

Osvrti s konferencije:

Five years of Croatia in NATO – Conference Review

Conference review

On April 1 the Atlantic Council of Croatia hosted an international conference “Five years of Croatia in NATO” at the Croatian Military Academy “Petar Zrinski” in Zagreb. The conference gathered more than 50 participants from the region, including government, military, academia and YATA representatives from Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. The goal of the conference was to evaluate the first five years of Croatia’s integration into the NATO and to share valuable experiences with countries from the region that are membership candidates.

Opening ceremony

The ceremony was opened by Professor Radovan Vukadinović, President of the Atlantic Council of Croatia. He began his remarks by reminding of Croatia’s difficult path to NATO membership that started over 20 years ago in the war following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the difficult circumstances Croatia encountered at that time. He emphasized the value of Croatia as a serious partner in NATO’s operations all over the world, where the Croatian flag is proudly carried on representing transatlantic values. He added that Croatia sincerely hoped that its neighbouring countries would be a part of the Alliance soon, and that this conference was an excellent way of presenting Croatia’s work in the past 5 years.

Following Professor Vukadinović’s remarks, the audience was honoured to have Ambassador Kenneth Merten, US Ambassador to Croatia, deliver a speech to further welcome conference attendees. His remarks focused on the shared values of the transatlantic community, and the uniqueness of the NATO because of those values. He emphasized the meaning of the US and Europe cooperating in economic and political issues, and added that Croatia had shown to the world a model for stability and peace.

Following Ambassador Merten, the attendees were addressed by General Drago Lovrić, Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of Croatia. He stated that the past five years were very important for the development of the Croatian Armed Forces and

stressed new capabilities gained in the NATO. He emphasized that the Ukrainian crisis showed the importance of maintaining transatlantic ties and highlighted regional cooperation between Croatia and its neighbouring states, especially the Republic of Serbia. In the end he expressed his satisfaction because of the very important five year anniversary.

Panel 1 – Croatian integration into NATO & participation in peace support operations

The conference started with the first panel discussing the Croatian integration into the NATO and participation in peace support operations. The panel was moderated by Professor Radovan Vukadinović, and the audience had the opportunity to listen to four experts on this topic: Mr Zlatko Gareljčić, Adviser to the President of the Republic of Croatia for Defence Affairs, RADM Marileo Stančić, Head, Planning Directorate GS CAF, BGEN Ivica Olujić, Head, Logistic Directorate GS CAF and BGEN Ivan Jurić, Commander, JOC GS CAF.

The panel started with Professor Vukadinović stating that the Ukrainian crisis had produced a new political and military meaning to the term transatlanticism, and because of that it was important for the NATO to stay open, especially for countries in Croatia's neighbourhood. The accession of those countries would be a safeguard for stability and prosperity of the Western Balkans.

Mr Gareljčić stressed out that Croatia was a valuable partner and would remain a responsible partner in the future. He added that the Alliance of today was different from the one in the 1990s. The difference can be seen through NATO's reactions and the readiness to emerging dangers such as terrorism, human and WMD trafficking. He concluded with underlining Croatia's commitment to staying an important partner in the NATO and promoting shared values.

RADM Marileo Stančić opened his speech with a presentation of Croatia's path to becoming a full NATO member, necessary military reforms that had to be undertaken and the overview of drafting national strategic documents. He announced that the new "Long-term strategic plan of CAF development" should be presented during the year 2014. He added that by joining the NATO Croatia took part in common financing, operations, NATO's command structure (with one Croatian general) and working groups; he also added that Croatia contributed in Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) with 160 people and in a number of Smart Defence projects.

BGEN Ivica Olujić presented the NATO committees. He talked about the successful reform of the committees and described them as an instrument and a tool that served as information hubs and monitors of decision implementation through multinational

cooperation. He also added that the role of the committees from a national perspective was to materialize interests in accordance with the level of ambition. Croatia has been involved in the work of the committees since 2003, after obtaining a MAP. He especially emphasized the fact that while the Croatian Ministry of Defence was very active in the work of committees, there was a need for cooperation with other ministries and national entities that could help in the process with their knowledge, experience and expertise. At the end of his presentation, BGEN Olujić concluded that the committees were more of an opportunity for creating political and operational influence than a burden, despite high expenses.

