

## Foreword

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As it is well-known, full inclusion into the Euro-Atlantic integrations is one of Croatia's strongest motivating factors and a driving force in shaping our policies. Croatia is ready to meet all criteria necessary for a full-fledged membership both of the European Union (EU) and NATO. Croatia has already been firmly entrenched in the European processes and with the opening of accession negotiations our ties with the EU are becoming stronger and stronger every day. Furthermore, Croatia has always been committed to play a constructive role in the stabilisation of South East Europe (SEE) as the Union's partner through enhancement of bilateral relations with our neighbours and by comprehensive regional co-operation.

At present, the countries of the region are going through different stages of the process of transformation and have achieved maybe different levels of democratisation but they are all progressing in the same direction. Reforming the security sector into a democratic and professional service to the citizens is of great importance for our long-term stability and economic development. Moreover, it is a precondition for the EU and NATO accession.

With regard to Croatia's EU accession process, explanatory and bilateral screenings for Chapter 31, Common Foreign and Security Policy, as one of the last in the row, have been successfully completed presenting Croatia's accomplishments in the implementation of ESDP standards concerning both civilian and military crisis management.

The NATO membership perspective rests upon the same political values and criteria, with security and defence co-operation gaining even more importance in today's world burdened with new kinds of security threats.

SEE is a very sensitive area not only due to the recent conflicts, but also due to its position on the so-called *Balkan Route*. The European Union and NATO could ill-afford to have a “black hole” in such an important geo-strategic area, if for nothing else than for its religious and ethnic diversities and divisions with potentials for extremisms and violence.

The SSR (Security Sector Reform) in SEE has gained in importance since it comprises border management, police reform, intelligence reform and very importantly parliamentary oversight. The process of reforming the security sector should involve the local government as well. So far, civil society has played a constructive role in the region by promoting the reforms in this sensitive sector. Croatia as well supports the development of the civil society and the Government adopted the National Strategy for Civil Society Development in July 2006. In this light, today’s conference is the best example of civil society contribution to reform processes.

Similar to the EU mechanisms that are to ensure adequate preparedness of South East European countries to join the EU, NATO has its own specific mechanisms to guide aspirant countries to the stage where they are capable of joining the Alliance. In the case of Croatia, and some other South East European countries, these are the Partnership for Peace and the US-Adriatic Charter, through which we can show our commitment and achievements.

NATO has praised Croatia’s achievements, among which participation in the US-Adriatic Charter and contribution to NATO mission in Afghanistan have their prominent place. We have completed the fifth Membership Action Plan (MAP) Cycle and I believe we have every reason to expect that at the forthcoming NATO summit in Riga a strong commitment to Croatia’s future membership will be confirmed.

The Republic of Croatia has a key, forerunner role in the stabilisation of the region as a country, which could serve as a role model to the region in the efficient implementation of the reforms of the security system. Croatia has made a significant progress in fulfilling the political criteria, our economic performance is very good, defence and judiciary reforms

are well underway, and we are making headway in the implementation of NATO legal and security requirements. The Annual National Programme (ANP), for the fifth MAP cycle (2006/07) was adopted by the Government on 14 September 2006. Last year the “Strategic Defence Review” (SDR) was adopted by the Government and welcomed by NATO. It is followed by the “Long-term Development Plan (LTDP) for the Armed Forces” (2006-2015), which has been adopted by the Government and the Parliament.

A profound transformation of the Croatian Armed Forces is well under way with a goal of having modern, fully professional, well-equipped, mobile, deployable, NATO-compatible and, very importantly, financially affordable military forces.

During the previous Action Plan, the legislation has been amended, and in accordance to that, the reform of the security/intelligence system has started. On 30 June 2006, the Security and Intelligence System Act was adopted. The Act foresees two agencies: the Security and Intelligence Agency, and the Military Security and Intelligence Agency.

The new Act lays the ground for adopting three laws, which will be the basis for organising a uniform system of information security – the Data Secrecy Act, the System of Information Security Act, and the Security Clearances Act, which will be adopted by the end of 2006.

The Republic of Croatia has already developed significant crisis management capacities. Improved capacities will qualify Croatian forces for participation in complex civil and military conflict management operations led by the EU and NATO.

The reform of the home affairs has also been focused on the European criteria and standards. In 2002, the Ministry of Interior has started a set of reforms of the Croatian Police in the areas of the internal democratisation of the police force, police educational system, public relations reform, the organisation of the communal police, the enhancement of the crime prevention, and the reform of the operational-preventive work of the policemen.

The Republic of Croatia has continued to play an active role in many regional initiatives, which have further contributed to the stabilisation of the region.

Euro-Atlantic integration is our goal – but not an aim in itself. Once achieved, it proves that the country has reached a level of stability, democracy, competence, efficiency, reliability and economic development, which ensures its individual successful future existence, as well as its contribution to the strengthening of the EU and its constructive participation in global affairs.

The reform of the security and defence system of the countries of the so-called ‘Western Balkans’ is one of the key processes of the association and integration into Euro-Atlantic organisations, and this is a process not the least separated from the process of the judiciary reform, fight against the corruption and organised crime, and the process of the approximation of national legislation to the *acquis communautaire*.

Croatia has a generally accepted profile of a stable, democratic European country which is rapidly progressing in the process of the security system reform, capable of taking its share of responsibility for strengthening regional, European and Euro-Atlantic values in the name of peace, stability and progress. Of course, the image underlines the responsibility. The Republic of Croatia will be up to the challenge, as I am confident that the rest of the region will follow.