THE BALKANS IS OUR NEIGHBORHOOD, EUROPE IS OUR DESTINY: CROATIA’S ATTEMPT TO BUILD REGIONAL RELATIONS IN HOPES OF EU MEMBERSHIP

Allison Johnson

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Approved by:

Don Searing

Milada Vachudova

John Stephens
ABSTRACT

Allison Johnson: The Balkans is our Neighborhood, Europe is Our Destiny
(Under the direction of Don Searing)

On July 1, 2013 Croatia became the first state significantly impacted by the Yugoslav wars to join the European Union. While Croatia was able to progress from a new country in a state of war to an EU member state in just two decades, the country’s accession process was certainly difficult. In addition to structural reforms, the EU pushed Croatian governments to implement a progressive regional policy and help neighboring countries carry out similar reforms. This goal required Croatia to build relations with other members of the former Yugoslavia, including former enemies.

This paper analyzes the actions taken by Croatian governments and presidents to build relations with its bordering states, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro, but also Kosovo because Croatia has taken the initiative to become its most vocal ally in the region. The paper concludes that Croatia, as a newcomer to foreign relations, has progressed substantially from its nationalistic past and currently has good relations with its most immediate neighbors. There is still substantial room for improvement in the case of the Croatian-Serbian relationship, but it is certainly much better now than immediately after the wars of the former Yugoslavia. Croatia has been substantially influenced by its EU accession process, so it is likely that the EU’s socialization process would only increase Croatia’s willingness to work closely with its neighbors and support those that are still interested in joining the club.
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<td>Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice</td>
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<td>ICTY</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
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<td>LB</td>
<td>Ljubljanska Banka</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>SAA</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On July 1 2013 Croatia became the 28th member state of the European Union. Croatia is the second state of the former Yugoslavia to enter the EU, after Slovenia’s entry in 2009, and the first state that was significantly affected by the Yugoslav wars. The acceptance of the newest member state by “Old Europe” is a telling sign of how quickly politics can change in the modern world. Furthermore, the fact that Croatia was in a state of war less than two decades ago would seem to suggest the country’s dedication to a swift reform process.

As a result of Croatia’s progress, the EU has placed tremendous pressure on Croatia to support its Balkan neighbors to implement similar reforms. Brussels wants Croatia to act as a leader in the region and use its own experience to support the Europeanization process. The EU does not want to see Croatia act as Slovenia did during Croatia’s own accession process, when Slovenia blocked its neighbor’s accession to force an agreement on a long-running dispute. Thus, while working toward membership amid a crisis, Croatia’s main thorn in its side was not just the financial constraints but also the hostility of its neighbors. In addition to the Slovenia obstacle, Croatia faced the challenge of building relations with former enemies with whom communication was either minimal or nonexistent. With regional cooperation as a condition for membership, Croatia had to prove to Brussels it could earn Slovenia’s approval while also appeasing the other post-Yugoslav states and assisting their transformation.

The importance of the EU’s post-conflict attempt to stabilize and democratize the Balkans cannot be overstated. Despite Central Europe’s history of meddling in the Western
Balkans, the bloody wars of the 90s provoked but trivial efforts by the EU. Europe’s failures during this period attest to its weak security policy at the time; despite the EU’s role as a peace promoter, a role it has ascribed to itself, member states failed to prevent and manage conflicts in their own backyard. If Europe’s guilt for standing by through most of the conflicts is not enough of a reason to help the Balkans now, its reputation certainly is. The EU’s reputation depends on its ability to guide the region towards not only lasting peace but close cooperation. At a time when many doubt the value of the EU due to its financial and economic problems, the union could really use this boost. As a result, the EU has placed an enormous amount of pressure on Croatia to encourage the efforts of other Balkan states towards European integration. Croatia, as the Western Balkans’ most advanced country and the first EU member state to have been seriously affected by the Yugoslav wars, has been forced into the role of a regional leader. Croatia’s rigorous accession process, far more difficult than that of Slovenia or any other member state, should ideally prove to the region that membership is possible when committed to reform. If the EU succeeds in spreading optimism through the Balkans by way of Croatian accession, it could enhance Brussels’ credibility as a peace promoter and democratizer.

Considering the pressure Croatia faced, it is worth analyzing how Croatia attempted to repair relations with its closest neighbors. It seems probable that Croatia would have been reluctant to do much in the region during its first years of independence, especially considering the tradition of hostility with Serbia and the interest in supporting the Croat minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is more likely that Croatia made meaningful attempts towards regional cooperation as it moved closer to the EU, with a particular interest in improving relations with Slovenia since this was the only former Yugoslav state with the power to block its accession.
To address the question of how Croatia proved its potential to act as a “regional leader”, I will compare the stated foreign policy goals of Croatia with the attempts of the country’s political leaders to engage with their counterparts in the region. This requires me to first suggest a theoretical model for understanding Croatia’s interests, motivation, and self-perception. I will then offer a general background of the development of foreign policy goals in the new state of Croatia. Next, it is necessary to define which matters would have the largest effect on leaders’ attempt to build regional relations, specifically which matters would likely serve as the greatest challenges. Lastly, I will look at the efforts made by Croatia to build close regional relations and analyze the success these efforts had.
CHAPTER 2: MOTIVATION FOR A REGIONAL POLICY, THE ISSUES OF IDENTITY, AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

This section is dedicated to an overview of three theories of international relations: rationalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, and constructivism. Each theory focuses on different aspects of international relations; as a result, each one suggests a different rationale for Croatia’s motivation for EU integration and thus meeting the most difficult EU condition: regional cooperation and reconciliation.

Rationalism

Rationalism states that actors are always self-interested. The theory is based heavily on cost/benefit calculations, material incentives, and coercion. From this perspective, actors look to join an international organization for its perceived benefits and do not experience any fundamental change in interests or values as a result of joining. According to the widely cited Jeffrey T. Checkel, “even in those instances where [rationalist] analysts see interests as changing, they argue that change occurs slowly and as a function of the new incentive structures agents face” (2001, p. 556).

