia is a natural connection between Western Europe and the Balkans, between the Mediterranean and

²¹⁰ Interview with Renato Cobal, Prime Minister's Advisor for Foreign Policy and International Security. He emphasized decisiveness of Croatian influence on the stabilization of the region.

²¹¹ Interview with Col. Mate Padjen, Head of G5 in of Croatian General Staff.

Central Europe, participating in transportation areas not only with highways and railroads, but also with ports, pipeline and river transport on the Danube, to say nothing about air transportation. The recent interest of Russian oil companies to invest in the Croatian pipeline (Serbian and BiH refineries also receive oil through that facility) and in the conversion of part of the Rijeka port for the export of Russian oil opens a new race for control of the pipeline between Western and Russian investors.

The Adriatic-Ionian highway, with the construction of some parts already started, will connect Italy with Greece along the Croatian coast, which will ensure a reliable connection with Western Europe for Albania and Montenegro. Hungary's natural exits to the sea are Croatian ports that, along with European highway corridors V. and X., will transform Croatian infrastructure during the next decade or so into a network of internationally important transportation routes. Moreover, the geographic position of BiH limited its access to the sea and Western Europe through Croatian territory and this could improve economic and other links between the two states. The planned channel between the rivers Danube and Sava will shorten the distance and develop Croatian and BiH ports along the Sava river. All of this indicates a huge perspective of the Croatian economy and the direct and indirect influence of Croatia on most of its neighboring countries, which can enormously contribute to NATO's intention of providing a more stable and secure Europe.

Furthermore, the Croatian military and civilian facilities of ports, airfields, bases, infrastructure, and naval repair facilities²¹² and their usage for NATO purposes can lessen NATO's expenditures not only for NATO-led operations in BiH and Kosovo, but also for future NATO needs. The Croatian military is in the middle of downsizing, and numerous facilities will be simply abandoned, which offers a unique opportunity for using them as NATO bases under extremely accommodating terms. Thus, both sides can benefit. Croatia will avoid the expenses of closing the bases and NATO will avoid new investments in facilities that are necessary for its current and future needs. This is especially true for naval facilities, because once tourism in Croatia reaches its zenith, and

²¹² Interview with General Petar Stipetic, Chief of Croatian General Staff. Beside the professional military, as the main contribution to NATO, he mentioned the importance of various military facilities that might be used for NATO or common purposes.

the process of ten percent yearly growth has already started, it will be hard to believe that there will be any available space for adequate accommodations in the future.

Also, the Croatian military, especially the Croatian Army, can offer officers, NCO's and soldiers with battle experience and willingness and opportunity to participate in NATO-led forces in any combat, peacekeeping or peacemaking operation. The survey conducted by the Croatian MOD in May 2001 shows that the vast majority of the 90.27 percent of military servicemen/women supported Croatian membership in NATO, while 87.28 percent considered Croatia's membership in PfP just as important for the security of the state.²¹³ A surprisingly high level of support is the best confirmation of the mood within the Croatian military.

Unlike other aspirant countries, the Croatian military has implemented US programs and training standards since 1994 not only in theory, but also in practice during operations in 1995 in Croatia and BiH. In terms of military readiness for participation in NATO-led peacekeeping or peacemaking operations, there is no question that NATO can only benefit from the presence of Croatian soldiers in the crisis areas. The best confirmation of this is the experience in Sierra Leone where a small number of Croatian officers performed a disproportionately significant role at critical moments. Also, the experience of the Croatian military in cooperation with NATO-led forces in BiH, although being of a mostly supportive nature, confirms the readiness of the Croatian Armed Forces for cooperation with NATO without impediments. Furthermore, the recent acquisition of US radars and communication equipment, along with the constant education of officers, NCO's and soldiers, and training of units through US based programs guarantee a reasonable level of interoperability with NATO forces. The only obstacle is an insufficient level of NATO compatible armament and technical equipment, but that is notorious in all aspirant countries.

D. POSSIBLE OBSTACLES FOR CROATIAN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO

There are two possible sources of obstacles to Croatia's acceptance in Euro-Atlantic institutions: domestic and international. Domestic obstacles are minute, mostly

²¹³ On the author's request, the MOD Department for Public Relations delivered on 5 March 2002 the results of the survey among members of Croatian Armed Forces about Croatian participation in NATO-related security associations.

resulting from internal political struggles among parties, or different political options inside individual parties. International obstacles are more serious and rooted in decades of biased policy toward the Croatian nation in general, along with the creation of unfavorable circumstances for Croatian participation in the core Euro-Atlantic institutions of NATO and the EU.

