

## CROATIA BECOMES THE 28TH MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

On July 1, 2013, the world looked on while Croatia became the 28<sup>th</sup> member of the European Union (EU), the second country from the former Yugoslavia to join the EU. Much has changed in the twenty years following the 'bloody wars' in the Balkans. The region went through the process of devolution, the political weakening of centralized state authority, and what was once Yugoslavia is now seven separate countries.\*

While some political ties were torn apart, new linkages are being made, and the most logical organization for Croatia to partner with is the EU. By joining, Croatia is a part of a supranational organization; supranationalism involves three or more countries cooperating on political, economic or legal issues. Since the global economic downturn in 2009, the EU has lost some of its economic strength, but it is still the largest and most influential trading bloc in the world today. Still, critics are wondering aloud whether EU membership for Croatia is worth the trouble. For the EU, their recent struggles are one of the reasons why they wanted Croatia to join now. Adding a 28<sup>th</sup> member serves to show that being a part of the EU is still desirable while bringing hope to other potential applicants in the Balkans.

Joining the EU is no small feat; they have standards and regulations that member nations agree upon, and applicants have to comply for years before being admitted. Under the European Union's guidance 350 new laws have been passed in Croatia, coopera-

tion has been given to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the stagnant economy was overhauled to be a part of that future, dampening the enthusiasm of many Croatians. Some asked, "What is the incentive for joining?"

Even if the EU isn't the economic powerhouse it was 10 years ago, Croatia is in the 5<sup>th</sup> straight year of recession and has a 40% youth unemployment rate. Croatians desperately want to strengthen their economy and see the EU as their chance for greater stability. Croatia has not yet changed their currency to the Euro, so they are not currently connected to its fiscal solvency issues. However, once Croatia meets the EU's requirements they will have to adopt the Euro as a part of their membership obligations, whereas some countries receive a special exemption (like the UK or Denmark) which would allow them to opt-in to the Euro Zone if and when they choose.

### Introducing the Next Member of the E.U.



Membership does have some tremendous advantages though. Croatian businesses are hoping for more direct investment. Already, EU member countries have earmarked over \$15 billion in aid for Croatia (all with some conditions and strings attached). For Croatian consumers, the increased economic connectivity will not only expand their options but greater competition will lower their costs. Politically, Croatia's border will open to other member states as stipulated in the Schengen Treaty, and their border with Slovenia and Hungary will also no longer be checked, meaning that the 500

million people populating the EU will no longer need a passport to visit Croatia. Tourism, which already accounts for one fifth of Croatia's economy, is expected to swell and be a great boost for other sectors of the economy.

While initially leery of admitting Croatia due to political corruption and harboring of war criminals, the EU has shown its diplomatic prowess in obtaining fundamental rights for Croatia's population. By pressuring Croatian law to change to fit EU social norms, Croatian citizens are getting a more open, democratic government that will be held accountable for maintaining human rights for minority groups. Many analysts feel that this will bring greater political stability to the Balkans. President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, was in Croatia's capital, Zagreb, to celebrate July 1<sup>st</sup> and told the crowd, "This will change the life of this nation for good."

The world will watch with interest to see how Croatia negotiates the future. The EU will also closely monitor their progress as they debate whether or not to allow more countries such as Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro to join.

\*Slovenia was the first former Yugoslavian country to join the EU. The seven countries that constituted the former Yugoslavia are Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (a single country), Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo. While many countries recognize Kosovo's sovereignty, all do not.

And that is the Geography News Network. July 7, 2013. #3.

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### **SOURCES:**

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