

CROATIA



Croatia The United States' top assistance priority for Croatia is to ensure that it fulfills its role as a well-equipped and active NATO ally that can promote peace and stability both in its immediate Southeastern Europe neighborhood and beyond. As Croatia works towards implementing the necessary reforms to obtain European Union membership and further advance its interoperability with international and NATO forces, U.S. programs help to enhance Croatia's military capabilities so that it can steadily increase its contributions to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and missions elsewhere. Croatia is a strong U.S. partner and an anchor of stability in the region.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Croatia is pursuing a policy of greater Euro-Atlantic integration. In October 2001, Croatia and the European Union (EU) signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement. In February 2003 Croatia formally presented its EU membership application, and in April 2004 the European Commission agreed to open EU accession negotiations with Croatia. The opening of talks was delayed in March 2005 when the EU decided that Croatia was not fully cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), but talks finally got underway in October 2005, after the ICTY's Chief Prosecutor, Carla del Ponte confirmed that Croatia was fully cooperating.

In December 2005 General Ante Gotovina, indicted by the ICTY for war crimes and a fugitive since 2002, was arrested by Spanish authorities in the Canary Islands, partially as a result of intelligence information provided by the Croatian Government. Since the arrest and transfer of Gotovina to The Hague in late 2005, Croatia continues to cooperate with the ICTY.

Croatia was admitted on May 25, 2000 into the Partnership for Peace program--which was designed by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states in 1994 to strengthen Euro-Atlantic security--and, in May 2002, was welcomed into NATO's Membership Action Program, a key step toward NATO membership. On May 2, 2003, the United States joined Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia to sign the Adriatic Charter, in which the three NATO aspirants pledged their commitment to NATO values and their cooperative efforts to further their collective NATO aspirations. In 2008, the Adriatic Charter expanded to include two new countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Croatia received an invitation to join NATO at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Romania in April 2008; it became a full member of the alliance in April 2009.

Croatia has been a member of the United Nations since 1992, and contributes troops to 13 UN operations including those in Haiti, Cyprus, Georgia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Kashmir. In January 2008, Croatia began a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Since 2003, Croatia has contributed troops to support the International Stabilization Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Croatia's contribution to ISAF rose to approximately 300 personnel in 2008, and Croatia also approved its participation in ISAF for 2009. Croatia is a member of the World Trade Organization and the Central European Free Trade Organization.

While Croatia has made progress on dealing with a number of post-conflict issues, the status of refugees displaced during the 1991-95 war and resolution of border disputes with Slovenia remain key issues influencing Croatia's relations with its neighbors and the international community.

U.S.-CROATIAN RELATIONS

The United States opened its Embassy in Zagreb in 1992. U.S. engagement in Croatia is aimed at fostering a democratic, secure, and market-oriented society that will be a strong partner in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

In an effort to promote regional stability through refugee returns, the United States has given more than \$18 million since 1998 in humanitarian demining assistance. Croatia hopes to remove an estimated one million remaining mines by 2010. The United States also has provided additional financial assistance to Croatia through the Southeastern European Economic Development Program (SEED) to facilitate democratization and restructuring of Croatia's financial sector, largely through programs managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Most SEED funding and USAID programs in Croatia concluded in 2008.

Peace and Security: U.S. assistance is needed to help secure Croatia's borders, improve cross-border cooperation, strengthen law enforcement capabilities, and combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Funding will also promote defense reform and military restructuring, which are essential for establishing interoperability capabilities required both to participate in Coalition operations with the United States and to meet NATO's performance-based membership criteria. These programs will be implemented through the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Defense.

Focus on Performance: The top two U.S. goals in Croatia are having Croatia be a capable and contributing NATO member and a global partner in advancing freedom and countering terrorism. U.S. security assistance programs are critical to the development of the professional capabilities and compatibility of the Croatian armed forces. Starting in FY 2009 and continuing in FY 2010, the U.S. will support expansion of Croatian participation in NATO and UN operations, including in Afghanistan and Kosovo. The U.S. will work to build Croatia's capabilities so that it is increasingly independent in troop deployments to enable the government of Croatia to contribute even more effectively to the needs of NATO and UN missions. Indicator levels align with the plans of the Croatian Ministry of Defense. Increased funding in FY 2010 would be used to support the development of niche capabilities and to provide the necessary advanced equipment to operate successfully in coalition operations.