



GLOBAL GOVERNANCE INSTITUTE

National Backgrounders – European Foreign Policy

Country Profile

Croatia

Capital:	Zagreb
Geographical Size:	56 594.0 km ²
Population:	2 246 700 (2014)
Population as % of total EU population:	0.8% (2014)
GDP:	€ 43.127 billion (2013)
Defense Expenditure:	€ 639 million (2013)
Official EU language(s):	Croatian
Political System:	Parliamentary republic
EU member country since:	1 July 2013
Seats in European Parliament:	11
Currency:	Croatian Kuna (HRK)
Schengen area member?	No
Presidency of the Council:	Not yet

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a. Political System

Croatia has been an independent country since 1991. It is a parliamentary democratic republic with a Prime Minister (Zoran Milanović, Social Democratic Party) as head of the government and a President (Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, Independent) as head of state. It is divided into 20 counties and Zagreb is the capital.

The government and the President of Croatia both hold the executive power (though the President holds a more institutional profile). The President is elected every five years. The Prime Minister is nominated by the President and formally elected by the Parliament on the basis of the balance of power between elected parties (multi-party system). Then, the Prime Minister is able to appoint the ministers forming its cabinet. Milanović's centre-left cabinet is made of thirteen members of the Social Democratic Party (*SDP*), four members from the Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats (*HNS-LD*), three independents, and one member of the Istrian Democratic Assembly (*IDS-DDI*).¹

Legislative power lies in the unicameral Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*), whose members are elected every five years. Elections follow the principle of proportional representation, choosing 151 members from the ten geographical constituencies. The multi-party parliamentary system in place in Croatia allows a wide variety of political parties to be represented and to form coalitions. In fact, sixteen parties have been represented in the Parliament since November 2015. The most influent ones are the Social Democratic Party (*SDP*) with 56 seats and the Croatian Democratic Union (*HDZ*) with 41 seats. The majority in the *Sabor* is formed by a coalition between the *SDP*, the *HNS-LD*, the *IDS-DDI* and the Croatian Party of Pensioners (*HSU*).²

A lot of change has happened in the Croatian judicial branch since the end of communism. However, nepotism and corruption have plagued the system since the 1990s. This issue posed great concern to the EU during accession talks. Despite this, recent United Nations and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports show that Croatia is on the right track. The highest judicial office in Croatia is currently the Supreme Court. In addition, there is also a Constitutional Court overseeing and protecting the appliance of the Constitution. The State Judicial Council whose members are chosen by the parliament appoints the judges³.

b. European and Foreign Policy

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration is responsible for Croatia's foreign policy in general as well as the policy towards the EU. Its main aims are:

- Preservation and strengthening of peace and understanding between countries;
- Strengthening of Croatia's international position;
- Realizing strategic priorities by becoming a full EU member;
- Solving all issues remaining from the break-off with former Yugoslavia;

¹ "Politics", *EU Croatia Portal*, August 2, 2013. Web. Accessed June 5, 2015. <http://www.eu-croatia.org/politics>.

² Pavlic V., "Almost 2 Weeks After Croatian Elections, Productive Talks about New Government Continue", *Total Croatia News*, November 21, 2015. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. <http://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/1530-almost-2-weeks-after-croatian-elections-productive-talks-about-new-government-continue>.

³ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Monitoring Report on Croatia's Accession Preparations*, March 26, 2013. Web. Accessed June 5, 2015. http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/fule/docs/news/20130326_report_final.pdf.

- Establishing good relations with neighbors as well as with the most important countries of the world;
- Strengthening Croatia's economic position; and
- Condemning all war crimes and bringing all war criminals to trial.

Croatia is part of the **Union for the Mediterranean**, which role is to strengthen the Mediterranean region in its relations with Europe and the rest of the world. This allowed Croatia's early access to the EU Mediterranean Policy⁴.

