

PERSPEKTIVY VÝVOJE GEOPOLITICKÉHO POSTAVENÍ CHORVATSKÉ REPUBLIKY

PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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Abstrakt

Tento článek analyzuje, do jaké míry byla Chorvatská republika doposud schopna využít své výhodné geografické polohy a dalších geografických vlastností svého území ke zlepšení svého geopolitického postavení. Článek využívá metodu neoklasické geopolitiky. Provedená analýza ukazuje, že geopolitičtí činitelé si jsou vědomi potenciálu chorvatského území, ale také že stávající geopolitický design může být doplněn o nové cíle, jejichž realizace by mohla umožnit lepší využití relativního potenciálu chorvatského státu.

Abstract

This article analyses to what extent the Republic of Croatia has so far been able to use its favourable geographical position and other geographical features of its territory to improve its own geopolitical position. The article uses the method of neoclassical geopolitics. The conducted analysis shows that the geopolitical agents are aware of the potential of the Croatian territory and that some geopolitical goals are defined in the National Security Strategy. Consequently, Croatian transport infrastructure is constantly being built, modernized, and partly connects to the network of pan-European corridors. Croatia has been able to use its favourable geographical position in defining and implementing its foreign policy goals.

Klíčová slova

Geopolitická pozice; geopolitický design; koridorový stát; geopolitická dynamika; relativní potenciál.

Keywords

Geopolitical position; geopolitical design; corridor state; geopolitical dynamics; relative potential.

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INTRODUCTION

As a basis for the analysis of the foreign policy and security activities of a country, its geographical position is still cited today. The geographical characteristics of a country also determine its geopolitical significance and have a great influence on its international activities. Thus, in defining national interests, goals and strategies for their realization, the influence of a geographical factor cannot be avoided - whether it is a coastal or land-locked country or an island country, whether it has significant natural and other resources, what the topology of its relief and geography of its identity are, etc. In this way, the geographical factor determines the geopolitical and geostrategic position of the country that affects its positioning and behaviour in international order.¹

This paper aims to answer the question whether Croatia has been able to use its favourable geographical position in defining and implementing its foreign policy goals. Using the method of geopolitical analysis of the neoclassical geopolitics, the geographical features of the Croatian territory and its influence on the relative power of Croatia will be described first. After that, the geopolitical dynamics of continuity that influence the morphogenesis of the Croatian state throughout the history and its effects will be presented. Finally, the Croatian geopolitical design and perspective of its development will be described.

METHODOLOGY

“A geopolitical study is a descriptive-analytical approach that aims to explain the impact of the geographical setting and other elements of potential, filtered by the geopolitical agent’s perception and capacities, on foreign policy and, by extension, on international politics.”²

In this paper, we will apply the methodological model of neoclassical geopolitics developed by Nuno Morgado, which includes specific methodological steps with the analysis of three sets of variables: independent variables (the factor of physical geography, geography of identity and resources), intervening variables (geopolitical agents), and dependent variables (existing strategic documents - geopolitical design or grand strategy).

One of the results of the independent variable analysis is the relative potential of actors of power. The result of analyses should also be the identification of the geopolitical dynamics of continuity as a prerequisite for an objective definition of foreign policy goals and successful political action. In this case study, the geohistorical approach will be used to point out the technique of the “geohistorical deductions” to identify these systemic stimuli.

¹ GRYGIEL, Jakub J. *Great powers and geopolitical change*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0801884801. pp. 21-22.

² MORGADO, Nuno. Neoclassical geopolitics: Preliminary theoretical principles and methodological guidelines. *International problems* (online). 23.12.2020, [cit.2022-08-29.]. Available from: <http://www.doiserbia.nb.rs/issue.aspx?issueid=3651>

An important principle of neoclassical geopolitics is possibilism, which is nothing but refusal of determinism. The state can take advantage of the benefits offered by nature, but it does not have to. Even when it tries to use the potential of the nature, the outcome can be positive or negative. Ultimately, it depends on the decision of the intervening variables represented by geopolitical agents whose focus is on international relations (president of the state, prime minister, ministers of foreign affairs and defence). The principle of possibilism leaves a possibility that the geopolitical agent, for some reason, ignores the influence that geography wields on international politics (geomisguidance).

Dependent variables are represented by already existing strategic documents. Geopolitical design³ is the central concept of neoclassical geopolitics. It represents a network of organized and prioritized goals, which differ from each other in whether they correspond to the logic of ambitions, or to the logic of counter-threats, the goal of which is to oppose the ambitions of others that are contrary to our interests.⁴ By analysing the Croatian strategic documents we will identify and later describe the defined strategic goals and foreign policy outcomes related to the geopolitical factors.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE CROATIAN TERRITORY: RELATIVE POTENTIAL OF THE CROATIAN STATE

Croatia has a favourable geographical position of a coastal state. Access to the Adriatic Sea enables Croatia to participate more intensively in the world's economic exchange. The Adriatic Sea is a tributary of the Mediterranean Sea, which is connected to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans via Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Croatia, as a coastal state in search of resources that are vital for its survival and development, can use the network of all the world's most important maritime routes. The Adriatic Sea is the most important longitudinal traffic route for Croatia. It penetrates deep into the European mainland, which is why it has great traffic significance also for other economically developed and densely populated countries of the Central Europe and for countries of the Southeastern Europe. At the same time, access to the sea allows Croatia to exploit the natural resources of the Adriatic Sea and its seabed. The surface of the territorial sea amounts to 31,067 km².

