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History and Politics of the Balkan Region and Croatian Accession to the EU

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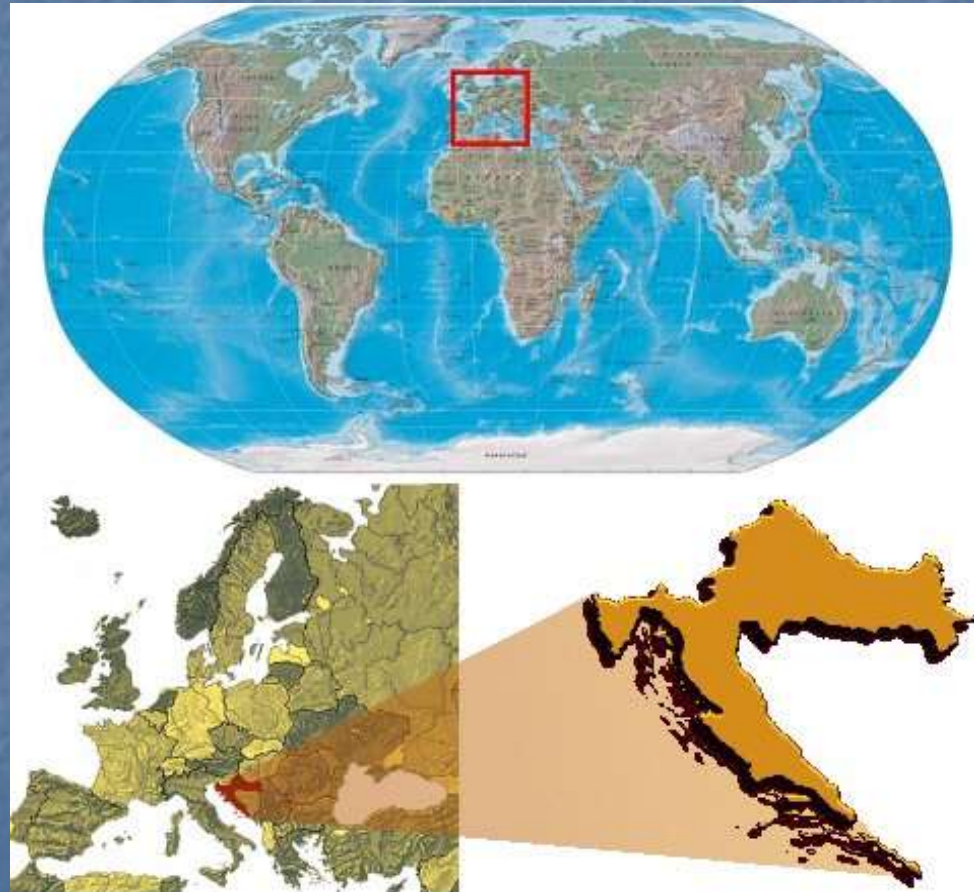
- On 1 July 2013 the Republic of Croatia is becoming **the 28th member state** of the European Union,
- At the referendum on 22 January 2012, more than **66 per cent of Croatian** voters who went to the polls voted for the full membership in the EU,



- Previously, Croatia held its last national referendum on 19 May 1991, when more than 94 per cent of the voters voted for **an independent and sovereign state outside the Yugoslav federation**,
- Croatia passed a long, hard and often toilsome way from the act of gaining independence through the war for independence and the post-war period to the membership of the EU.

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- Croatia has inherited the historical and political experiences of two major European regions: **Central Europe** and **South-East Europe or the Balkans**,
- Croatia was tied to Central Europe through **the Habsburg Monarchy and Austria-Hungary** from 1517 to 1918,
- After the end of World War I, Croatia became a part of **Yugoslavia** as a new European state in the south-east of Europe,



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- Between the two world wars, Yugoslavia was a **unitary monarchy** under the Serbian dynasty Karadjordjevic,
- During World War II, Yugoslavia was occupied by the members of **the Tripartite Pact**,
- In the area of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Fascists established a puppet state formally transferring power to **Ante Pavelic's Ustasha regime**,
- The country also witnessed the strengthening of **the antifascist movement** led by Communists headed by **Josip Broz Tito**,
- After the victory of the Allies in World War II, Yugoslavia was restored as a **socialist federation** made up of six republics including Croatia,
- In the early years of government, Josip Broz Tito's Communist regime was a typical **totalitarianism**,
- After the breach between Tito and Stalin's USSR in 1948, Yugoslavia was **opening up to the West**, and at the same time took over one of the leading roles among **the Non-Aligned Movement**,
- With respect to other socialist regimes, the Yugoslav regime was **economically and socially more liberal**, but there were no political rights and freedoms.