In the next fifteen years, Croatia will seek to significantly increase the amount of money that is sent in assistance to other countries, so that the national **development aid** in 2030 would reach 1.1 billion *Kuna*, three times more than this year, according to the *National Strategy for Development Cooperation 2015-2020*. In the next five years, Croatia will continue to put emphasis on the countries of Southeast Europe (Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina), and in the area of North Africa and the Middle East. The national Government believes that Croatia has certain advantages and experiences which can be shared with other countries; for example: the experience of transition from a one-party system into a multi-party system, from communism to market economy, from war to peace, and the experience of the accession to the EU⁵.

Besides close links with EU members, Croatia maintains bilateral relations with non-EU countries. These often have the goal of converging towards EU principles and values. Such relations exist with **Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey**. Relations with the **Russian Federation** are mainly based on Croatian economic needs. In addition, regional multilateral cooperation is established through the **South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP)**, a cooperation framework formed in 1996 on initiative of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey. Today, it also includes Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Kosovo. It greatly interacts with the EU and NATO. Croatia joined this non-institutional process of high-level meetings in 2005, and chaired it in 2006. It has played an important role in fostering political dialogue by providing support and technical assistance to this process. Previous SEECP projects have been focused on Justice and Home Affairs as well as on preserving cultural identity. Croatia also invested most of its development cooperation towards this area with the objectives to consolidate peace and support the development of health, economy, and education.

European Union (EU)

Croatia applied for EU membership in 2003. Accession negotiations began in 2005 and ended in 2011. The country officially became a member in 2013. Despite being accepted into the EU, there are still some security issues Croatia has to work on, such as organized crime and the protection of minorities (especially the Serbian minority). Croatia is currently struggling with the EU **refugee crisis**. In November 2015, Croatia was among the four Balkan nations (Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia) shutting their borders to those not coming from war-torn countries such as Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq, making a clear distinction between those requiring international protection and economic migrants⁶.

⁴ "Foreign Policy Aims", *Republic of Croatia – Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs*. Web. Accessed June 8, 2015. <http://www.mvep.hr/en/foreign-politics/foreign-policy-aims/>.

⁵ Pavlic V., "Croatia to Increase Foreign Aid to Other Countries", *Total Croatia News*, October 22, 2015. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015. <http://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/1252-croatia-to-increase-foreign-aid-to-other-countries>.

⁶ n.a. "Europe refugee crisis: 4 Balkan countries close borders to those fleeing poverty", *CBC News*, November 19, 2015. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/europe-refugee-borders-balkans-1.3326009>

Croatia enjoys a variety of good bilateral relations with several of its EU neighbors. This has already been the case before its accession to the Union. One example is **Italy**, with whom Croatia has regular bilateral meetings and now shares a common European future. Croatia's relations to **Hungary** have been highly developed. This cooperation was of immense help during the last steps of the Croatian accession process, when Hungary held the EU Presidency. A priority in the relations between these two countries is the preservation of nature along the Danube. Croatia and Hungary also have bilateral agreements on police cooperation, especially during the summer when tourism is important. Croatia and **Slovenia** have highly developed economic and good political relations. Furthermore, friendly relations with **Austria** exist, as the latter strongly supported Croatia's accession to the EU. Besides its direct neighbors, Croatia also enjoys good relations with Poland, the Czech Republic, Spain, and Germany. Cooperation with Slovakia is even seen as outstanding.

c. Peace & Security Policy

Croatia's military is divided into ground forces, naval forces, air force and air defense command, joint education and training command, logistics command, and the military police force. The intelligence service is under the supervision of the Prime Minister, and an independent oversight board monitors its service performance.⁷

Croatia's history with peacekeeping missions began in 1995 when the UN authorized a mission in the country itself in order to uphold ceasefire after the Croatian War of Independence. Since 1999, Croatia has participated in operations of several organizations such as the EU, UN and NATO. However, it was not until 2005 that civilians were deployed. In order to regulate this process, a "Law on Participation of Military Personnel, Police, Civil Defense and Civil Servants in Peace Missions and Other Activities Abroad" was passed in 2002. It says that decisions are made by the Parliament with the help of a proposal of the Government and the approval of the President. Furthermore, a reporting mechanism was introduced. More changes in the law are underway in order to properly address the civilian component of peace operations. According to the 2014 Croatian national *Strategy on Participation of Croatia in International Missions and Operations*, priority is given to international missions and operations where their engagement strengthens alliances with strategic partners, primarily with the US and European countries. Thus, **NATO and EU-led missions** are considered strategic priorities⁸.