The geographical position of Croatia is specific also due to the fact that its national territory is in the area of direct contact of three European regions - the Mediterranean (Adriatic Sea), Central Europe and Southeastern Europe, between maritime and land regions in Europe, respectively. Two traffic paths place the Croatian territory at the centre of the transport network of the Central and Southeastern Europe. The first direction extends from Western and Central Europe to Southeastern Europe and Asia Minor. The second direction extends from the Baltic Sea across the Danube region to the Adriatic Sea. Both directions intersect at the Zagreb hub, which is also a key transport intersection which connects all Croatian regions.

³ CHAUPRADE, Aymeric; THUAL, François. *Dictionnaire de Géopolitique*. Ellipses, Paris. 1999. ISBN 2-7298-9984-7, pp. 492-497.

⁴ The geopolitical design is materialized in the form of diplomatic, military, and special design (special forces and intelligence services). See CHAUPRADE, THUAL ref. 3, pp. 492-497.

The favourable Croatian geographical position has historically been the motive for some landlocked countries in Central and Southeastern Europe to use the Croatian territory as a transit route in their constant search for natural resources. For others, it was one of the important motives for pursuing an aggressive, conquering policy towards Croatia (for example, the “Greater Serbia” project).

The advantage of a favourable geographical position has not resulted in an advantageous geopolitical position also due to an unusually elongated territorial shape of Croatia. Today’s Croatian territorial shape appeared at the beginning of the 17th century. The borders of Croatia took on a completely new, so called horseshoe shape around the present territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The elongated shape of the Croatian territory negatively affects the geostrategic position of Croatia.

“From the point of view of defence of the state, the ratio between the length of the border and the area, an irregular and elongated shape of the land and the large indentation of the coastal area, large relief and climatological differences are demanding and very complex geographical features. In some parts of the country, the mainland is very narrow. This has resulted in a small available battlefield and operational depth and has significantly complicated the implementation of defensive operations.”⁵

A strategic weakness of the Croatian territory is also evident by the claim that *“in modern Europe there is no state that has such an unfavourably composed area as Croatia”*.⁶ It is precisely the *“unfavourably composed”*⁷ Croatian area that can enable the opponent to jeopardize the reliability of transit through the Croatian territory. To potential enemies, as shown during the Homeland War, such an area gives the opportunity for a simultaneous attack from several directions with a possibility of rapid dividing of the Croatian territory in several places and breaking the Croatian geopolitical unity. During the Homeland War, a large part of the Croatian territory, including the capital Zagreb itself, was within reach of the enemy’s artillery and missiles weapon systems.

The two most sensitive points of Croatia’s geostrategic position are Karlovac and Neum gates. The Karlovac Gate covers an area of small dimensions (from the Croatian-Slovenian border on the Kupa river to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the width of the Croatian territory is only 47 km). In addition to its traffic importance, for centuries, Karlovac has had the geostrategic function of preserving communication between the mainland and the coastal part of Croatia. In every conflict in the last four centuries, the conquest of the Karlovac Gate area would lead to the division of the Croatian territory. This was also visible during the Homeland War, when seizing Karlovac

⁵ Croatia. Vojna strategija Republike Hrvatske. In: *Zbirka propisa i strateških dokumenata iz područja obrane*. Zagreb: MORH.2003. pp. 299-331.

⁶ RADINOVIĆ, Radovan, «Realna pretnja na delu» (Real Threat at Work), *Vojska Krajine*, 4-5, July-August 1993. Cited in: MARIJAN, Davor. 2007. *Oluja*. Zagreb, Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata. ISBN 978-953-7493-08-8. pp. 7.

⁷ Ibid.

would lead to severing the communications between Zagreb, Rijeka and Zadar.⁸ Today, as in the past, the control of the area of Karlovac is necessary for preserving the territorial integrity of Croatia. An important discontinuity of the Croatian territory also exists near Neum, where Bosnia and Herzegovina has access to the Adriatic Sea in the length of 26 km.⁹

Often described as a horseshoe, the Croatian territory is divided into three large geographical units: the Pannonian and Peripannonian area, the Adriatic area, and the mountainous area between them.¹⁰ The Dinaride mountain range and Croatian islands create further discontinuity of the Croatian territory. Throughout history, these discontinuities have negatively affected the internal transport connection of Croatia and its geopolitical unity. These discontinuities in the Croatian relief, among other factors, have facilitated the division and control of the Croatian lands throughout history by various powers (Venice, Hungary, Austria, the Ottoman Empire...).

Thus, "relief is the most characteristic element of the territory of Croatia that is important for understanding of its historical processes."¹¹ At the same time, the geographical location of the Croatian territory is one of the important reasons why throughout the history Croatian regions have rarely been together.¹² Modern technology has relativized the negative influence of geography, but it cannot completely eliminate it. However, in today's conditions of technological progress, the mountain is no longer an insurmountable obstacle. *"It is still harder to control the mountain than to cross it."*¹³

Insufficient fossil fuel reserves and negative demographic trends exert a negative impact on the relative potential of the Croatian state. Croatia does not have a sufficient amount of domestic oil reserves and natural gas, so it must import them. More than 80% of Croatia's energy needs are met using oil and natural gas. The needs for these still most sought-after energy sources are only partially met from its own sources. Croatia obtains 40% of its natural gas and as much as 80% of its oil from imports.

The number of inhabitants represents an important element of the identity and relative potential of the state. Although modern technological achievements resulting from scientific research relativize the influence of the number of inhabitants on the power of a state, a larger number of inhabitants also means a statistically greater possibility for a state to obtain more effective means of power. Demography is a dynamic element of the Croatian identity and it is made dynamic by the spatial and physical movement of the Croatian population. However, one has to bear in mind that Croatia has negative

⁸ PAVIĆ, Radovan. *Geostrategija karlovačkih vrata*. Svjetlo. Karlovac, 1993, Vol.1/2, pp. 1-6.