1. Domestic Obstacles

All aspirant countries, just like Croatia, have some percentage of supporters from the extreme left and the extreme right parties that, interestingly, share certain interests, for example, opposition to international institutions.²¹⁴ Membership in NATO and the EU is opposed by the extreme left because of its antiglobalism and antimilitarism, which combined with followers of subculture movements from anarchists to Hare Krishnas, represents an opposition insignificant in numbers, but very noisy in appearance. Their opposition is disorganized and used more for attracting media attention, and therefore, cannot be taken too seriously. The extreme right's arguments against any participation in European and global association are mainly connected with the protection of national purity and the preservation of sovereignty in its atavistic sense. Having considerable support in Croatia, up to ten percent, which is understandable after the war and national homogenization, the extreme right can use unfavorable circumstances to receive greater support and, together with the moderate right parties, to postpone Croatia's entry in NATO and the EU for a certain period of time. Such a scenario is very unlikely because of the right's patriotism, which will prevent it from weakening the country's position in the international community and, particularly, in relationships with the US and the West.

The only real domestic obstacle for Croatian participation in Euro-Atlantic institutions is a preoccupation of the domestic parties and politicians with their mutual and internal struggle for power that prevents them from reaching a consensus about basic Croatian interests and goals. They obviously need to be repeatedly reminded of the old saying that the state has no friends, but interests and that some periods of history offer no room for hesitation and delaying, particularly not for fruitless mutual fighting. Sometimes that struggle goes to the level of personal animosities, which is irresponsible from a state

²¹⁴ Interview with Zlatko Gareljic, Deputy Minister of Defense.

perspective and unacceptable from the viewpoint of citizens. Consequently, such behavior makes any decision-making too slow and questionable. That, along with the notoriously unprofessional media, creates confusion and a lack of confidence in politicians as elected representatives of its citizens. For example, the final agreement about the set of laws that covered the military and security system has been reached after two years of indecisive haggling with the end results similar to the initial proposals, but with a significant loss of irretrievable and precious time. That indecisiveness and irresponsiveness about the most crucial issues and, at the same time, an obsession with trivialities on a daily basis, can produce the appearance of a country uninterested in undergoing any integration processes in Europe, which can be disastrous.

Financial concerns about the cost of NATO membership are also significant,²¹⁵ although the cost of collective defense in the long run appears to be significantly less than for the individual defense. A potential, but not worrisome, obstacle in the military can be the cadre inherited from the JNA that cannot change their attitude toward professionalism, which, along with the politically promoted cadre during the HDZ times, could slow down, but not stop, the process of approaching NATO. However, the recent legal changes in defense-related laws allowed a broad spectrum of possible solutions for the de-politicization of the military, which will marginalize opponents of reforms.

Additionally, during the war many powerful individuals emerged in all segments of societal life. They are wealthy even by Western standards, but their wealth is closely connected with illegal businesses or even with organized crime. It is not in their interest for the situation in Croatia and the region to become normal. Thanks to their influence not only in the economic sphere, but also in the realm of politics and the military, they will try to obstruct any change that leads to the establishment of a normal state of affairs. Those individuals are not to be underestimated, mostly because they will stop at nothing and they can use all means available in that milieu for achieving their goals. Beside the aforementioned obstacles, there is no serious opposition in Croatia for membership either in NATO or the EU.

²¹⁵ Interview with Djurdja Adlesic, Chairwoman of National Security Committee in the Croatian Parliament. Her concerns are mostly oriented towards Croatian capability to spend more resources on the military instead of for economic development.

2. International Obstacles

The extremely complicated international approach to the crisis in the region since it began in the late 1980s resulted in entangled Western relationships not only towards individual countries in the region, but also negatively influenced mutual relations among the Western allies. Numerous international actors, both states and international organizations, involved in a solution to the crisis, produced a Gordian knot of interwoven interests and contradictory goals, and Croatia could not satisfy all of these sometimes contradictory demands. Namely, in the case of pursuing goals connected with potential NATO membership, such as interoperability, military acquisition, and so on, Croatia will, through increased military spending, automatically jeopardize the EU demands for the two percent military participation in the GDP. Also, following EU requests for close economic cooperation and free trade agreements with chaotic economies in Serbia and BiH, Croatia endangers its own security interests and decreases its stability, which poses a risk for its admittance to NATO. Additionally, because of still unsolved problems of the succession of the ex-state²¹⁶, Croatia cannot fully accept demands for reconciliation in circumstances where Serbian nationalism still runs high. Neighboring countries will perceive indulgent Croatian behavior as a sign of weakness and an implicit confirmation of the justifiability of their politics, which cannot be accepted. Constant international pressure on Croatia to be a better Catholic than the Pope, and insisting on the behavior according to the highest possible standards, which is often avoided by the same countries that insist on it, such as the British role in Northern Ireland which is probably the best example, results in confusion and the questioning of the real intentions of the West.