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- After the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia was headed toward its collapse, precipitated by the rise of the Greater-Serbian forces to power in Serbia and Montenegro, whose leading politician was Slobodan Milosevic,
- After the first multi-party democratic election, that was held in all Yugoslav republics in 1990, demands for new relations among the Yugoslav republics started to grow but the negotiations failed,
- The regime in Serbia used the troops of the common army and members of the Serbian people who lived in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to launch a war in 1991,
- The war with more than 125.000 casualties and losses lasted until the autumn of 1995, when NATO intervened against the Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- The Croatian military forces liberated the country in 1995, and the full integration was achieved in 1998.

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- Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia declared their **independence** in 1991, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992,
- NATO intervened against Slobodan Milosevic's regime in 1999, in the war in Kosovo which proclaimed independence in 2008,
- In the meantime, Montenegro also came out of the federation with Serbia in 2006,
- Today, all of the six republics of the former Yugoslavia have diplomatic and economic relations



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- The establishment of relations between the Republic of Croatia and the European Union started with **the international recognition of Croatia** as an independent and sovereign state on **15 January 1992**,
- The signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement on **29 October 2001** was **the first time for Croatia to enter treaty relations with the EU**,
- Croatia submitted its Application for EU membership on 21 February 2003, obtained the EU member candidate status on 18 June 2004, while **the accession negotiations were opened** on **3 October 2005**,
- After the negotiations were closed on 30 June 2011, **the Accession Treaty of Croatia** was signed on **9 December 2011** in Brussels .



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- With its membership of the EU, Croatia will become **the part of the largest common market and economic and political union in the world,**
- Croatia has a population of approximately **4.3 million** with area of **56,594 km²,**
- Croatia is **the only country in Europe** which is **at the same time a Mediterranean and Danube-basin country,**
- As part of the European Mediterranean, Croatia has **the longest coast** between the cradles of the European civilisation Italy and Greece, while as a country of the Danube basin it brings **together Central and South-East Europe.**

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- In brief, Croatia is a country whose today's position in a globalised world has been affected by **a variety of geopolitical, historical and economic factors**,
- Croatia has a combination of a geographical position, economic potentials and political opportunities by which it represents a **unique offer** on the global level,
- Croatia, since it proclaimed its national independence in 1991, has had **to intensively adapt its priorities in the international relations**,
- By entering the third decade of its state independence in 2012, Croatia accomplished the objectives of the **full membership of the EU (from 2013) and NATO (since 2009)**



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- Croatia should seek its **development opportunities and benefits** in 10 areas:
- 1) its **hydrographical wealth**,
- 2) its **agrarian wealth**,
- 3) a deep concern for **the health of people and the environment**,
- 4) the image of a desirable and **unique tourist destination**,
- 5) intensive **technological development and knowledge** as an essence of human resources,



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- 6) production and export-oriented, i.e. **globally oriented economy**,
- 7) **construction sector** directed toward the reconstruction and development of the infrastructure,
- 8) a connection between its own energy resources and participation in international **energy paths and projects**,
- 9) the promotion of **human rights** on the national and international levels,
- 10) active participation in international politics within **bilateral and multilateral peace diplomacy**.

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- Even though Croatia, as an EU member state, will have to participate in the common European politics, there is still enough space for its own foreign policy moves in accordance with the European priorities,
- These primarily include the positioning of Croatia as **a key country at the conjunction of the Mediterranean and the Danube basin**, and of Central and South-East Europe,
- In this way, Croatia could become **the leader of the group of countries of the East Mediterranean and Danube region**, characterised by strong economic growth, mutual political, economic and cultural cooperation the accomplishment of their common interests within the EU, and their coordinated policy toward countries outside the EU.