When applying rationalism to the Croatian case, it is easy to understand how a simple cost/benefit calculation of the necessary reforms against perceived benefits would have spurred interest in the EU immediately after independence. While NATO offered a security guarantee that Croatia desperately wanted following its war for independence, the EU offered the economic
solution, promising millions of euros in assistance programs and pre-accession funds; however, Croatia retrieved less than half of the total pre-accession funds available to it, suggesting it did not fully take advantage of the material incentives for accession. Also, while EU accession made sense for Croatia in 2000, rationalism cannot explain why it would have made sense after the financial crisis. Croatia endured the most difficult accession process to date and didn’t lose steam despite the crisis; in fact, the government’s rhetoric and implementation of reforms indicate Croatia was working most diligently towards meeting EU standards after the crisis peaked. The EU’s response to the crisis promised to be especially damaging to Croatia’s economy; for example, the new emphasis on public debt reduction with the EU’s excessive deficit procedure would pose a significant challenge to Croatia in the midst of its recession.

If rationalism doesn’t fully explain Croatia’s motivation for membership, it also doesn’t fully explain Croatia’s motivation to meet the conditions for membership. Rationalists would argue that norms are not internalized by elites but merely constrain their behavior (Checkel, 2001, p. 557). This would suggest that in repairing relations with its neighbors, the Croatian government merely adhered to a goal dictated to them and followed the EU-approved ways of doing so. However, this doesn’t offer a full explanation in scenarios where Croatia went above and beyond the requirements such as offering an official apology to Bosnia and Herzegovina for war crimes committed by the state of Croatia. It simply does not seem logical for Croatia to make such bold moves to satisfy EU demands for good regional relations when it did not even fully absorb the EU’s greatest incentive, the pre-accession funds, and its economic prospect was bleak. Rationalism cannot be entirely discounted but, for the purpose of this paper, rationalism will most likely only assist in explaining Croatia’s initial developments and will not guide the understanding of Croatia post-crisis. Considering material incentives do not sufficiently explain
the situation, it is worth considering domestic pressure through the liberal intergovernmentalist lens.

**Liberal Intergovernmentalism**

Andrew Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalism, while encompassing some parts of rationalist ideology, strives to explain EU integration by underlining “rational state behaviour in terms of optimizing economic benefits, through an asymmetric bargaining process, with state preferences shaped by domestic societal pressures” (Miosic-Lisjak, 2006, p. 101). This theory, with its emphasis on national preference formation, does not consider the importance of external pressures on national governments. Liberal intergovernmentalism expects governments to respond primarily to domestic pressure. According to this logic, there is no reason why Croatia should have cooperated with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in handing over indicted war criminals seen as heroes by the Croatian public. Although Croatia was hesitant to cooperate with the ICTY, it eventually came around to giving up the nation’s beloved war hero, Ante Gotovina. The Croatian government dragged its feet on the issue for some time but eventually responded to EU pressure to cooperate in finding Gotovina, proving both domestic and external pressures have influence. Croatia was “neither at the centre nor is it in control of the negotiation process” with the EU. This theory leaves out the important role of the EU in shaping individual states’ values and preferences.

While the Croatian government had to take into account the views of its citizenry, much of its foreign policy formation was a response to the conditions of accession (Miosic-Lisjak, 2006, p. 111). Liberal intergovernmentalism may prove useful when analyzing examples of Croatia’s reluctance to comply with EU demands; however, former Croatian governments have had to respond to more than just domestic pressure when formulating foreign policy and
therefore it is important to consider the interplay between the EU, Croatia, and its own understanding of its values and its future role. Constructivist theory could surely fill some of the gaps that liberal intergovernmentalism and rationalism leave.

**Constructivism**

Social constructivism states that “social construction”, the institutions and norms around which society is organized, are what actors base their preferences on (McNamara, 2010, p. 161). This social reality must be rooted in a value system and once actors adopt these values, they make certain decisions because they are seen as legitimate and agree with their internalized identities. Social constructivism also emphasizes the “mutual constitutiveness” of the social order which means the creators of the regulatory environment, those actors that originally set the norms, are constantly redefining themselves and re-envisioning their role in the world based on their stated values (Diez and Wiener, 2009, p. 48).

When applying the constructivist framework to a state’s foreign policy formation, the assumption is that the state’s identity is the most important factor. This seems very true when looking at Croatian rhetoric for EU integration which used “Europe” and “the EU” interchangeably. From Croatia’s point of view, it must be a part of the EU to once again establish itself as a true European state. This is important for Croatia as its chosen identity is much more Western European that it is Balkan. Like the Eastern European states of the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, Croatian elites constantly spoke of their “return to Europe”. As early as 2000, the Croatian Parliament’s Declaration on the Homeland War asserted Croatia was ready for real reform “as a country which shares the democratic values of the present western world . . . in the domains of politics, security, society and culture” (as cited in Horelt and Renner, 2008, p. 14). The former prime minister Iva Racan even presented a document titled “RE:member Croatia”
when applying for candidacy in 2003 (Miosic-Lisjak, 2006, p. 110). The interesting title suggests that Croatia strived for its place in the EU to once again be a part of the western world. Ines Sabalic, a Croatian journalist in Brussels, also confirms this sentiment when she insists that “Croats have always argued that they are part of Europe, not the Balkans” (“A cautious yes; Croatia and the European Union,” 2012).

**The Complexity of the Croatian Identity**

Although Croatian elites have clearly preferred to think of themselves as part of the West, this is only one aspect of a very complex identity. Croatia’s shared history with states it considers more “Balkan” that itself, as well as the way the Yugoslav Wars played out, have had implications for the Croatian historical narrative. The historical narrative, or the way Croatians interpret their past, is essential to its identity construction. Horelt and Renner explore four observable identity patterns that emerged after Croatia’s wars of independence. The four ways Croatia can see itself is as a heroic nation that courageously stood up to Serbian aggression, as an innocent nation with a few bad war criminals, as a Western nation that adheres to democratic values, and as a Balkan nation with the expected criminal habit (2008, p. 9). These identities exist simultaneously, sometimes overlap, and compete with each other so one or the other might gain dominance at certain points in time. As constructivism posits, the identity of Croatia is the main factor for explaining its foreign policy; therefore, Croatia’s numerous identities all suggest different policy options. The way these four identities relate is relevant for understanding what could be a schizophrenic regional policy, sometimes complying with EU mandates and sometimes not. By analyzing Croatian rhetoric and actions towards its neighbors, it is possible to answer which historical narrative has come out most successful.
In conclusion, rationalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, and constructivism all suggest different ways of understanding Croatian foreign policy at various points in history. The intersection of these three schools of thought, with an added emphasis on constructivism and the Croatian identity, can help explain Croatia’s motivation for an active regional policy. When Croatia initially started its reform process in hopes of EU membership, the new state could indeed see a prosperous future for itself and rationalist theory would easily explain why Croatia desired membership. However, when the probability of economic success changed for the worse, Croatia did not hesitate in its pursuit but rather increased the pace. Furthermore, the Croatian government may have responded to its citizens’ concerns at times, but it implemented difficult reforms and pursued a foreign policy that appeared unpopular domestically. Croatian elites might have looked inward at times but they often decided, for their country’s future, to respond to EU pressure and do what was unpopular at home. The identity explanation is more substantial for understanding Croatian governments’ enthusiasm in recent years. Therefore, constructivist theory helps scholars understand why Croatia is now conducting relations with those it fought only two decades ago. Constructivism would suggest that it underwent serious socialization, adopted new norms, and altered its historical narrative.
CHAPTER 3: THE EVOLUTION OF CROATIA’S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS

