

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Hearing on “NATO Enlargement and the Bucharest Summit”

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

Statement by Marijan Gubic, *Chargés d'affaires a.i.*

Embassy of Croatia

Croatia and NATO

The North Atlantic Alliance has provided security for the democratic countries of Western Europe and North America during the Cold War. After the end of the Cold War era, NATO continues to expand the zone of security and stability to Central and Eastern Europe by successfully integrating new countries into the Alliance, which was subsequently followed by their membership in the European Union. The United States has played a decisive role in the process of enlargement by providing leadership in this crucially important process for the future of Europe. NATO and EU enlargement have been two of the most successful projects of Europe in the post-Cold War era.

The process of enlargement is yet to be completed. It is of crucial importance that NATO remains open to any European country committed the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty and which is ready and willing to contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area. South East Europe went through a period of turmoil and war during the last decade of the twentieth century. This came to an end as a result of the active engagement, and again, the leading role of the United States and NATO, which provided a heavy footprint on the ground and enabled the peace process in that volatile part of Europe to succeed. South East Europe has not yet reached the desired level of stability. This is demonstrated by recent developments. Although we have come a long way to achieve a sustainable peace and stability, more can and needs to be done. Countries in the region need a strong signal that their future lays within the Euro-Atlantic community. An invitation at the Bucharest Summit for candidate countries to join the Alliance will have an enormously positive impact on stabilization efforts within and beyond the region.

NATO is a central pillar of Croatia's foreign and security policy. Today in NATO we recognize a unique efficacious political and defense alliance which links both sides of the Atlantic into a powerful community of shared values and common interests — an alliance able to

face new challenges and threats while fostering partnerships in its efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability. The Croatian government is fully committed to ensuring the country's rapid accession to the North Atlantic Alliance, just as it is committed to its values and interests which we profoundly share with NATO member countries.

At this crucial point in our history, as Croatia is on the verge of NATO membership, we are completing a wide range of comprehensive reforms. Croatia is on a fast track to become an EU member, which is clear recognition of Croatia's reform achievements. It is important to stress that Croatia has fully co-operated with the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. We have been successfully also in dealing with the legacy of the past, while setting an important example for others in the region.

Regional cooperation is another strategic cornerstone of Croatia's foreign policy. Croatia will continue to contribute to the strategic interests of the North Atlantic Alliance in South East Europe. In a short period of time, Croatia has transformed itself from a consumer to a provider of security in the region and beyond. Our Euro-Atlantic integration process sets a good example and gives hope to all the countries in the region. In that sense, Croatia highly values the successful cooperation between the US-Adriatic Charter countries. The Charter has provided a framework for the regular exchange of experience and cooperation with our counterparts Albania and Macedonia, as well as other neighboring countries in the region. One of the main results of the cooperation within the US-Adriatic Charter framework is the deployment of a Combined Medical Team to Afghanistan in August 2005. The fifth rotation of the Medical Team was deployed in September 2007.

Croatia has successfully completed the sixth cycle of the Membership Action Plan for NATO. Allies welcomed a successful implementation of the reform processes and shared a common view that Croatia's reforms are irreversible. Croatia's political, economic and social reforms, relevant for the accession to the Alliance, have also during the last few years complemented and supported our efforts for EU integration. As a result, this process has been substantially accelerated, engaging the entire institutions of state and public administration.

Reform of the judiciary is particularly intensive and ongoing in Croatia. Our goal is to establish a transparent and expedient process at all levels within the judicial system, while enhancing the rule of law and judicial independence. The Government is particularly committed to combating corruption and to this end, international and regional co-operation have been

enhanced. A National Anti-Corruption Program was adopted by the Government, and a National Council has also been established to monitor its implementation.