⁹ MAGAŠ, Damir. Izazovi suvremenog kopnenog povezivanja Dubrovnika, *Geoadria*. Zadar: Hrvatsko geografsko društvo, 2014, Vol.19, No.1, pp. 27-60. ISSN 1331-2294 (print), pp. 28-31.

¹⁰ FUERST-BJELIŠ, Borna. GLAMUZINA, Nikola. *The Historical Geography of Croatia. Territorial Change and Cultural Landscapes*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2021. ISBN 978-3-030-68432-7., pp. 1-19.

¹¹ GOLDSTEIN, Ivo. Hrvatska povijest. Zagreb: *Jutarnji list*. 2008. ISBN 978-953-300-089-3 pp.20

¹² KLAJIĆ, Vjekoslav. *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena do svršetka XIX. stoljeća*. Knjiga 1. 1974 Zagreb: Nakladni zavod MH. pp.27.

¹³ CHAUPRADE. Aymeric. *Géopolitique. Constants et Changements dans l'Histoire*. Ellipses. Paris. 2001. ISBN: 2-7298-0668-7. pp. 176.

demographic trends. The population of Croatia is decreasing and the Croatian population is getting older. In 1991, Croatia had almost 4.8 million of inhabitants, while according to the 2021 census, this number decreased to less than 3.9 million.¹⁴

MORPHOGENESIS OF THE CROATIAN STATE AND GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS OF CONTINUITY

Croatia's favourable geographical position was often a motive for the competition of the neighbouring powers for influence in Southeastern Europe and in the Eastern Mediterranean. Their ambitions to achieve access to the sea and to control important traffic corridors that pass through the Croatian territory represent geopolitical dynamics of continuity that have significantly influenced the morphogenesis of the Croatian state throughout history.

After an initial period of creation and expansion of its borders in the early Middle Ages, Croatia soon lost its independence and until 1992 (when it became an independent state again), it had only limited sovereignty within larger political communities. Change of the Croatian borders also created a problem of maintaining a connection between individual parts of its national territory that is still present today. These geopolitical dynamics of continuity have led to another feature of Croatia during its historical development. It was the political fragmentation of its territory (created by the conquest of the Croatian territory by the great powers) that influenced the current regional complexity of Croatia.¹⁵

The importance of the Croatian territory as part of the transport corridor was established even before the creation of the Croatian state. In Antiquity, during the period of the Roman Empire, the Adriatic Sea gained the status of a direct trade route from Africa and Asia Minor to Central Europe that it has retained it to this day. This trade route provides direct access to the interior of northern Italy and across the Alpine passes to Central Europe.¹⁶ The control of the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea was essential for maintaining this maritime route. The Adriatic corridor has retained its strategic importance to this day. This is visible in the efforts of the Chinese companies to obtain long-term concessions for the lease of ports in the north Adriatic Sea in Italy

¹⁴ *Objavljeni konačni rezultati Popisa 2021*. 26.07.2017. [cit.2022-11-04], available from: <https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/objavljeni-konacni-rezultati-popisa-2021/1270>

¹⁵ Croatia is a regionally complex entity which encompasses various strongly built regional identities united by the idea of national and political unity as a response to external threats. See: MAGAŠ, Damir. The development of geographical and geopolitical position of Croatia. *Geoadria*. Zadar: Hrvatsko geografsko društvo, 1997, Vol.2, pp. 5-36. ISSN 1331-2294 (print); KLEMENČIĆ, Mladen. Zemljopisni i geopolitički položaj: sastavnice hrvatskog identiteta. In: ZORISLAV, Lukić - SKOKO, Božo. *Hrvatski identitet*. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2011, pp. 105-109. ISBN 978-953-150-920-6.

¹⁶ See GRYGIEL, ref. 1, pp. 59-61.

and Croatia.¹⁷ By proposing the construction of the Družba Adria pipeline, the Russian Federation also showed interest in using the Croatian territory as a transit area.

At the time of the Roman Empire, a traffic connection had been established for the first time between the Adriatic Sea and the central Danube basin in the area where the Medieval Croatian state was to be established. The efforts to establish control over this corridor by the neighbouring states and major powers have been visible in all stages of development of the Croatian state.

Development of the early medieval state (7th - 11th centuries). The development of the Croatian state began by the settling of Croats in the area bounded by the Kupa, Sutla, Mura, Drava, Danube, and Drina rivers and parts of the eastern Adriatic coast (the area of the Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia) in the 7th century. At the time of the arrival of the Croats, a geopolitical conflict between the Frankish Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire was taking place, which called into question the Byzantine sovereignty over these areas.¹⁸ This situation led to beginning of the development of the Croatian state under strong Frankish influence during the 9th century. Later, with the decline of the Frankish influence, Byzantium strengthened its hold again until the abolition of the Byzantine sovereignty over Croatia during the reign of King Dmitar Zvonimir (1075 - 1089).¹⁹

In this initial period of development, the Croatian state was under the influence of the conflict between the two foreign powers and also under their cultural influence, which affected further political and territorial development of Croatia. Thus, in the history of Croatia so far, three civilization circles directly influenced its territorial and national development.²⁰

The core of the Croatian medieval state was formed in the middle of the 9th century. It was a triangle consisting of the towns of Knin, Šibenik and Nin, an area known as Dalmatian Croatia. Dalmatian Croatia quickly expanded its territory. The area of the former Roman province of Pannonia in the north, inhabited by Croatian tribes (called Slovinje, later Slavonia) was united with Dalmatian Croatia in the 10th century.²¹ The United Kingdom of Croatia had an area of about 100,000 km² that covered present Bosnia to the Drina river in the east.