Ivo Josipovic, the third president of Croatia since 2010, delivered a lecture at the South Eastern European Studies Centre at Oxford on May 24, 2013 in which he outlined Croatia’s foreign policy objectives since 1992. The first objective was international recognition of the country and then, second, to establish its territorial integrity. Once Croatia accomplished both of these objectives, the next goal was to join the international community through membership in NATO and the EU. Josipovic, delivering this lecture just five weeks before Croatia’s entry into the EU, expressed his desire for further enlargement to his neighbors in the Western Balkans. In his concluding remarks, he promised Croatia would be at the disposal of all its neighbors in achieving the goals of Europeanization and reform.

Croatia’s stated foreign policy goals over time have generally followed Josipovic’s narrative (The Republic of Croatia’s Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs). Immediately after the Croatian War of Independence, the new state’s foreign policy was initially characterized by regional disengagement (Trkanjec, 2010). The situation looked as if it would change in 2000 when the country elected Stjepan Mesic as president and a Social Democratic Party (SDP) government, formed under Prime Minister Ivica Racan. Although this government focused primarily on domestic issues rather than improving regional relations, it made some steps toward joining the international community with its admittance to NATO’s Partnership for Peace and the WTO by July of 2000.
In 2003, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) came to government under the leadership of Ivo Sanader. Sanader set his main foreign policy goals as membership to NATO and the EU. To advance towards achieving these goals, Sanader fixed Croatia’s cooperation issue with The Hague tribunal and initiated EU membership talks (Sanader 2005). Sanader largely succeeded in his goals as Croatia was granted official candidate status by June of 2004 and joined NATO in April of 2009; still, he failed to push for an active regional policy.

After NATO accession under Sanader, Jadranka Kosor became prime minister. Under her leadership, and with Ivo Josipovic’s presidency starting in 2010, Croatia conducted a more determined foreign policy. These influential politicians focused even more on EU integration and regional cooperation than their predecessors. In 2011, the newly elected president Josipovic said Croatia’s new “regional policy is part of the European policy” (“Croatia's ‘serious foreign policy’ focused on EU, region in 2010,” 2010). The president expressed his intent to make his country a leader in the region, exactly what the EU had been waiting for.

After the EU finally confirmed Croatia had met the requirements for membership, the country signed the EU accession treaty in 2011 (Castle, 2011). In January of 2012 the Croatian public approved EU membership in a referendum and membership was ratified on July 1, 2013 making Croatia the newest member of the EU (Bilefsky, 2013). The EU has continued to push Croatia to act as a regional leader since accession, but there have been and continue to be real challenges to this.

**Challenges for Regional Relations**

A number of issues have likely complicated the country’s willingness to engage in an active regional policy which requires building relations with former enemies. The main challenges are those related to issues of legacy and identity.
Legacy issues in the Balkans have historical roots much older than the Yugoslav Wars of the 90s, but for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be limited to the breakup of Yugoslavia up until Croatian accession. Croatia’s main legacy issues, resulting from a history of war, are with some of its direct neighbors: Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Montenegro is also a state to consider as it assisted Serbian aggression during the 90s. How Croatia works with Kosovo may also be important as it would antagonize Serbia. However, even Slovenia is important to consider as it is the only other EU member state that was a part of the former Yugoslavia.

While Slovenians and Croatians never fought in the 90s, Slovenia has acted as a major obstacle to Croatian EU accession. Slovenia blocked Croatia’s accession twice, forcing its neighbor to surrender over disputes about border and banking issues that have existed since the breakup of Yugoslavia. Croatia’s EU bid likely depended on its ability to “jump through hoops” place by Slovenia.

Serbia is the country with which Croatia has the most lingering hostility. Serbia receives the most blame for war crimes while Croatia has traditionally been hesitant to acknowledge wrongdoings on its own side. This tension has led to a number of arguments both rhetorically, with politicians making snippy comments back and forth, and more formally, through genocide lawsuits before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Another issue for Croatian-Serbian relations is Serbia’s refusal to participate in events that embrace Kosovo, since Croatia recognized the self-proclaimed state early on and aims to engage Kosovo in regional initiatives as supported by the EU. While Croatia succeeds in putting its relations with Kosovo on a productive track, it may be at the expense of its relations with Serbia, which are already messy.

Bosnia and Herzegovina could also be a difficult neighbor for Croatia to work with considering it was the main victim of Croatian aggression outside of Croatian territory. Croatia’s
cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has been pushed by the EU as an important step towards reconciliation for these crimes in Bosnia. Also, both countries share their longest border with one another and this is likely to cause significant border issues.

History would also suggest that the Croatian-Montenegrin relationship could be an issue considering Montenegro was a strong Serbian ally during the Yugoslav wars. Montenegrin forces were responsible for substantial destruction of Dubrovnik, a historic port city in Southern Croatia along the Montenegrin border. Croatian-Montenegrin relations largely depends on Croatia’s view of Montenegro, whether it blames its neighbor for aggression inside its territory as it does for Serbia, and whether Montenegro can also confront its past and acknowledge such wrongdoings.