There obviously is a need for coordinating common goals and interests among Western states and organizations that can establish clear and unambiguous patterns of behavior that can be the path to follow not only for Croatia, but also for other aspirant countries. Without a uniform Western policy towards the region, countries will sail between Scylla's and Charybdis' of confusing and conflicting demands of Western individual interests. This can produce unsolvable obstacles for any aspirant country,

²¹⁶ Yugoslavia's currency reserves that were frozen in Western banks, after the UN embargo in 1992, mysteriously decreased from about \$600 million to less than \$60 million. That clearly illustrated the way Serbs, with a little help from their Western friends, perceived the fair succession of common property. Vjesnik, <http://www.vjesnik.hr/html/Default.asp>

including Croatia, and result in debatable outcomes. Currently, there is no better solution than stronger US engagement and leadership in solving discrepancies in the Western approach, and not only, to NATO enlargement. The essential role of the US, as the only world superpower and relatively unbiased actor in puzzling circumstances, can put an end to Europe's failure to find a reasonable solution for the Croatian situation and to eventually stabilize the region. Unlike Europeans, the US is not burdened by historical attachments to any side that participated in the conflict which offers the opportunity to fairly judge Croatia's position.

Although having strong verbal support from the EU, based on Croatian democratic achievements that caused changes in BiH and Serbia, "it was Croatia – let us not forget – that got things moving ... we (EU) need substantially to increase our financial support for Croatia,"²¹⁷ in practice it was not followed by any substantial help, which undermines the credibility of EU promises. Only receiving compliments cannot improve the Croatian economy and speed up its admission to Western institutions, especially when those compliments are followed by pressure from the International Tribunal in Hague (ICTY), which regularly occurs before every tourist season. The usage of the ICTY for political and economic pressure on Croatia is more than obvious, particularly when compared with the ICTY approach to war criminals in Serbia. The big story about Croatian uncooperativeness is actually used for covering up the fact that numerous Serbian war criminals from Vukovar over Srebrenica to Kosovo are still free and even hold high posts in the Serbian political and military establishment. The current Serbian president is on the ICTY list and the current chief of the Serbian general staff is also a candidate for the Hague. Even worse, Serbia's 'cooperativeness' was awarded with large grants of over \$1 billion at donor conferences and a cancellation of one-third of its foreign debt. Naturally, such an approach causes a revolt among Croatian citizens and diminishes confidence in international institutions, resulting in a growing number of domestic opponents to Croatian membership in Western institutions.

Finally, international pressure on Croatia for the return of Croatian Serbs who went to BiH and Serbia in 1995, and who refuse to stay in Croatia and behave as regular

²¹⁷ Statement of Commissioner Chris Patten at the signing ceremony of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between EU and Croatia. http://www.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/news/index.htm.

citizens represents another mechanism for constant pressure on the Croatian government. The fact that half the Croatian Serbs never left Croatia and that almost 100,000 Croatian Serbs returned to Croatia, while the same is not allowed for Croats and Muslims in the Republika Srpska, obviously cannot be completely understood by Western officials. Consequently, one-sided pressure on Croatia reflects on its pace of democratization and encourages Serbs in BiH to continue with their policy. At the same time, Croatia copes with refugees from BiH and Serbia with little or no help from the outside, which represents a heavy economic burden and complicates the internal political scene by offering additional arguments to adversaries for Croatian isolationism from the West.