After the decline of Byzantium, Venice became the key geopolitical opponent, which, during the period of its rise (1000 - 1204), established control over the Adriatic Sea and eastern Mediterranean in order to dominate the trade routes that passed through this

¹⁷ See BARIĆ, Robert. China's Influence in South East Europe. In JUREKOVIĆ, Predrag. *Competing External Influences in South East Europe - Implications for Regional Consolidation*. Vienna: National Defence Academy, 2019, pp. 97-116. ISBN 978-3-903121-73-7 (print).

¹⁸ DUANČIĆ, Vedran. Hrvatska između Bizanta i Franačke. *PRO TEMPORE*. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet-ISHA Zagreb, 2008, Vol.5, No.5, pp. 9-28. ISSN 1334-8302 (print).

¹⁹ BUDAK, Neven. Hrvatska i Bizant u 10. stoljeću. *Tabula*. Pula: Filozofski fakultet, 2014, No. 12, pp. 51-63. ISSN 1331-7830 (print).

²⁰ In the development of Croatia, the influence of the three civilization circles is visible: Mediterranean circle, Middle European circle and the third is South Eastern/Balkans circle. See CVRTILA, Vlatko. Croatia - the "Gateway" to Southeast Europe. *Politička misao*. Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti, 2000, Vol. XXXVII, No.5, pp. 150-159 ISSN 0032-3241 (print).

²¹ FUERST-BJELIŠ, GLAMUZINA, ref. 10, pp. 57-59.

area. The conquest of Dalmatia established control by Venice over the Adriatic, which lasted from the late 11th to the 16th centuries.

Consequences of the union with Hungary (12th to 14th centuries). By creating the personal union with Hungary in 1102, Croatia lost its sovereignty. This was also the beginning of the Croatian territorial reduction. The territory of Bosnia was formed as an independent state, and from 1358, the city of Dubrovnik began to develop as an independent trading republic.²² Venice established control over the western part of the Istrian peninsula and began expansion on the eastern Adriatic coast; after 1409, Venice established control over almost all Adriatic islands and key ports.²³ It was the expansion of Venice that led to political and economic weakening of Croatia. These events, together with the expansion of the Hungarian rule in Slavonia, caused weakening of the territorial integrity of the Croatian medieval state.

The period of expansion of the Ottoman Empire (14th to 16th centuries). The expansion of the Ottoman Empire to the territory of Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries (conquest of Bulgaria, Serbia and Bosnia) led to territorial consolidation of the Croatian state that reached its peak in the 16th century.²⁴ Only after the acceptance of the Habsburg rule in 1527, conditions were created for a gradual stopping of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. In the new community, Croatia managed to maintain autonomy. However, the organization of the defence against the Ottoman expansion led to political fragmentation of Croatia due to the creation of the Military Frontier districts as border defence areas.²⁵ Also, Croatia was constantly exposed to pressure from Vienna for achieving centralization of the political power in the Habsburg Monarchy.

Modern development of Croatia (17th to 20th centuries). Territorial recovery of Croatia took place at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century through liberation of parts of the territory conquered by the Ottoman Empire. After the fall of Venice in 1797 and the loss of Dubrovnik's independence in 1808, these areas came under rule of the Habsburg Monarchy, within which the Croatian component (the Triune Kingdom of Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia) had a limited autonomy. After the short-lived French occupation of the Monarchy's territory (Illyrian provinces, 1809 - 1814/15), Austria established control over the entire eastern Adriatic coast. With these changes, Croatia gained today's unfavourable elongated geographical shape and borders that are largely present today.

The wider area of Karlovac (the Karlovac Gate) gained strategic importance in terms of territorial connection of the continental and coastal Croatia. At the end of the 17th and during the 18th century, Austria pursued a mercantilist development policy, in which an important role was played by transport connection of the southeastern part of the Habsburg Monarchy in the direction of the Danube - Posavina - Pokuplje - mountain threshold - northern Adriatic.²⁶ With the development of the transport network, plans

²² Ibid. pp. 78-84.

²³ Ibid. pp. 76-78.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 87-112. At the end of the 16th century, the territory area of Croatia was only 16,800 km².

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 118-125.

²⁶ FELETAR, Petar. *Hrvatske povijesne ceste - Karolina, Jozefina i Lujzijana*. Samobor: Izdavačka kuća MERIDIJANI, 2015. ISBN 978-953-239-194-7. pp. 40-48.

were made to achieve rapid inclusion of the territories taken over from the Ottoman Empire from Transylvania to Lika in the political and economic system of the Habsburg Monarchy (connecting these areas with the ports on the Adriatic coast). Those integration efforts were focused on the economic development of Croatia and Hungary with the goal of creating (together with the Balkans area) the key market for the Habsburg economy.²⁷

In accordance with this goal, in the second half of the 18th century, a system of roads and cities through Croatian territory from the area of Karlovac to the Adriatic coast was created.²⁸ These were three historical Croatian roads: Karolina (Karlovac - Kraljevica - Rijeka, 1726 - 1732), Jozefina (Karlovac - Senj, 1765 - 1779) and Lujzijana (Karlovac - Gospić - Karlobag, 1750 - 1754/1786 - 1789). The possibility of interrupting this traffic connection in the area of Karlovac led to the development of this city as a key point of the defence system against Ottoman attacks.