Many of the issues mentioned, such as border disputes and cooperation with The Hague can be dealt with diplomatically, yet one matter that cannot be easily changed is the question of the Croatian identity. A common perception Croatians have is that, despite the shared history, they have less in common with the Balkans than with Central or Western Europe. Due to some cultural commonalities with the West, for example the Catholic tradition, Croatians see themselves as very distinct from its immediate neighbors. Even amid the EU financial crisis, the Croatian government sold EU membership to the public based on rhetoric on national identity and its place with the West rather than economic benefits. The pro-EU rhetoric about identity resonated with the public as Croatians are in the midst of what Alex Crevar calls an “identity crisis.” He insists that despite Croatia’s geographic position in the Balkan Peninsula, “call a chic Zagrebian Balkan and prepare to get an earful” (2009). Ines Sabalic, a Croatian journalist in Brussels, also confirms this sentiment when she insists that “Croats have always argued that they
are part of Europe, not the Balkans ("A cautious yes; Croatia and the European Union," 2012). With this understanding of being entirely different from its neighbors, what motivation does Croatia have to reach out to them? The EU seems to be responsible for much of this pressure as it forces Croatia to not only deal with war criminals through cooperation with The Hague but also to act as a leader for other Balkan states.

Croatia’s entry into the EU assures the rest of the Balkans that membership is within reach as long as the countries are willing to undergo serious reform. EU officials depend on Croatia to prove this to its Balkan neighbors as much as the Balkan states depend on Croatia to ensure further enlargement. Most analysts agree that hindsight has shown that Romania and Bulgaria’s admission in 2007 was premature; thus, the enthusiasm for enlargement is quite weak at the moment. Dimitar Bechev, senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, maintains that “if Croatia is seen as a success it can bolster enlargement” (Castle, 2013). Dan Bilefsky, a correspondent for the New York Times with expertise in the Balkans, agrees and takes the notion a step further with the belief that “if Croatia turns into a problem child for the E.U., then it's going to be next to impossible for anyone else to join” (2013).

Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia are all hoping to join the EU. Kosovo and Serbia have made great strides in proving to Brussels that they are ready to join, even signing an agreement to overcome ethnic hostilities that led to Serbia receiving permission to start EU negotiations in 2014 and Kosovo gaining closer trade, economic and political relations. However, the possibility of disputes reemerging within the region cannot be ruled out and without Croatia’s superb behavior as a new member and its support of its neighbors, the Balkan region could face long-term marginalization.
CHAPTER 4: FOREIGN POLICY IN ACTION

Slovenia

For Croatia’s NATO and EU accession processes, it desperately relied on Slovenia as an ally. Slovenia has been a member of both NATO and the EU since 2004 and thus Croatia had to earn Slovenian approval to enter both organizations. This gave momentum to Croatian-Slovenian relations, although quite obviously Slovenia negotiated from a position of strength.

During the early 2000s, Croatia’s failure to form an active regional policy caused relations with Slovenia to take a turn for the worst, but Croatia had to overcome this if it wanted membership in both organizations.

Slovenia first utilized its power to obstruct Croatian transatlantic integration in 2008 when it blocked its entry to NATO, citing a border dispute. The disagreement is over a part of the Adriatic Sea left unmarked after the breakup of Yugoslavia. This particular issue has been one of the largest obstacles in repairing Croatian-Slovenian relations. In 2009 Slovenian nationalists even tried to force a referendum to once again block Croatia’s accession to NATO. The party attempted to collect the 40,000 signatories required for a referendum but failed, permitting Croatia’s admission to NATO (Reuters 2009).

Slovenia also exerted its power vis-à-vis Croatia by blocking its accession to the EU. After Slovenia voted against the Croatian accession process in 2009, Sanader stepped down as Prime Minister (Trkanjec, 2010). That year, Croatian Prime Minister Kosor proved her dedication to the accession process by working closely with her Slovenian counterpart to resolve
their border dispute. The ratification of the border deal removed one of the main obstacles for Croatia’s entry (The Associated Press, 2009).

Croatian-Slovenian relations improved after the border resolution in the late 2000s, but this reality was threatened in 2012 when an ongoing issue of Yugoslav-era foreign currency deposits came to the forefront of relations. Ljubljanska Banka (LB), a Slovenian entity, went bankrupt in the early 90s and its foreign currency deposits became Croatia’s public debt and paid out to LB clients. The problem arose when the Croatian government authorized two private Croatian banks to sue LB (“LB issue dominate Slovenia-Croatia relations,” 2013). Croatia brought the first-ever European Human Rights Court ruling against Slovenia regarding this matter and Slovenia demanded that Croatia withdraw its authorization for the lawsuits. Once again, Slovenia used its power as an EU member state to force Croatia to yield in an ongoing dispute by making this a condition for the Slovenian Parliament’s ratification of Croatia's EU Accession Treaty. Just like in the border dispute, Slovenia was successful. In March of 2013, the EU Commission announced that the two made a deal regarding the issue and thus Croatia no longer faced any opposition to membership (The EU Commission, 2013).

Despite having to surrender to Slovenia over long-running disputes, Croatia had an easier time cooperating with its neighbor on issues of broader regional importance. Responding to Brussels’ demands to act as a regional leader, Croatia has committed to working especially closely with Slovenia in regional initiatives. The best example of this effort is the Brdo Process, a collaboration between the two to assist their neighbors’ efforts towards transatlantic integration. Croatian and Slovenian prime ministers first decided to commit to this task during a meeting in January of 2010. Two months later, Croatia and Slovenia initiated the program at a conference in Brdo kod Kranja, a town in the Northwest of Slovenia, giving the process its name
(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia). This kind of cooperation between Croatia and Slovenia was unimaginable a few years before, proving Kosor and Josipović’s determination to make a reliable ally out of Slovenia and promote transatlanticism in the region to prove to Brussels it was assuming its role as a regional leader. Furthermore, the Croatian-Slovenian partnership on the Brdo Process has been very successful in its goal to motivate other Balkan states towards reform in hopes of European integration. French President Francois Hollande even attended the 2013 meeting in Brdo to demonstrate his support for the Balkans’ EU integration process (Bandic, 2013).

Although Croatia was forced to succumb to Slovenian pressure over bilateral issues in hopes of both NATO and EU integration, the two are now working as equal members of transatlantic organizations to coordinate support for others aspiring to follow their lead. From the rationalist perspective, Croatia was coerced into reaching less-than-favorable agreements with Slovenia as it desired membership in both organizations. The constructivist ideology seems more relevant for the development of relations in previous years, however, as it suggests that Croatian elites have been socialized to at least try out their role as a regional leader, with Slovenia assisting. Through efforts like the Brdo Process, the two countries are now working as equals to build regional solidarity and encourage Balkan states to seek membership in Euro-Atlantic organizations. In effect, Croatia’s entry to the EU has meant another actor responsible for leading the Balkans in the direction of Brussels.