Croatia sees effective response to a broad spectrum of global threats possible through a strong and **comprehensive cooperation** with partners, and through integration of civilian and military capabilities. Regarding the Balkans, there have still been potential security threats resulting from open regional issues caused by the legacy of the 1990s. Therefore, Croatia relies on its affiliation with NATO and the EU and engages more actively in multilateral and bilateral regional cooperation projects in order to strengthen regional stability and to help Balkan countries join the Euro-Atlantic integration⁹.

⁷ "Croatia", *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, last update November 19, 2015. Web. Accessed June 8, 2015. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/hr.html>.

⁸ Bosanac G., "Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: Croatia", *Providing for Peacekeeping*, last updated August 13, 2014. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2014/08/13/peacekeeping-contributor-profile-croatia/>.

⁹ The Republic of Croatia – Ministry of Defense, *The Croatian Armed Forces Long-Term Development Plan 2015-2024*, Zagreb, December 2014, p. 9-10. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015. http://www.morh.hr/images/stories/morh_2015/pdf/dpr/ldp_en_2015.pdf.

European Union (EU)

Even before its accession to the EU, Croatia has tried to stay close to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU, for instance by taking part in informal meetings with other European defense ministers. Croatia has already participated in the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) in 2011 and served in the EU Battlegroup 2012 led by Germany, with Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland, and Macedonia. When Croatia joined the EU, it became a stronger supporter of CSDP¹⁰. In the second half of 2016, Croatian Armed Forces will be part of another EU Battlegroup with Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and the Czech Republic.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Croatian participation in NATO already took place before becoming a member through the Membership Action Plan and by being a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) from 2000 on. This coupled with an Annual National Program that facilitated necessary reforms. Croatia joined NATO in 2009 and has contributed to several operations ever since; examples are participation in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan with emphasis on training and capacity building of Afghan forces, support to the Kosovo mission, and participation in the Operation Unified Protector in Libya¹¹.

Croatia advocates the **enlargement** of NATO towards South East Europe. In addition, it cooperates in the defense and security reform of NATO as well as supports wider democratic and institutional reforms¹². Croatia's mentoring of neighbors in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), and especially the **Adriatic Charter**, has helped NATO candidates in South East Europe to advance their membership aspirations by initiating defense reforms and contributing to some of the Alliance-led operations¹³. In 2015, Croatia devoted 1.4% of its GDP to defense expenditures¹⁴. For the period 2014-2015 Croatia contributed to 0.31% of the NATO Common-Funded Budgets and Programmes¹⁵.

United Nations (UN)

Croatia has been a member of the United Nations since 1992. Croatia's capital Zagreb hosts an office of the **UN Development Programme** (UNDP). Recently, Croatia has been very engaged in post-conflict management resulting in their re-election to the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).

¹⁰ Cehuldic Vukadinovic L., "The Croatian View on the EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)", *Austria Institut für Europa-und Sicherheitspolitik*, 2014. Web. Accessed June 9, 2015. <http://www.aies.at/download/2014/AIES-Fokus-2014-01.pdf>.

¹¹ "U.S. Relations With Croatia", *U.S. Department of State*, September 24, 2015. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3166.htm>.

¹² "NATO's relations with Croatia", *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, last update October 5, 2012. Web. Accessed June 9, 2015. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_31803.htm.

¹³ "U.S. Relations With Croatia", *U.S. Department of State*, September 24, 2015. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3166.htm>.