During the 19th century, most of the parts of today's Croatian territory in the Habsburg Empire were still administratively separate. With the reorganization of the Habsburg Empire (Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867), the division of Croatian lands remained unchanged (Dalmatia and Istria remained in the Austrian part of the empire, while Croatia had a special status within the Hungarian part of the empire).

With the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, Croatia became part of the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). The impetus for Croatia's entry into new state was the severance of ties with Austria and Hungary, but also the effort to preserve its territorial integrity from the threat of Italian expansionism. However, instead of the expected security, in the new unitary state union under Serbian control, Croatia lost its autonomous status, which was briefly restored in 1939 with the creation of the Croatian Banovina.

During World War II, with its decisions against the declaration of the Independent State of Croatia in 1941, the National Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH) repeatedly confirmed the state sovereignty of the Croatian people with its decisions, which was also later confirmed in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) by the Constitution of the People's Republic of Croatia in 1947 and the constitutions of the Socialist Republic of Croatia from 1963 to 1974.²⁹

After World War II, Croatia became part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (later it was renamed to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) as a federal unit with the area of 56,538 km², with borders largely corresponding to its territory within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. With the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Croatia declared independence in 1991 and it was internationally recognized as a sovereign state in 1992. The problem of maintaining integrity of its territory was re-emphasized during the Homeland War (1991 - 1995) when successful defence of the Karlovac Gate prevented separation of the continental and coastal parts of Croatia.

²⁷ See FUERST-BJELIŠ, GLAMUZINA, ref.10, pp. 145-158.

²⁸ See FELETAR, ref. 26, pp. 91-182.

²⁹ GRIZOLD, Anton. TATALOVIĆ, Siniša. CVRTILA, Vlatko. *Suvremeni sistemi nacionalne sigurnosti*. Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 1999. ISBN 953-6457-05-9. pp. 347.

GEOPOLITICAL DESIGN OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA AND PROSPECTS FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT

After the end of the Homeland War, Croatia ensured its territorial integrity and regained political control over its entire territory. However, its favourable geographical position did not result in an advantageous geopolitical position. Further exposure of the unusually elongated Croatian territory to the complex geopolitical dynamics of continuity continued to make Croatia strategically vulnerable. In order to resolve the problem of this security dilemma, Croatian efforts focused on seeking an appropriate geopolitical design.

NATO and EU as the main pillars of Croatian security

The first National Security Strategy of the Republic of Croatia, adopted by the Croatian Parliament on 19 March 2002, defined Croatia's integration into NATO as *"one of the main goals of the Croatian foreign and security policy"*.³⁰ The same strategic document defined Croatia's integration into the EU and the ESDP as *"the most significant and complex undertaking the Croatian state and society are facing"*.³¹ According to the same document:

*"Relations with neighbours and regional cooperation are the foundation and political precondition of the full Croatian integration into the European mainstream and regional cooperation, in its multilateral segment, is an important component of the Croatian security policy."*³²

Croatia became a NATO member in 2009. Another important change for Croatia's geopolitical position occurred after 1 July 2013, when Croatia became the 28th member of the EU, one of the world's strongest economic poles and one of the rarely successful models of security communities in the world. By joining NATO and the EU, Croatia has gained an effective geopolitical design and solved its security dilemma.

However, the security situation in Europe is constantly changing. New security threats and challenges have emerged, but so have new strategic opportunities to improve Croatia's geopolitical position. The most serious threats to Croatia's security are created by the shift in the global power structure at the global level, and negative consequences of such shifts in the area of the Western Balkans.

Deterioration of the security situation in Europe and in the Croatian neighbourhood has again raised the question of the negative impact of these trends on the geopolitical position of the Republic of Croatia.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 represents the culmination of the geopolitical conflict between the Russian Federation and the West. One of Russia's goals

³⁰ Strategija nacionalne sigurnosti Republike Hrvatske. *Narodne novine*, [online]. 19.03.2002. [cit.2022-08-29], available from: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2002_03_32_692.html

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

in this conflict is the revision of the European security architecture by the weakening of its two key components, NATO and the EU. By encouraging divisions, Russia seeks to break the established unity of the West in providing military and economic assistance to Ukraine, which in the long run could lead to the weakening of the Transatlantic relations. The potential global consequences of this conflict are also worrisome.

As a member of NATO and the EU, the Republic of Croatia has clearly demonstrated opposition to Russia's expansionist policy and its consequences in Europe. The geostrategic importance of Croatia as a member of the NATO alliance and the EU stems from the fact that a branch of one of the five relevant European geostrategic directions, which stretches from northern Italy across the Adriatic, Hungary and Ukraine to Russia, passes through its territory.³³ In the event of the war conflict in Ukraine spreading to other countries, the geopolitical dynamics on this geostrategic direction could intensify, and the potential for conflict could increase. At the same time, the Ukrainian-Russian war conflict could further affect the stability of the already unstable region of Southeastern Europe.

After the start of the war in Ukraine in 2014, NATO established a *Readiness Action Plan (RAP)* which entailed adapting the NATO command structure and force structure to the new situation. In 2020, the divisional level command Centre (MND-C) was established on this geostrategic direction. The importance of the functioning of this command for Croatia is shown by the fact that a Croatian general was appointed as the first Commander of the MND-C. Croatia also expressed its support through decisive diplomatic activities and the strong engagement of its Armed Forces in NATO and EU-led missions, operations and activities.