Serbia

While Slovenia’s prior acceptance by the West forced Croatian submission, Croatia’s relations with Serbia is a different story entirely. Croatians still see Serbia as an aggressor
responsible for major destruction in its region, yet the state of Croatia has been pressured by the EU to help reform Serbia into a modern European state.

The Croatian-Serbian relationship was not any better in the first years of peace than before. Tudjman had no interest in working towards making Serbia an ally but even after his death, the reality did not change much. Mesic’s government in the early 2000s claimed it would develop relations with its immediate neighbors, including Serbia, but it made little effort to do so because of the Croatian public’s strong opposition. At the time, Croatian voters still clung to the past and therefore so did their government. Subsequent governments have attempted to repair relations with Serbia in aspiration of EU membership, and Serbia also had an interest as it wanted to initiate accession talks (Marini, 2013). Still, the countries face many difficulties considering how recent the war was. The main challenges have been related to unresolved war crimes, Serbia’s anger with the ICTY acquittal process, the refugee situation, and Croatian support of Kosovo.

A legal war between Croatia and Serbia began in 1999 when Croatia filed a lawsuit against Serbia in the ICJ for the murders of Croats. In 2009, after years of Serbia trying to convince Croatia to withdraw the suit, Serbia filed a countersuit against Croatia (Ristic, 2013). Throughout 2011, Josipovic and his Serbian counterpart Tadic met many times to discuss issues like this that hinder bilateral cooperation. The blossoming of this relationship quickly came to a halt, though, in November of 2012 when Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac, two Croatian generals, were acquitted of war crimes against Serbs. While the Croatians have responded joyfully, Serbs are outraged. This even led to a victory of nationalists in Serbia, electing Tomislav Nikolic, a former extreme nationalist, as president and Ivica Dacic, Milosevic’s former spokesperson, as prime minister (T.J., 2012). Nikolic consistently refused Josipovic’s proposals
for meetings because of his stark opposition to the acquittal of these generals. He made very offensive statements, even saying Croats may not return to the Croatian town of Vukovar, a town practically destroyed by Serbian forces in 1991, because it belongs to Serbia (Judah, “How Croatia and Serbia buried the hatch”).

Contrary to Nikolic’s statement, Croatia has greatly improved its refugee situation. Especially under Kosor, the Croatian government made its refugee policy and resettlement of its minority Serbs a higher priority. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees acknowledged Croatia’s achievements in March of 2010 while recommending further steps. Still, at this time, Croatia had already reconstructed over 50,000 houses for Serb returnees and even more improvements have been made since then (UNHCR, p. 3). Many Serbian politicians and NGOs point to the low number of Serb returnees to Croatia as proof that the state has not done enough, but the UNHCR and the U.S. government have recognized Croatia’s refugee situation as the best in the region. Despite tremendous support for returnees, the fact is that many Serbs have no interest in returning and while the Croatian government can offer incentives for refugees to return, it cannot force them to do so. Still, the Serbian government uses this as a point for argument and it is considerably difficult strain on relations.

Another issue that Croatia and Serbia have consistently fought over is Kosovo. Since 2008, Croatia has recognized Kosovo and included it in regional efforts despite Serbian governments’ refusal to recognize it or participate in events where Kosovar officials are present. This has become a major challenge for building peaceful relations. Possibly the biggest step Croatia has taken in establishing its role as a regional leader is the establishment of its annual summit. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, Croatia hosted a conference in 2006 focused on the “Future of Southeast Europe.” The Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
invited its neighbors to Dubrovnik to discuss issues relevant for the region’s future. The event concluded with a joint declaration emphasizing the attendee’s commitment to membership of NATO and the EU. The conference has been repeated every year based on relevant themes, such as in 2012 when it was organized for Croatia to share its EU accession experience with its neighbors (Jovanovic, 2013). Serbia has consistently refused to attend in protest of Kosovo’s participation (“Serbia boycotts Croatia Summit over Kosovo,” 2012). Serbian officials have even skipped out on less political events such as President Josipovic’s inauguration in 2010. Josipovic invited the Serbian President Tadic but he turned him down because Kosovar President Fatmir Sejdiu was invited too. (Trkanjec, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, Croatia and Slovenia have led the Brdo Process since 2010 to promote coordination on regional efforts towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Further confirming good relations between Croatia and Slovenia, the two have worked together to encourage Serbia to participate in Brdo events along with Kosovo. Three-way talks began under Prime Minister Kosor in 2010 when she met her Slovenian and Serbian counterparts to discuss the upcoming conference. The main obstacle of the conference’s success was, and continues to be, Serbia’s reluctance to attend due to Kosovo’s presence. For the first conference on March 20 2010, Serbia insisted that Kosovo attend the conference as Kosovo-UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administration Mission) (“Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia to continue three-way talks,” 2010). No compromise was met and Serbia refused to attend; still, the event has been repeated annually and Serbia actually showed at the most recent meeting on July 25 2013 just three months after reaching a landmark deal with Kosovo. The two reached an important deal over the future of the Serb-run region in Northern Kosovo (Barlovac, 2013). They also agreed not to block each other’s’ path towards EU integration. This agreement has paved the way for future discussion
between Serbia and Kosovo, making their mutual attendance possible at important political
events. Even French President Francois Hollande attended the 2013 conference to demonstrate
his support for the Balkans’ EU integration process (Bandic, 2013).

Josipovic has also made his own personal attempts at improving his relationship with
Nikolic, having resumed regular communication over the past year. The Croatian president even
visited Nikolic in Belgrade in October of 2013, marking the first time he visited Serbia since his
election. Still, the two have not been able to reach an agreement regarding their lawsuits against
each other. Nikolic promises to drop its genocide suit if Croatia drops its own, yet Josipovic
refuses to do so until the issues of missing Croats is addressed. An estimated 1,689 people have
still not been accounted for, 953 Croats and 736 Serbs (Marini, 2013). This is an issue that
Croatia is unlikely to budge on, even under future governments and presidents.