¹⁴ "NATO publishes defence expenditures data for 2014 and estimates for 2015", Press release PR/CP(2015)093-COR1, *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, June 22, 2015, p. 6. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015.

http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_06/20150622_PR_CP_2015_093-v2.pdf

¹⁵ "NATO Common-Funded Budget & Programmes", *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015.

http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_06/20140611_20140601_NATO_common_funded_budgets_2014-2015.pdf

After declaring its independence in 1991, Croatia was involved in military conflicts both in Croatia itself and in Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1995. During the war, Croatia hosted several UN peace operations (UNPROFOR, UNCRO, UNTAES, and UNPSG), which ended in 1998 when Eastern Slavonia was integrated into Croatia. Since then, Croatia has started to become a **proactive** security provider within the UN. Between 1999 and 2014, Croatia participated in 19 UN peacekeeping missions, deploying around 1,300 military personnel in total. Croatia's most significant contribution was to the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights after 2008, where 100 Croatian soldiers were deployed.

Challenges that Croatia faces at the moment are financial limitations within the state budget and lack of a broader vision on the importance of Croatian participation in UN peacekeeping missions¹⁶. In fact, in October 2015, Croatia had only 17 nationals engaged in peacekeeping missions (MINURSO in the Western Sahara, UNIFIL in Lebanon, and UNMOGIP along the ceasefire line between India and Pakistan in the state of Jammu and Kashmir)¹⁷. For the period 2014-2015, Croatia contributed to 0.05% of the UN Peacekeeping budget¹⁸.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Croatia has been a member of the OSCE since March 1992. In December 2014, foreign ministers of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia signed the *Amendments to the Agreement on Sub-Regional Arms Control*, taking over full responsibility for regional stability and arms control, essential for building peace and stability in the Western Balkans¹⁹. In 2014, Croatia contributed to 0.1% (€200,347) of the Organization's unified budget²⁰, and 7 nationals were involved in its staff²¹.

Council of Europe (CoE)

Croatia became a member of the Council of Europe in November 1996. In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights issued 27 judgments concerning the country, of which 23 were violations and four were non-violation. In 2015, Croatia contributed to 0.26% (€1,080,929) of the unified budget of the Organization²².

Strategic Culture

The **EU and NATO** are Croatia's top two foreign security priorities. Croatia wants its neighbors to be integrated into these frameworks; in this respect, the country is ready to offer its first-hand **knowledge of post conflict resolution**. However, Croatia currently lacks an adequate National Security Strategy and hence a clear overview of potential threats and security concerns; the first (and thus far only) National Security Strategy was adopted in 2002 and is outdated since Croatia has become a full NATO and EU member in the meantime.

¹⁶ Bosanac G., "Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: Croatia", *Providing for Peacekeeping*, last updated August 13, 2014. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015.

<http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2014/08/13/peacekeeping-contributor-profile-croatia/>.

¹⁷ "UN Mission's Summary detailed by Country", *United Nations Peacekeeping*, October 31, 2015, p. 10. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2015/oct15_3.pdf.

¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly, "Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236", *Report of the Secretary General*, December 27, 2012, p. 4. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015.

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/224/Add.1.

¹⁹ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Annual Report 2014*, July 2015, p. 17. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/169971?download=true>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²² "Croatia – Member state", *Council of Europe*. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/croatia>.

d. Economic Policy

Croatia has a functioning market economy that is still in the process of adapting to the EU market through adjustments on better targeting of subsidies, restraints on expenditures of goods and services, as well as improved tax collection. Its budget is managed with the help of a three-year outlook on the monetary and fiscal policy. Nonetheless, Croatia was and still is affected by the economic crisis of 2008 (e.g. large youth unemployment). In order to increase economic growth, a comprehensive structural reform program was launched in 2012 through fiscal consolidation. In order to reach fiscal sustainability, spending was reduced and tax revenue increased through indirect taxes. Moreover, efforts were made to improve the social welfare system.²³

European Union (EU)