However, the current geopolitical conflict has a negative impact on the stability of the immediate environment of the Republic of Croatia. Moscow has clearly shown its willingness to use many unresolved issues in Southeastern Europe and the Western Balkans to create instability in the region. The goal of such activities is to simplify the Russian position by shifting the focus of key European states and institutions from the conflict in Ukraine.

The geography of identity represents one of the most important factors of instability in the Western Balkans. Security problems in this region stem also from the fact that to date, despite significant investments, the EU has not created satisfactory conditions for a successful political and economic transition in the region.³⁴

The EU's inability to stabilize the region opened the door for strengthening of the influence of other great powers in the Western Balkans.³⁵ Moscow's efforts to destabilize the Western Balkans have the most negative consequences for the stability of the region. Until 2014, Russian actions were aimed at strengthening the political and economic influence in the region, with the final objective to strengthen the Russian

³³ PAVIĆ, Radovan. Novi NATO na osnovici dokumenata. *Politička misao*. [online]. 1998. Vol. XXXV. No. 1. pp. 88-118. [cit. 2022-08-29]. 327-51(4). Available from: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/53434>

³⁴ See BARIĆ, Robert. Intra-regional Security Co-operation in the Western Balkans - Chances and Impediments. In JUREKOVIĆ, Predrag - HENSELLEK, Benedikt. *Montenegro's NATO Membership: Regional and International Implications*. Vienna: National Defence Academy, 2017, pp. 55-77. ISBN 978-3-903121-25-6 (print).

³⁵ Ibid. pp. 69-74.

influence within the EU. However, after the annexation of Crimea, this objective changed - now the goal is to actively destabilize the region and create a crisis that would force the West to intervene. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia are particularly exposed to Russian actions.

The strengthening of the Chinese influence in Southeastern Europe, and especially in the Western Balkans, should be seen as part of China's new strategy towards the EU, adopted after 2012. China no longer perceives the EU as an equal partner, but as a weaker side that should be exploited politically and economically. As part of this strategy, China seeks to bypass the EU institutions and to negotiate directly with individual regions and members of the Union. Such an approach is visible in the Western Balkans, where China, unlike the EU, offers unconditional economic investment, which is acceptable to the political elites of the Western Balkan countries that are not members of the EU yet.³⁶

Turkey and countries of the Persian Gulf are also interested in expanding their influence in the region, which further negatively affects the stability of the Western Balkans.

The growth of instability in the neighbourhood also has a negative impact on the security of the Republic of Croatia. Due to its geographical position, Croatia is exposed to the possibility of the emerging crises spilling over into its territory.

Croatia as the corridor state

The National Security Strategy from 2017³⁷ confirmed that Croatia's membership in NATO and the EU are still the main pillars of the Croatian security. In this strategic document, the Croatian favourable geographical position has been recognised as the strategic opportunity for the improvement of its geopolitical position. The strategy focuses on a better utilisation of Croatia's favourable geographical position as the Adriatic and Mediterranean country. One of the defined goals is related to the improvement of Croatia's traffic connections and upgrading of its critical infrastructure, especially in the domain of the energy security. Additionally, the Strategy highlights the Croatian ambition of its own positioning as an energy link between the countries of Southeastern, Central and Northern Europe, but also in relation to Asia. It is underlined that diversification of oil and gas supply routes through the Croatian territory would strengthen the Croatian energy security, but also the security of its immediate neighbours and a wider European area. Furthermore, the "Three Seas Initiative", which promotes infrastructural connection between the Baltic Sea, Black Sea and Adriatic Sea, is mentioned as an instrument for the fulfilment of this goal. Also, an additional objective of the Strategy is related to the improvement of the Croatian transport infrastructure connections to the pan-European transport corridors.

To take advantage of its favourable geographical position of a coastal state, adequate infrastructure of the Croatia's seaports plays an important role. There are several

³⁶ BARIĆ, Robert. China's Influence in South East Europe. In JUREKOVIĆ, Predrag. *Competing External Influences in South East Europe - Implications for Regional Consolidation*. Vienna: National Defence Academy, 2019, pp. 97-116. ISBN 978-3-903121-73-7 (print).

³⁷ *Strategija Nacionalne sigurnosti Republike Hrvatske*, [online]. 26.07.2017. [cit.2022-11-04]. Available from: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2017_07_73_1772.html

important seaports along the Croatian Adriatic coast: Pula, Rijeka, Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Ploče and Dubrovnik. The largest Croatian seaport connected to other world ports and markets is the seaport of Rijeka. It is a deep-sea seaport, equipped to accommodate large ships and located deep in the European continent. Throughout history, the port of Rijeka has been an important seaport for the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe. Until the end of the World War I, when Croatia was part of Austria-Hungary and more oriented towards Central Europe, the port of Rijeka, along with the port of Trieste, were the most important Austro-Hungarian ports. After the Treaty of Rome was signed on 27 January, 1924, Rijeka came under the rule of Italy. After World War II, the port of Rijeka became the most important Yugoslav port. At that time, its services could be used freely by all the then Yugoslav republics. The port of Ploče is also connected to the world's ports and markets. The ports of Split, Zadar and Pula are Croatian seaports of local character. These are ports of tourist importance; they are not directly connected to the world's ports and markets and their capacities are not adapted to large ships.

