



Croatia: a beautiful land with talented people ...

Besides the beauty of the coast and countryside, Croatia has a rich history and cultural heritage — including six important sites on the Unesco World Heritage list, such as Roman Emperor Diocletian's immense and amazing palace at Split. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Croatia enjoyed its own literary renaissance. But, whilst the cultural and literary tradition continues, today Croatia also produces — and is perhaps more famous for — top-level footballers, world-beating tennis players and Hollywood heart-throbs such as Goran Višnjić, branded 'the new George Clooney'.

Unfortunately, history has its darker side and this has also been prominent in Croatia through the ages. Most recently, the bitter, savage hostilities that followed the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, from 1991–95, have left ugly physical and mental scars and some wounds that have yet to heal.

This would be an issue of importance to the European Union (EU) in any case, given Croatia's proximity, but with Slovenia and Hungary having joined the Union in May 2004 Croatia became the EU's new next-door neighbour. So, it is vital for the EU that this beautiful, resourceful country continues the substantial progress made over the last few years so that it too can take its place as an EU Member State when ready.

... that is coming to terms with the past and looks to a future in the EU

The problems caused by the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the so-called 'Homeland War' that followed were further exacerbated in the late 1990s by the nationalistic policies of Croatia's then President, Franjo Tuđman. When change of government and political climate followed the parliamentary and presidential elections in January 2000, Croatia took the chance to open a new chapter in relations with the EU. One of the main milestones in this process was Croatia's formal submission of its application to join the EU, on 21 February 2003. The new government, elected in December 2003, is also pursuing this new EU-oriented course with objectivity and determination. A dynamic economy has helped to underpin progress towards increasingly political stability and a fully democratic society.

Challenges remain ...

There remains much to be done before Croatia is ready to join the EU, however. In a keynote speech to the Croatian Parliament in Zagreb on 10 July 2003, European Commission President Romano Prodi pointed out that 'further effort is needed in areas such as the reform of the judicial system, freedom of the media, respect for minority rights and the return of the refugees. It calls for a major effort on the sensitive issue of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia'.



Archive of EC Delegation in Croatia

... but Croatia is rising to meet them, with the EU's support

There is general political consensus in Croatia that joining the European Union is the country's principal near/medium-term goal. The strength of Croatia's economy will help the government to pursue the policies and initiatives necessary to meet the standards and criteria that the EU sets for membership, in particular the process of bringing Croatian law into line with the EU's body of law, known as the Community *acquis*.

The EU is supporting this process, in particular through cooperation in the framework of the stabilisation and association process, enriched at the Thessaloniki summit (June 2003) with instruments inspired by the recent successful enlargement process. In this context, a stabilisation and association agreement was signed with Croatia in October 2001. The stabilisation and association agreement and an interim agreement have served as powerful catalysts for legislative reform. Croatia is now seriously focused on harmonising its legislation with the Community *acquis* and has started to implement an ambitious programme for Croatia's integration into the European Union. In June 2004, the European Council decided that Croatia is a candidate country and that the EU accession process should be launched.

The main objectives of EU support for Croatia are:

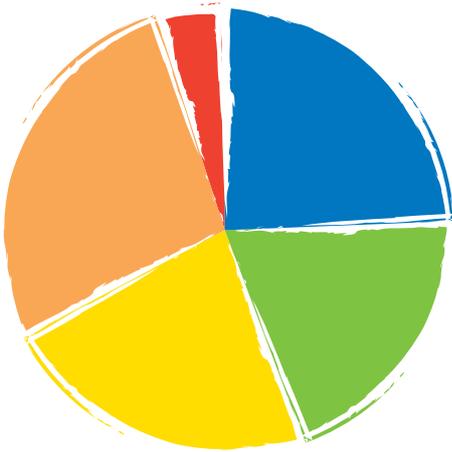
- to support structural and economic reforms and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law;
- to help Croatia move closer to EU standards and principles and to make possible Croatia's integration into European structures through the stabilisation and association process;
- to promote ethnic reconciliation and the return of refugees and displaced persons.

What does that mean in practice?

Between 1991 and 2000 the European Commission supported projects in Croatia worth EUR 367 million. The activities included:

- democratic stabilisation;
- return of refugees;
- promotion of civil society;
- strengthening social cohesion;
- public administration reform;
- public finance reform;
- modernisation of the justice system;
- policing and fighting organised crime;
- integrated border management;
- trade promotion;
- improving the investment climate protection of the environment and natural resources.

**CARDS allocation 2002-04
(by priority sector)**



EU financial assistance provided through CARDS (Community assistance for reconstruction, development and stabilisation) underpins the objectives and mechanisms of the stabilisation and association process.

Priority sectors	Million EUR
Democratic stabilisation	48.0
Administrative capacity building	39.3
Justice and home affairs	45.0
Economic and social development	55.0
Environment, natural resources	9.7
Total	197.0

A 'two-way street'

The EU is supporting Croatia's aims and ambitions, but in the final analysis the future is in Croatia's hands. In his 10 July 2003 address to the Croatian Parliament, President Prodi spoke of his conviction that Croatia would meet the challenges that lay ahead and continued: 'The Union is ready to do its part and the Commission is keen to get on with the work before it. But this is a two-way street. You need to show the same enthusiasm and determination. Indeed, the pace and tempo of integration will be set by you.' Welcoming the Commission's recommendation on 20 April 2004 that the EU begins negotiations with Croatia for joining the EU, President Prodi noted that '... Croatia's performance shows that the EU strategy for the western Balkans provides a good framework for economic and political progress and will hopefully encourage the other countries of the region to redouble their efforts to make progress towards European integration.'



Dejan Vekić



Where can I find more information?

Further information on the EU's relations with Croatia and the other countries of the western Balkans is available from the Commission's dedicated website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/index.htm

If you have a specific question concerning the European Commission's external relations policies, please e-mail the 'Relex feedback' mailbox through the following web address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/feedback/question2.htm

For other questions on the European Union, you can contact Europe Direct by e-mail through the following web address:

<http://europedirect-cc.cec.eu.int/websubmit/?lang=en>

or by telephone, by dialling the single freephone number:

00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (from any country within the European Union),

or the chargeable number:

(32-2) 29 99696 (from other countries or via certain mobile telephone operators).

European Commission
Directorate-General for External Relations
Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels
Fax (32-2) 29-92198

EuropeAid Co-operation Office
Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels
Fax (32-2) 29-67482
http://europa.eu.int/comm/europaid/projects/cards/index_en.htm

Delegation of the European Commission to Croatia
10000 Zagreb, Masarykova 1
Tel. (385-1) 48 96 500 • Fax (385-1) 48 96 555
<http://www.delhrv.cec.eu.int>