We have a democratic political system based on a fully functioning, competitive market economy. We respect minority communities in accordance with OSCE guidelines; and we do not have any major outstanding disputes with our neighbors. Furthermore, we are deeply committed to the peaceful settlement of international disputes and we are continuously sharing our experiences in adopting NATO and EU standards with other countries. In this regard, after eleven years of fruitful cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Croatia, the decision to close mission in 2008 upon fulfillment of its mandate has already been made. This can serve as an example of the positive role and effect of the OSCE's endeavors in general. The successful fulfillment of the OSCE Mission mandate should also be viewed within the context of a positive contribution of Croatia, as a strong and stable democracy, to the permanent stabilization of our part of Europe. We will continue with our contribution to regional stability in cooperation with the OSCE, especially in key areas like the prosecution of war crimes and the return of refugees.

Croatia realized early the imperative of taking its share of the international burden in Afghanistan at a very early stage, in particular in the ISAF operation, and it became a part of it prior to NATO taking the lead. As a country without extensive experience in peace-keeping, we joined ISAF in February 2003 with a military police platoon. As a result, as we have gained invaluable experience and enduring confidence in our capabilities and competence; we have progressively also increased our contribution.

Croatia's participation in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is our largest commitment to the North Atlantic Alliance and international security. We will continue to give development assistance to Afghanistan

During the five years of engagement in ISAF, Croatia's contingent has gradually been assuming more diversified and complex tasks (military police, intelligence, logistics, medical, headquarters elements and now infantry, training personnel, civil-military liaison). The size of Croatia's contingent has been increased to 200 troops and will increase further to 300 during 2008, and with a level of ambition to have 700 in the operations continually by 2011. Croatian diplomats and police officers also participate in the mission.

Croatian troops have also been expanding geographically and are present throughout different regions of Afghanistan (in Kabul, North and West), and they are operating without

caveats. Half of the Croatian OMLT (Operational Mentoring Liaison Team) members were temporarily deployed to Kandahar (South) as well, with a possibility of redeployment in the future.

Aware of the fact that building a capable Afghan Security Forces is a key condition for a self-sustainable Afghan state and a cornerstone of the International Community's exit strategy, Croatia is also actively participating in the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA), and we have also donated needed military materiel.

In the meantime, we are trying to support Afghan governance and capacity building by inviting Afghan diplomats to attend courses at the Diplomatic Academy in Zagreb. We have also hosted a delegation of women from the Afghan Women's Ministry for a study mission to Croatia in order to acquaint them with our achievements and experiences in the area of human rights, gender issues and women's empowerment.

On the other hand, gaining experience in international peace operations is valuable for further development of the Croatian Armed Forces. The main goal of the reform of the Croatian military is to develop a modern, effective, well trained, equipped and more expeditionary Armed Forces, capable of executing a broad spectrum of missions, nationally and internationally. As of January 1, 2008, the Croatian Armed Forces to be all volunteer forces.

The Croatian annual defense budgets are developed in accordance with the Long-Term Development Plan of the Armed Forces, making the budget an important tool for defense reforms. In this regard, we aim to reach a defense budget of 2 percent of GDP by 2010.

Together with the reform processes and our international efforts, the Croatian Government, being fully committed to the values of democracy, gives utmost importance to an open dialogue with the Croatian public.

Particular importance has been given to the efforts of increasing public support for Croatia's membership in NATO. There have been so far numerous activities across the country to inform and educate the public, reaching out to all groups within the Croatian society. Consequently public support has grown steadily and an absolute majority support NATO membership for Croatia. The most recent polls register 67 percent support for Croatia's membership in NATO.

Euro-Atlanticism continues to be the fundamental framework for the realization of Croatia's national interests. We consider that our country belongs to this community. Continued

reforms in the political, economic, judicial, administrative and defense sectors, dealing with the legacy of the past decade, as well as activity in numerous regional initiatives whose objective is to facilitate the creation of a secure and prosperous neighborhood, prove our full determination to adapt ourselves to be a member of the Euro-Atlantic family. In that regard, Croatia is and will remain a responsible and credible partner. We have great expectations from the upcoming Summit Meeting in Bucharest, where enlargement will be a prominent issue. To conclude, Croatia believes it is ready to join the Alliance.