E. CONCLUSION

The results of Croatia's elections in January 2000 caused a flood of domestic, political, economic and military changes. Moreover, the newly elected authorities fundamentally altered Croatia's unfavorable international position and improved relations with the neighboring countries. This initiated political changes in BiH and Serbia and transformed the region into a more stable area with a firm perspective for further stabilization. Such astonishing results were accompanied by a warming of relations with Western countries, which resulted in Croatia's quick accession to various European institutions. However, there is still a considerable amount of effort to exert in the future, especially in terms of membership in two core Euro-Atlantic institutions, NATO and the EU. "Entry in the NATO is a strategic goal of the Republic of Croatia which permanently resolves the issue of security and concurrently confirms the achievement of the highest criteria in the democratic civil control of armed forces."²¹⁸ When considering this, Croatia is trying to fulfill the necessary preconditions to prepare itself for the decisive Prague summit and hopes that the numerous advantages of Croatian membership would be recognized.

Most of the preparations have been completed, which when paired with the many benefits that NATO can achieve with Croatia as a member of the Alliance, offers a strong basis for optimism. Croatian comparative advantages are obvious and easy to document. The positive experience with the previous wave of enlargement eliminated the doubts that

²¹⁸ Program of the government of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2000-2004, Zagreb, 8 February 2000, <http://www.vlada.hr/english/gov-program2.html#1>.

the second round of enlargement could supposedly complicate or worsen the security relations between the new NATO members and non-NATO countries. Quite to the contrary, NATO membership proved itself to be the best way to improve good-neighborly relations. In that light, Croatian membership in NATO can play a decisive role in the stabilization of BiH and Serbia, which will ensure their democratization and revitalization by eventually bringing long-lasting stability to the region.

V. CONCLUSION

The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today.
Let us move forward with strong and active faith.²¹⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt

This thesis has provided comprehensive evidence that Croatia's membership in NATO might easily be the most beneficial step for both sides and the entire region under the present circumstances. Becoming a NATO member would be an accolade in the centuries long tendency of Croatia to establish itself as an independent and sovereign country ready and willing to participate in progressive and democratic international processes, and do so in a peaceful and political manner. This attitude guided Croatia in its attempts to be an equal partner in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the process of forming the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and in Croatian attempts to resolve problems within Yugoslavia at all stages in a parliamentary way. There were dark times in Croatia's past, as in all other European countries, especially during WWII. Today's Croatia recognizes and condemns its responsibility in this matter. The Homeland War and Croatian participation in resolving the BiH crisis demonstrate that Croatia has successfully overcome the political and social position that brought about those dark times and that Croatia has become a reliable NATO partner in the region.

NATO has changed over the course of the fifty years of its existence, especially during the last ten years. The military machinery in the state of readiness on this side of the Iron Curtain back in the Cold War was cautious about any influence and cooperation with the countries in the East. Today's NATO is a more mature political organization, and the leader in most cooperation and integration processes throughout Europe. The substantial proof of NATO's developed confidence and maturity is Partnership for Peace, with 29 CEE member countries, including NATO's Cold War archenemy, Russia. Ten of those Partners are also aspirant nations for the next round of NATO enlargement.

The role of the U.S. concerning European security is still decisive. Although U.S. involvement in Europe has varied in intensity, and changed over time, the crisis in the

²¹⁹ John Lamberton Harper, American Visions of Europe, Cambridge University Press, p. 131.

former Yugoslavia demonstrated that the U.S. had and still has an irreplaceable impact on Europe. In many respects, the U.S. has shown an unprecedented resolve in dealing with the BiH crisis and its conclusion, and at the same time ending the period of NATO's preoccupation with itself. U.S. and NATO involvement in BiH and the duration of this involvement also helped to reestablish the U.S. leadership within the Alliance as well.

The recent changes in Croatia, starting in 2000, have revealed a new, market-oriented and democratic Croatia. Those changes have been successful in terms of domestic politics and have been recognized by the international community. The amazing aspect of those changes is that they occurred within two years and despite the heavy burden left by the previous government and the aftermath of the war. The government would not have been able to achieve this without strong support from the people of Croatia. This demonstrated not only that the Croatian leaders, but also Croatia as a whole, is ready for integration into Western institutions. This readiness is evident when comparing Croatia and other NATO aspirant countries.

Currently, the most problematic region in Europe is the territory of states that emerged after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. It was a battlefield where nations tried to articulate their identities. Hesitating and inadequate reactions of the international community, including NATO members, at the beginning of the crisis, produced a set of unsolved problems that have dominated the region ever since. However, the engagement of the US-led NATO has not yet reached the desired outcome. The region continues to be unstable, with stabilization processes frozen somewhere between the proclaimed good intentions and the existing bureaucratic complications. The domestic politics in BiH and Serbia, although undergoing considerable change, have not yet achieved the expected improvements, while the situation in Macedonia became even worse. Democratic trends in Montenegro and Albania are still fragile, and offer no guarantee for continued advancement. Obviously, these demand a more focused and assertive engagement of all available domestic and international forces interested in peace and democratization in the region.