Croatian interest in relations with Serbia cannot be supported by rationalist theory, with
its focus on cost-benefit analysis, and even less so by the liberal intergovernmentalist
perspective, with its focus on domestic opinion. Many Croatian citizens are still wary of
Serbians, sometimes not so subtly and actually more hatful than wary. This is a perfect recipe to
continue a passive aggressive foreign policy towards Serbia yet this was not a viable option for a
state which sees its future in Europe. It would be overly optimistic to assume all Croatian elites
have radically transformed from their nationalist past and now welcome their Serbian
counterparts with open arms; however, some key figures in Croatian politics have obviously
managed to take the first steps in improving Croatia’s future with its former enemy. All things
considered, this seems to be a one-sided effort as Serbia has been largely unresponsive to
Croatia’s attempts to strengthen relations. The two still have disputes stemming from their
nationalist pasts and fundamental identity issues, but the Serbian government’s desire for EU
membership may have a positive effect on its willingness to, at the very least, maintain normal communication with Croatia. With Croatia’s accession, it is even more necessary for Nikolic to respond to his counterpart since he needs Croatia to not obstruct his country’s accession process. Croatia’s relations with Kosovo and Serbia’s obstinacy regarding this have also complicated things; however, the situation has improved since a Serbia-Kosovo agreement made in April of 2013. At this time, Serbian EU Integration Office Director Milan Pajevic expressed approval of Croatia’s stance, saying his Croatian counterparts are very motivated to help Serbia and that "on the working level, relations are just fantastic” (Judah, “How Croatia and Serbia buried the hatch”).

**Kosovo**

The most influential western nations, including the US and major European powers, were the first to recognize Kosovo when it unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in February of 2008. Croatia’s recognition of Kosovo was sure to worsen relations with Serbia, a relationship Croatia intends to repair. Despite the risk, Croatia recognized Kosovo in March of 2008. This swift recognition as well as Croatia’s support for Kosovo’s independence before the ICJ, its inclusion of Kosovo in regional initiatives, and public statements of support are Croatia’s main ways of guiding Kosovo towards Europeanization.

Croatia recognized Kosovo in March of 2008. The timing of this was likely strategic, as Croatia was hoping to join NATO by 2010 and was expected to receive an invitation the following month at the NATO summit in Bucharest (which it did). The Croatian government organized a session with the governments of Hungary and Bulgaria to adopt a joint statement. The statement was critical of the failed efforts of the international community to reach a solution between Belgrade and Pristina, endorsed Kosovar institutions in their commitment to human
rights, and connected the integrity of Kosovo to stability in the region (Government of the Republic of Croatia). As three states which border Serbian and have significant influence in the region, the statement was a powerful response to Kosovo’s declaration.

Croatia’s testimony before the ICJ was possibly the most notable example of its support for Kosovo’s integrity. Serbia filed a request for the ICJ opinion on Kosovo’s declaration of independence in August of 2008. When the case came before the ICJ in December of 2009, Serbia and Kosovo presented their arguments followed by the opinions of 27 states. Croatia was the only former Yugoslav state to participate, proving it was more readily willing to back Kosovo than its immediate neighbors. Croatia was represented by four officials including Andreja Metelko-Zgombic, the Chief Legal Advisor for the MFA, who delivered the state of Croatia’s official testimony. Metelko-Zgombic argued that Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence was in accordance with international law and that Kosovo had the same right to self-determination as the other former members of Yugoslavia. She cited the factors that led to Kosovo’s declaration of independence, focusing on human rights abuses carried out on behalf of the Serbian state. Metelko-Zgombic’s powerful argument led to the ICJ advisory opinion in July of 2010 stating that Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence was indeed not in violation of international law (ICJ). As the only member of the Former Yugoslavia to testify on the matter, Croatia played an important role in this ruling, strengthening the Croatia-Kosovo relationship.

In addition to its unwavering supporting for Kosovo’s integrity, Croatia consistently includes Kosovo in regional events despite Serbia’s objection. Josipovic invited Kosovar officials to his inauguration despite knowing this could threaten any success made in relations with Serbia (Trkanjec, 2010). Croatia also extended invitations to Kosovo for regional conferences such as the annual Croatia Summit. Although the Serbians in power refused to
attend the conference in 2012, former Serbian President Boris Tadic came as a personal guest of
the Croatian prime minister. At the event, Tadic even shook Kosovar Prime Minister Hashim
Thaci’s hand. Serbia’s former ambassador to Germany agreed that events such as this could
further enable interaction between the two and improve their relations (Jovanovic, 2012). By not
waning in its support of Kosovo, Croatia is forcing a reality on Serbia that it is closer to
accepting.

The final form of public support Croatia demonstrates for Kosovo is through amicable
speech, and former Croatian Prime Minister Kosor’s statements serve as the best example.
During a trip to Pristina, Kosor made the bold statement that Kosovo was her country’s “best
friend because both countries suffered from the nationalist and war-making regime of late
Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s” (Dervisbegovic, 2014). Croatia has made great
effort to publicly support Kosovo in public statements and by including it in regional initiatives
to support states’ eventual European integration; the most effective example may be the delivery
Croatia’s opinion at the public hearing of the ICJ ruling on Kosovo’s independence. In the run up
to Croatia’s entry to the EU, it proved that it will use its voice and power to support Kosovo’s
ambitions as a true European state.

Since Kosovo’s declaration of independence, Croatia has proven to be one of its closest
allies, yet Croatia’s unwavering support of the controversial state does not fit neatly into a single
theoretical framework. Rationalist theory applies well in the event of the Croatian government’s
timely recognition of Kosovo, right before a NATO summit at which it expected to receive
invitation for membership. Croatia’s incentive for this first step, to join the West’s security
alliance, was tangible and immediate; there were no tangible or immediate rewards, however, for
arguing for Kosovo’s independence before the ICJ or including Kosovo in regional initiatives
despite the strain this put on Croatian-Serbian relations. When considering the identity element of constructivist theory, it is much easier to comprehend Croatia’s relentless support of Kosovo. The concept of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” perfectly describes the foundation of these relations, as Croatian politicians have related Kosovo’s struggle for independence to Croatia’s own. If Serbia was the enemy aggressor in both nations’ historical narratives, the two have some common understanding (Thorpe, 2008). While this is a likely friendship considering the two countries’ common adversary, the dynamics also help Croatia fulfill its obligation to lead the region towards reform.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