BGEN Ivan Jurić was the last speaker of this panel. He discussed the participation of Croatian Armed Forces in peace support operations. He emphasized the valuable experience Croatia gained through participating in these types of operations, and stressed out that 6091 members of the CAF participated in peace support operations since the UNAMSIL mission in Sierra Leone – the first operation Croatia participated in. At this moment, the CAF are participating in two NATO led missions – ISAF and KFOR. BGEN Jurić emphasized that ISAF was Croatia's most important multinational operation, with Croatia participating several times since 2006 by providing mentoring. He concluded the panel with emphasizing that the best way Croatia could contribute to peace support operations is by mentoring and providing counsel. He added that the valuable experiences gained in PSOs contributed greatly to the development of Croatian Armed Forces and their interoperability.

Panel 2 – Croatian military industry and NATO Alliance

The second panel focused on the way the NATO influenced and shaped the Croatian military industry. The panel was moderated by BGEN Milan Knežević (ret.) from the state Agency Alan, and hosted two representatives from the Association of the Croatian Military Industry Manufacturers, Mr Alojzije Šestan, the chairman of the Association, and Mr Patrik Stupin, the secretary.

In his opening remarks, Mr Knežević highlighted the importance of Croatian military industry products, whose quality is recognized all over the world. He added that the industry had to overcome various challenges whilst adapting to the NATO market, but with NATO's assistance during the process it managed to integrate successfully. Mr Šestan stressed the importance of gaining access to the market of 27 other member states and eliminating the barriers which revived the military industry. The Croatian military industry is made of about 100 business subjects, making an annual turnover of 300 million euros, with 100 million in export. The biggest weapon manufacturer is the company HS Produkt, which developed a lot of top-class products such as the reputable assault rifle VHS-2 or handgun HS 2000 which has been sold in the US in

2 million copies. The participants talked about NATO tenders as great opportunities for conducting business and highlighted the involvement of companies in the NATO Industrial Advisory Group (NIAG), where businesses can inform themselves and adapt to new plans and doctrines developed by the NATO.

In conclusion, the participants agreed that the process of NATO integration formulated and advanced the work of the Croatian military industry to a new level of management.

Panel 3 – Enlargement of NATO and Western Balkans

The third and final panel focused on the Balkan states and new challenges to the NATO. The speakers of this panel were Mr Vladimir Ateljević, advisor to the Minister of European Integration, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Professor Olivera Injac, University of Donja Gorica, Montenegro, Professor Marina Mitrevska from the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, Macedonia, and Assistant Professor Miloš Šolaja, Center for International Relations in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The panel started with Mr Ateljević presenting the Serbian-NATO relations. He highlighted the role of the integration process as a medium and as a challenge, emphasizing the fact that there were no bigger political challenges in Serbia for joining the NATO, but a possible challenge might emerge in different perspectives of the regional states about their role in the NATO. Professor Injac stated that the NATO membership became a very important political issue in Montenegro, and that the public discussion gave rise to anti-NATO groups. Montenegro should undertake three steps that would assure its accession to the Alliance: a reform of the security and intelligence sector, the education of its citizens on this matter and the fight against political corruption. She stressed out the need for faster accession of other regional states in order to provide regional stability.

Professor Mitrevska added that Macedonian problems with Greece were *sui generis* and that the two states were in *status quo*, which was a big problem for Macedonian development. She stressed the fact that public discourse on this matter was often misguided because of its focus on less important aspects of the problem, and emphasized that maybe a time had come for a new summit to take place under the patronage of the EU, where the two countries could resolve their problems.

The last speaker of the panel was Mr Šolaja from Bosnia and Herzegovina. He pointed out that the problem of his country was the most complex one in the region. Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently stuck in two processes – accession to the NATO and the EU, both of which are going nowhere. He emphasized the fact that a state with two entities and three nations could not communicate with the EU through one channel, and that the

issue was directly connected with the political elites of the country, who did not seem to be capable of guiding Bosnia and Herzegovina through Euro-Atlantic integrations.

Closing and final remarks

After the last discussion, Professor Radovan Vukadinović, the president of the Atlantic Council of Croatia, gave a short speech in which he emphasized the very good relationship between Croatia and the NATO and the positive results 5 years after becoming a member of the Alliance. He expressed his warm gratitude to the Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces, the representatives of the military industry, the representatives of the regional states and to the members of YATA Croatia for their organizational support. With these final remarks, the conference was officially closed.

Ivan Klasan