Connecting all parts of Croatia by traffic also means ensuring free movement of natural resources, passengers, goods, services, etc. across its entire territory. This entails construction and modernization of the infrastructure of all forms of transport (maritime, air, road, rail and pipeline). The traffic connection of Croatian seaports with its economic centres is influenced by the topology of Croatian relief. Mountains, rivers, forests, plateaus, straits, islets, bays and other land objects represent discontinuities of relief that affect the Croatian traffic interconnection and geopolitical unity. The construction of the important for Croatia transverse road of the A1 motorway that is currently not part of the network of the pan-European transport corridors began in the early 1970s. The continuation of the construction of the A1 motorway (Zagreb - Dubrovnik) came about only after the independence of Croatia and the end of the Homeland War. The section of the motorway from Karlovac to Split was opened to traffic in June 2005, after which its construction towards Ploče and Dubrovnik continued.

Today's modern technology facilitates the construction of roads and thus relativizes, but cannot completely eliminate, the influence of the geographical factor. The construction of the A1 motorway is part of a wider project for construction of the Adriatic-Ionian road. The most demanding objects were the tunnels Mala Kapela (5801 m) and Sveti Rok (5727 m), and the 2400 m long Pelješac Bridge, finished in July 2022. The Croatian Prime Minister defined the Pelješac Bridge as a project "...which will connect the south with the rest of Croatia" and which, together with the LNG terminal, will "contribute to the strengthening of Croatia's international and European position."

³⁸ The motorway from Zagreb to Rijeka is part of the transport infrastructure of the pan-European transport Corridor Vb. The construction of the last section of this highway was completed in late 2008.

³⁸ *Otvaranje LNG terminala na Krku je povijesni trenutak kojim se mijenja položaj Hrvatske na energetske karti Europe* [online]. 29.01.2021. [cit.2022-11-04]. Available from: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/otvaranje-lng-terminala-na-krku-je-povijesni-trenutak-kojim-se-mijenja-polozaj-hrvatske-na-energetskej-karti-europe/31404>

A special problem in the connection between Adriatic and Pannonian Croatia is the poorly developed and outdated railway network. The railway line between Rijeka and Zagreb is a single-track line with an excessive slope and the need to change locomotives due to different electrification. The construction of the railway, but also of other transport infrastructure, in this traffic corridor on the section Rijeka - Zagreb - Botovo (on the Hungarian border) is especially important for the positioning of the Republic of Croatia as a *corridor state*.³⁹ At the same time, the seaport of Ploče is not connected to the Croatian hinterland but to the backlands of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through which an obsolete railway passes, which is not fully electrified.

The Croatian pipeline traffic consists of the oil and gas pipelines. Croatia does not have a sufficient amount of its own reserves of oil and natural gas, it must import them. The favourable position of the port of Omišalj on the island of Krk for transport of the liquefied gas is a benefit that is in Croatia's favour in this regard. The construction of the oil and gas infrastructure on the territory of Croatia is of strategic importance for its resilience (JANAF system⁴⁰ and LNG terminal). In January 2021, the LNG terminal on the island of Krk was opened. The Croatian Prime Minister declared that this would change Croatia's position on the European energy map.⁴¹ The war in Ukraine significantly increased interest in the supply of oil and natural gas through this supply route. As a result, the Croatian government has announced an increase in the capacity of the LNG terminal from 2.9 to 6.1 billion m³.⁴² This would ensure Croatia's diversification of the sources and transit routes for the supply of natural gas for its own needs, but also for the needs of the EU and Western Balkan market.

Croatian inland waterways consist of a network of waterways of the Croatian rivers Sava, Drava and Danube. A strategically important transport project is the construction of the Danube-Sava canal. The completion of this project would ensure better transport connections between Croatia and the Danube river, and thus the most important European development axis.

In order for Croatia to make the best use of its favourable geographical position as the coastal state, in addition to quality internal transport infrastructure, it is necessary to ensure good connection of its roads to wider international transport corridor networks.

Transverse traffic routes that connect Central European landlocked countries with the Adriatic Sea in the north-south direction through the Croatian territory are of special importance for Croatia's Central European and Adriatic (Mediterranean) orientation. Longitudinal traffic routes, which stretch in the east-west direction, are important for

³⁹ JOZIĆ, Jugoslav. Geopolitička doktrina „države koridor“. *Međunarodne studije*. Zagreb: Centar za međunarodne studije, 2010, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 75-95. ISSN 1332-4756 (print). UDK:911.3:32, UDK:321.01, pp. 75-95.

⁴⁰ The JANAF oil pipeline was put into operation on 22 December, 1979

⁴¹ *Otvaranje LNG terminala na Krku je povijesni trenutak kojim se mijenja položaj Hrvatske na energetske karti Europe* [online]. 29.01.2021. [cit.2022-11-04], Available from: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/otvaranje-lng-terminala-na-krku-je-povijesni-trenutak-kojim-se-mijenja-položaj-hrvatske-na-energetske-karti-europe/31404>

⁴² *Povećanje kapaciteta LNG-a i ulaganje 180 milijuna eura u plinovod Zlobin - Bosiljevo* [online]. 18.08.2022. [cit.2022-11-04]. Available from: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/povecanje-kapaciteta-lng-a-i-ulaganje-180-milijuna-eura-u-plinovod-zlobin-bosiljevo/35926>

the development of relations between Croatia and Western Europe with countries of Southeastern Europe and Asia.