While Croatia takes issue with Serbia for its aggression in Croatian territory, the story is the direct opposite in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatian violence in Bosnia and Tudjman’s collaborative effort to divide Bosnian territory with Milosevic are the main examples of Croatian war crimes outside of its territory. After the cessation of violence in Croatia, Tudjman still did very little to repair his country’s relationship with Bosnia and Herzegovina. He continued to support Bosnian Croats, further destabilizing the region even in peaceful times. He also refused to pressure Bosnian Croats to comply with the Dayton accords. In 1998, German and French Foreign Ministers went to Zagreb to speak with Tudjman. They warned him that Croatia could not develop ties with the EU unless it committed to doing a number of things, including supporting peace in Bosnia. Specifically, the foreign ministers warned that Croatia’s behavior would prevent it from joining the EU’s assistance program and initiate talks on a cooperation treaty (“France and Germany warn Croatia,” 1998). Since then, Croatia has become the world’s most vocal supporter of extending EU candidate status to Bosnia, but Croatian assistance to its bordering country does not seem to go much further than this.
In 2000, the makeup of Croatian elites changed but policy towards Bosnia did not undergo as radical a transformation. Racan became prime minister after Tudjman’s death and did begin to withdraw support for Bosnian Croats, while newly-elected President Mesic began his term with a visit to Bosnia Herzegovina, an indication of his government’s intention to improve relations (Knaus, 2012, p. 197). Mesic, however, succumbed to domestic pressure and failed to create an active regional policy; thus, Croatian-Bosnian relations remained stagnant (Trkanjec, 2010).

More significant changes in Croatian-Bosnian relations began when Ivo Sanader became prime minister in 2003. In hopes of pleasing the EU, he further consolidated moves to cut off support for Bosnian Croat organizations, sending the message that the state of Bosnia, not Croatia, was their home (Judah, “Croatia: From isolation to EU membership”). Sanader also began to arrest Bosnian-Croat war criminals, a move that was unthinkable under previous governments (Bilefsky, 2013). This effectively allowed his government to start membership talks.

More recently, Josipovic has made stronger statements about the situation in Bosnia. One of the most important actions he took towards reconciliation during Croatia’s accession process was when visited the Bosnian Parliament in April of 2010 and extended an apology of sorts for his country’s attempts to split up Bosnia and the massacres that resulted. The apology was a surprise to the Croatian public, but was generally appreciated as it would improve bilateral relations. When questioned about the statement, Josipovic said “someone had to take one step further,” (“Croatia's ‘serious foreign policy’ focused on EU, region in 2010,” 2010). He insisted his expression of regret for the past was not done as a response to any order, not by his government or the EU. He also was quoted saying that the responsible thing to do for all
politicians in the region is to “see both good and bad sides of the policy their country was conducting” (Fonet, 2010). This statement was quite revolutionary as it was the first public statement of a Croatian official expressing remorse for the Bosniaks affected by Bosnian Croat ethnic cleansing. It is remarkable that this occurred over three years before the conviction of key members of the Croat leadership (ICTY).

The main lingering issues in Croatian-Bosnian relations have been related to their large common border. Croatian and Bosnian ministers of foreign affairs met with the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy in the framework of Trilateral Ministerial meetings. In June of 2013, the two representatives, with the Commissioner’s support, agreed on three treaties concerning border management. In one of the treaties, Croatia agreed to grant Bosnia permission to continue using one of its ports despite the fact that it would soon become EU territory. This move allows Bosnian exports of agricultural products to continue unaffected by Croatia’s accession to the EU, proving that both Croatia and the EU are interested in the growth of the Bosnian economy. Furthermore, the Croatian representative agreed to set up the necessary structures to allow Bosnian exports to reach countries of the EU- including Croatia, its largest trade partner. This is important because the Bosnian economy could likely collapse if Croatia ceased close trade with its neighbor. In this way, the economic success of Croatia can have a very real effect on Bosnia and Herzegovina (Fule, 2013).

Croatia still has a complicated connection to Bosnia through its Croat population. The international community sent a clear message to former Croatian governments to renounce control of Bosnian Croats and respect the Dayton Accords arrangement. Croatia’s response to this type of coercion and heavy influence was in line with rationalist ideology, but
constructivism would stress the likely possibility that Croatia intends to make Bosnia its policy niche within the EU. As the only EU member state with a significant influence on Bosnia, Croatia could be instrumental in working towards a practical solution for Bosnia’s future. Croatia’s change in foreign policy direction can be seen in its shift in focus back on Bosnia to work towards reconciliation, economic support, and resolution of almost all bilateral issues. Despite this optimistic picture and Croatia’s influence on Bosnia’s future via the EU, Croatia’s status as an EU member could also complicate other matters. As many Bosnian Croats have dual citizenship, Croatia’s entry to the EU is also a major perk for Bosnian Croats. Croatian politicians have acknowledged that this reality could worsen ethnic relations among Bosnians as it further exacerbates their inequalities. Also, Croatia is not the only country in the region with significant influence in Bosnia- Serbia still has the ability to influence the state of play in Bosnia through its Serb minority but also through economic means. For these reasons, Croatia must be vigorous in its assistance of the Bosnian reform and integration process, while also advocating for durable solutions to the tense situation in Bosnia.

Montenegro

Despite the fact that Montenegrin forces allied with Serbia during the Yugoslav wars of independence, even destroying much of the historic port city of Dubrovnik, current relations between Montenegro and Croatia could not be better (Bilefsky, 2009). Since 2000 when Montenegro’s previous prime minister Milo Djukanovic apologized to Croatia for his country’s actions in Croatian territory, the two countries have not had any serious conflicts (Judah, “How Croatia and Serbia buried the hatch”). Like Croatia, Montenegro was able to reach a “wide consensus” on Euro-Atlantic integration (Jovic, p. 175). This consensus has made Montenegro
the next state furthest along in its Euro-Atlantic integration process, and Croatia has shown great enthusiasm to help.

In December of 2008, Montenegro submitted its application to the EU. In March of 2009, it came before the Council but instead of forwarding it to the Commission as usual, Germany (with other states’ support) refused, blocking its application until late 2010 (Mihovilovic, 2010; Council of the European Union). Following this unfortunate decision for Montenegro, Croatia upped its support for its neighbor. The former Croatian president, Stjepan Mesic, emphasized Croatia’s readiness to help Montenegro in its efforts to join both the EU and NATO. That year, Croatia doubled its investment in Montenegro, compared to 2008’s figures, and committed to helping to improve Montenegro’s infrastructure in the long-term (“Relations between Montenegro and Croatia on rise”). On the surface, this assistance seems likely and the relationship seems supportive. After Croatia completed accession negotiations with the EU in 2011, Montenegrin president Vujanovic was full of congratulatory remarks. He insisted this was “a success not just for Croatia but also for the region and for Montenegro as its neighbour, because it is certain that Croatia will strongly promote Montenegro's strategic interests,” (“Josipovic, Vujanovic: Croatian-Montenegrin relations very good,” 2011). At this time, Croatia promised Montenegro, an EU candidate since December of 2010, additional support in its candidacy.