As the newest member of the EU, Croatia is still benefitting from several structural funds. However, EU spending on Croatia is only slightly larger than Croatian contribution. In order to balance this out, Croatia is closely following the Europe 2020 Strategy. Several discrepancies remain in employment, R&D investment, GHG emissions, tertiary education, and poverty²⁴. Until it becomes a member of the Euro area, Croatia remains a member of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

According to the *2015 Council Recommendation*, Croatia is currently in the corrective arm of the Stability and Growth Pact. According to the country's Convergence Program, the Government plans to gradually reduce the headline deficit to 5,0 % of GDP in 2015, 3,9 % in 2016, and further to 2,7 % of GDP in 2017. The government debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to peak at 92,5 % in 2017 and to broadly stabilize at 92,4 % of GDP in 2018. However, based on the assessment of the Convergence Program and taking into account the Commission's 2015 spring forecast, the Council is of the opinion that there is a risk that Croatia will not comply with the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact. One of the major shortcomings of Croatian economy resides in a pension system that allows a large number of early retirees and numerous special pension schemes. Furthermore, the distribution of competences between national and local level is complex and fragmented, which undermines the management of public finances and efficient public expenditure²⁵.

Economic Diplomacy & Foreign Trade

Croatia has been a member of the World Bank since 1993. Previous World Bank efforts have been focused on projects and lending to Croatia. This will now shift to a knowledge partnership. The current incentive is to boost competitiveness as well as income allowing better benefits from an EU membership with an emphasis of recovering from the financial shock. Previous projects have also focused on issues such as judiciary and tax reform²⁶.

²³ "Croatia - Economic Policies", *Sustainable Governance Indicators*, 2014. Web. Accessed June 9, 2015, http://www.sgi-network.org/2014/Croatia/Economic_Policies.

²⁴ The Republic of Croatia, *2013 Economic Programme of Croatia*, April 2013. Web. Accessed June 9, 2015. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/ep2013_croatia_en.pdf.

²⁵ Council of the European Union, "Council Recommendation on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Croatia and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of Croatia", *Official Journal of the European Union*, C272/57-58 (July 14, 2015). Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/csr2015_council_croatia_en.pdf.

²⁶ "Croatia – Overview", *The World Bank*, 2015. Web. Accessed June 8, 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/croatia/overview#1>.

Croatia is mostly an exporter of transport equipment, machinery, textiles, chemicals, foodstuffs, and fuels. Croatia is also an importer of machinery, transport and electrical equipment, fuels and lubricants, and foodstuffs. Croatia's main trading partners are Italy, Germany, Russia, China, Slovenia, and Austria. The European Union as a whole is Croatia's most important trading partner²⁷. Overall, foreign trade, foreign direct investments, and tourism – which are important elements of the current and capital account of Croatia's balance of payments – hugely benefited from the stabilization of the neighborhood and Croatia's accession to the EU. For instance, tourist arrivals reached an all-time high of 3,617,662 in August 2015²⁸.

e. Other Diplomatic Priorities

Priorities at the European Level

Croatia is still in the process of adapting to the EU and fulfilling all the necessary *aquis communautaire* requirements. Problems are still reoccurring due to overcrowded prisons, backlog of judiciary proceedings, corruption and the status of former refugees. Moreover, basic rights are still violated as journalists have to self-censor themselves and Serbs are still being discriminated²⁹.

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²⁷ “Croatia Balance of Trade”, *Trading Economics*, last update November 9, 2015. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/croatia/balance-of-trade>.

²⁸ “Croatia Tourist Arrivals”, *Trading Economics*, last update November 21, 2015. Web. Accessed November 22, 2015. <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/croatia/tourist-arrivals>.

²⁹ “Croatia”, *U.S. State Department*. Web. Accessed June 8, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160183.pdf>.

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- n.a. “Europe refugee crisis: 4 Balkan countries close borders to those fleeing poverty”, *CBC News*, November 19, 2015. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/europe-refugee-borders-balkans-1.3326009>
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“U.S. Relations With Croatia”, *U.S. Department of State*, September 24, 2015. Web. Accessed November 21, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3166.htm>.