The Central European landlocked countries are still partly oriented towards the use of Adriatic seaports. This is especially true of Austria, Slovakia, Czechia, Hungary and Poland. In addition to the use of the Italian Adriatic ports of Trieste and Venice and the Slovenian ports of Koper, the Central European countries partly use the Croatian Adriatic ports of Rijeka and Ploče. The focus of some Central European countries on the use of Adriatic ports dates back to the time of Austria when Venice, Trieste and Rijeka were the main imperial seaports. After 1866, Venice became part of Italy, thus, Austria attached increasing importance to the ports of Trieste and Rijeka. In order for Austria to have direct access to the Adriatic Sea through its territory, the Karavanke and Bohinj tunnels were cut through the Alps.⁴³ Until 1914, the single Austro-Hungarian market of 52 million inhabitants was supplied through these seaports.⁴⁴

Corridor V is a transverse transport corridor in the network of pan-European transport corridors and it is important for Croatia's Central European and Adriatic (Mediterranean) orientation. Branch b and branch c of Corridor V pass through the Croatian territory and connect the Croatian seaports of Rijeka and Ploče to the pan-European network of corridors. In order for Croatia to position itself as a corridor state⁴⁵ between the Mediterranean, Central and Southeastern Europe, modern transport infrastructure should be built in the sections b and c of Corridor V and connected to the network of pan-European transport corridors.

In order for Croatia to be well connected with its European hinterland and to acquire favourable conditions for its own positioning as a corridor state, its important strategic interest would be to include the Baltic corridor in the network of pan-European corridors.⁴⁶ Through the Baltic corridor, Croatia would achieve quality transport connections with the countries of Central Europe. In addition to road and rail transport, it would be especially important to make full use of the JANAF's transport capacities, but also to assess the possibility of building the north-south gas pipeline.

Unlike the unfavourable approach to the Croatian territory from the west and south, access to Croatia is much more favourable from the north and east. Croatia's good traffic connection to Southeastern Europe and the Middle East is made possible by natural advantages provided by the Posavina corridor. Pan-European Corridor X is the most important longitudinal corridor of the pan-European network of corridors that passes through the Croatian territory. At the same time, the Danube River with its navigable tributaries (Rivers Sava, Drava and Kupa), the Romanian plains and the plain of Thrace open Croatia's access to the Black Sea, but also to the ports of the North Sea (pan-European Corridor VII).

⁴³ SIVIGNON, Michel. *Les Balkans une Politique de la Violence*. 2009. Paris. Belin. ISBN-10: 978-2-7011-4939-4. pp. 66.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 66.

⁴⁵ JOZIĆ, Jugoslav. *Geopolitika Republike Hrvatske*. Zagreb. MORH.2018. ISBN: 978-953-193-161-8 pp. 48.

⁴⁶ BOŽIČEVIĆ, Josip. PERIĆ, Teodor. Prometni koridori Baltik-Jadran - Konceptijske postavke za optimizaciju prometne mreže, [online]. *EKONOMSKI PREGLED*, 2005. [cit.2022-08-29]. Available from: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/15406>

However, the construction and modernization of the transport infrastructure on the Posavina corridor have encountered another type of obstacles, which are of a political and financial nature. A large number of state borders, the crossing of which is a long wait, give rise to additional costs and delays in deliveries, diverting traffic from pan-European Corridor X to Corridor IV. Bad political relations in some countries and among some countries in the region can make transit through their territory unreliable. Such a possibility delays the construction of some transit projects or simply diverts their routes to other alternative directions.

In order to build and modernize the transport infrastructure in transport corridors that connect Croatia with Southeastern Europe and further towards Central Asia and the Middle East, more in line with the transit function, good political relations among the countries of this region are necessary. It would then be possible to put these longitudinal transport corridors into operation and enable the transit of energy, goods, passengers, services, etc.

CONCLUSION

Croatia has a favourable geographical position of a coastal state. The Adriatic Sea represents for Croatia the most important route for both an economic exchange and easier access to natural resources. It penetrates deep into the European mainland, which is why it has a profound traffic significance not only for Croatia, but also for other economically developed and densely populated countries of Central and Southeastern Europe. Moreover, the Croatian territory is a transport corridor that connects the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe with the Mediterranean, and further towards the east (Eurasian area) and south (Middle East). However, insufficient amounts of domestic sources of fossil fuels and negative demographic trends exert a negative impact on the relative potential of the Croatian state.

The unusually elongated shape of its territory with little strategic depth, which is the result of the geopolitical dynamics of continuity linked to the ambitions of the external powers to gain access to the sea and control over this area, has also negatively impacted the relative potential of the Croatian state. Since the Antiquity until today, there have been constant efforts of the great powers in Europe and abroad to directly (by conquering territories) and indirectly (through expansion of the political, economic, and military influence) gain control over the area that is the point of contact of the Northern Adriatic and Central Europe, including Danube River basin.

After a territorial reduction of the Croatian state in the Middle Ages, there has been a constant need to maintain the link between the continental and coastal parts of the country as a prerequisite for preserving the integrity of the national territory. In all the previous conflicts, including the Homeland War (1991 - 1995), maintaining the territorial continuity of the coastal and continental Croatia has been a necessary condition for the survival of the Croatian state.

The first Croatian National Security Strategy from 2002 resolved this security dilemma by defining Croatia's membership in NATO and the EU as the pillars of its security. With the membership, Croatia managed to reduce the negative impact of the aforementioned

factors and to highlight the positive aspect of its geographical location. On the other hand, the strategy from 2017 focuses on exploiting the favourable Croatian geographical position.

Some public declarations of the Croatian geopolitical agents show that they are aware of the potential that nature offers for the improvement of the Croatian geopolitical position. Consequently, the Croatian transport infrastructure is constantly being built, modernized and partly connected to the pan-European network of corridors. This demonstrates that Croatia has been able to utilize its favourable geographical position in defining and achieving its foreign policy goals.

Therefore, the prospects for the development of the geopolitical position of the Republic of Croatia should be linked to the development of the multimodal transport infrastructure connected to the pan-European network of corridors and the positioning of Croatia as the corridor state.