One way Croatia has assisted the Montenegrin accession process to the EU and NATO has been by granting access to Croatian translations of EU legislation. On June 13 2012, the Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic and her counterpart signed an agreement on Euro-Atlantic partnership, directed at Croatian assistance to Montenegro in its reform process. Most
notably, the agreement gave Montenegro access to its most recent EU legislation adopted later in its accession process (Milosevic, 2013).

Less closely related to Euro-Atlantic integration, Croatia has been able to collaborate with Montenegro on issues of transnational crime, a subject that has been problematic for other countries in the region. The two countries’ ministers of justice were able to reach an agreement to promote cooperation regarding transnational crime, primarily organized crime and corruption. As a result, Croatia and Montenegro can support each other’s efforts in combatting crime and establish the framework for mutual enforcement of court decisions (Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister for political system, foreign and interior policy, 2011).

The only remaining dispute between Croatia and Montenegro is over the Prevlaka peninsula. Both have claimed the peninsula since the breakup of Yugoslavia. Still, the unsettled boundary issue has not been a major conflict and the two have complied with an interim agreement that defines the peninsula as Croatian territory and the surrounding waters as Montenegrin since 2002 (Milosevic, 2013).

Despite past wartime issues, relations between Croatia and Montenegro seem to be very amicable. Croatia has demonstrated its willingness to support Montenegro as it seems the next most probable EU member. In late 2011, Montenegrin President Filip Vujanovic even said that Croatian-Montenegrin relations are "an example that should be followed by the region” (“Josipovic, Vujanovic: Croatian-Montenegrin relations very good,” 2011). The Croatian government has some practical interest in maintaining good relations with Montenegro, as they share a border and have strategic interest in a disputed peninsula, but it does not have any obvious incentive to go above and beyond in its attempts. Again, this seemingly “goodwill” of Croatian elites to assist their neighbors, such as by sharing Croatia’s own translation of EU
documents, further supports the constructivist prediction that Croatia begins to assume a role as a regional leader. As the next candidate to meet EU standards in the foreseeable future, Montenegro has a good reason to respond to the positive Croatian support.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Croatia has come a long way in its foreign policy development and is currently the most dynamic actor in the Balkan region. The new country’s attempt to engage with both its former compatriots and enemies was by all means a great endeavor. Croatia’s initial motivation to repair regional relations was most likely in response to international pressure, proven by such actions as its surrender to Slovenia over long-running disputes in order to remove the final obstacles to NATO and EU integration; however, Croatia seems to have a genuine interest in helping neighbors such as Kosovo based on values, supporting its integrity despite the consequences, or Montenegro as it helps its ally secure a future in Europe in hopes of another stable partner in the region. Croatia’s interest in the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is less simple, as it is concerned with this victim of Croatian aggression and also their largest common border.

Even in the case of Serbia, Croatia has attempted to work on legacy issues that hit close to home, even when this upsets the Croatian public. The problem with the Croatian-Serbian relationship today is that whenever Croatia has put forth the effort to work on concrete political objectives with Serbia, progress has been interrupted by recurring reminders of their past. The challenges in this relationship, related to the nations’ different experiences through numerous wars and fundamental differences of identity, are too great to be dealt with in a matter twenty years. If Serbia becomes more serious about pursuing EU membership, the two might be able to work out lasting differences; however, this would be a discussion between a member and a
nonmember, and there is no guarantee Croatia will not use its veto power regarding enlargement to force serious action from Serbia.

The EU goal was clearly to socialize Croatia into a regional leader with a positive influence on countries with which it shares a tremendous amount of history. Croatia dived into foreign policy as a newly independent state, and its initial priorities focused on issues the government knew would reap the most benefits and advance its country’s NATO and EU accession processes. External pressure and material incentives were real motivators at a point in time, but Croatian elites seemed most determined when their country’s economic prospects were bleak. In contrast to liberal intergovernmentalist thinking, they made difficult choices that were at odds with public opinion. As the socialization emphasis of constructivist theory would have suggested, the Croatian government has embraced the role of regional leader and is sharing its new expertise with neighbors and continues to assure them of the EU process.

Though the government is on its way towards peaceful relations with its former enemies, the possibility of future disputes between Croatia and its Balkan neighbors, particularly Serbia, cannot be ruled out; however, the country’s EU accession process has proved that leadership is the key ingredient for access. The willingness of Croatian politicians to swallow their pride, fight nationalist sentiments, and reach agreements with these powers proves that EU membership is indeed a powerful force guiding democratization in the Balkans.
## APENDIX 1: CROATIA EU TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01-06-2000</td>
<td>Feira European Council states all SAP countries are &quot;potential candidates&quot; for EU membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-10-2001</td>
<td>Stabilization and Association Agreement signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-02-2003</td>
<td>Croatia applies for EU membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-04-2004</td>
<td>Commission approves Croatia's application for EU membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-06-2004</td>
<td>Council confirms Croatia as candidate country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-12-2004</td>
<td>Council sets 17 March 2005 as start date for negotiations conditional upon full cooperation with the ICTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-02-2005</td>
<td>Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) enters into force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-03-2005</td>
<td>EU postpones start of accession negotiations due to failure to cooperate with ICTY but adopts negotiation framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-10-2005</td>
<td>'Screening' stage of accession negotiations begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-06-2006</td>
<td>1st chapter of accession negotiations formally opened and provisionally closed at ministerial-level conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-06-2011</td>
<td>Last of the 35 negotiating chapters is closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-10-2011</td>
<td>Commission issues favorable opinion on Croatia’s accession to EU and adopts last progress report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06-12-2011</td>
<td>Council adopts decision on admission of Croatia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09-12-2011</td>
<td>EU and Croatia sign accession treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-01-2012</td>
<td>66% of voters approve of EU membership in referendum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-07-2013</td>
<td>Croatia joins the EU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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