Given the current situation in the region, there is more than just declarative support and promising plans that must be completed in order to ensure genuine

stabilization and permanent development of every nation in the region. The first real step forward will be the acceptance of Croatia in Euro-Atlantic institutions, which will speed up its development and, at the same time, produce the model of behavior that will strengthen democratic tendencies in the rest of the region. Thus, a clear signal will be sent to all political forces advocating democratization that they must persist in this manner and reduce the influence of nationalists on domestic and foreign policy.

Among the international officials who understand the importance of providing a role-model for transition countries is the High Representative for BiH, Lord Ashdown, who thanked the Croatian Government for “its constructive policy towards BiH and requested equally attentive support in the future.”²²⁰ The example of Croatia’s advancement in only two years can represent the paradigm for BiH and Serbia that will allow the realization of common goals such as stabilization, democratization and prosperity of individual countries and the whole region. To achieve this, the following conditions must be satisfied:

- The impact of Croatia’s democratization and membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions must be used as a clear example and a landmark for BiH and Serbia which will ensure their wholehearted participation in the process of stabilization and democratization
- Engagement of the international community, particularly NATO and the EU, must be unified and clearly defined and thus will avoid the overlapping competencies of various institutions and confusing interpretations of future goals
- Democratic forces inside the countries in the region must be unequivocally supported and assisted. This can offer a reasonable perspective for the people in the region and encourage them to overcome the burden of their recent past, such as war criminals still at large, etc.

Thus, through synergic advancement on all three fronts, regional stability and prosperity can be achieved, and greater future cooperation can occur. This will automatically solve the problem of individual liberties and human rights and make the possibility of democratic peace the only option.

²²⁰ Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Press Release – 49/02: <http://www.mvp.hr/mvprh-www-eng/3-priopcenja/release/02/0203/pr02-03-03.html>.

The stabilization process in the southeastern corner of Europe will depend not only on Croatia, but also on the international community and especially the U.S.-led NATO Alliance. Their interests in peace and stability in the region, together with the search for fair and objective solutions to the existing problems, will be of utmost importance. As of September 11, 2001, the security issues in the region became interconnected with the global security situation. The initial reports of groups connected with international terrorism in BiH confirmed this. The prompt reaction of Croatia and its full participation in the anti-terrorist coalition is an unmistakable signal that Croatia is ready to take on its fair share of responsibility in fighting terrorism. In the light of those events, regional stabilization became *conditio sine qua non* for consolidating the international forces against the new threat. This stabilization demands additional efforts not only from the people that have already suffered too much, but also from the international community that, through fair and assertive engagement of its institutions, can bring an end to the instability in Southeastern Europe and thus improve the overall security situation.

The greatest opportunity to bring this about is the next round of NATO enlargement in 2002 which, along with the enlargement of the EU in 2003, offers new hope for normalizing the situation. By including new members in the European mainstream, the concentration of efforts on the remaining few countries would make it possible for them to also improve their positions. This would be even easier with the help of the new members who would be able to share their invaluable experiences and thus pave the way for others towards NATO and EU membership. Croatia is able and willing to participate in such an undertaking for the sake of lasting peace and increasing stability in the region. A democratic and prosperous Croatia, in a peaceful and stable environment, will represent the fulfillment of the 'thousand years old dream' of the Croatian people.

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As a part of thesis research, author traveled to Croatia in June 2001 and interviewed numerous high officials in various state institutions:

- **In Sabor (Croatian Parliament):**

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Lieutenant General Imra Agotic, Presidential Advisor for Defense and Military Affairs

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LTC Dr. Tomo Radicevic, Head of Defense Policy and Planning Department

Dr. Dragan Lozancic, Head of Department for International Military Cooperation

Commander Robert Hranj, Head of Office for NATO/PfP

- **In the General Staff of Croatian Armed Forces:**

General Petar Stipetic, Chief of Croatian General Staff

Colonel Mate Padjen, Head of G5 in of Croatian General Staff

Colonel Nikola Nogolica, Commander of the RACVIAC

Also, during his visit to Naval Postgraduate School, Mr. George Katsirdakis, the Head of Political Military Steering Committee on the staff of the NATO Secretary General, shared some information with the author.

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