

4th Annual International Conference of the Croatian Alumni Club of TFAS

*NATO and the New Kids on the Block:
Finding Common Cause in the Age of Global Security*

Zadar, Croatia
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Poštovane dame, cijenjena gospodo, dragi prijatelji, dobrodošli u Zadar!
Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, welcome to Zadar!

On behalf of everyone associated with the Organization Team, I would like to welcome you to the official opening of the 4th Annual International Conference of the Croatian Alumni Club of TFAS.

Winston Churchill once joked that this part of the world produces more history than it can consume. Which is another way of saying that we are consumed by our history. In one respect, this is certainly true of Zadar. The streets of Zadar are a time capsule of world history, the architecture reads like a book on Western Civilization, from the pre-Roman to the Medieval period through the Renaissance to the Baroque. And throughout the 3000 year history of Zadar, the ships docked in the port reflected the strategic alliances of the time; in the 7th Century B.C. it was ships of the Phoenicians, Etruscans, Ancient Greeks, soon followed by the Romans, in the Middle Ages it was the Byzantine merchants, in the Baroque period it was Venetian traders. Today, the ships docked in the port fly the flags of the U.S., the EU, and Croatia's NATO allies. Economic alliances were inextricably linked with military alliances, as common defence meant common prosperity. What was true then is still true today, and for this reason, and with all apologies to the great Churchill, we thought Zadar was a perfect place to produce yet another chapter in that storied history of Central Europe and the Mediterranean.

But before we make another indelible entry into the annals of world history, we must first take a commercial break. I want to take this opportunity to point out that the Croatian Club wouldn't be able to organize this gathering without the contributions and the generosity of our sponsors and donors. Let me say how much we especially appreciate the support of NATO's Public Diplomacy

Division, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the U.S. Embassy in Zagreb, The Fund for American Studies, and the Croatian Ministry of Science.

Let me also thank our distinguished lecturers from NATO, the Ministry of Defence, Louis Berger Corporation, Vjesnik daily newspaper, Durham University, IE University, Rhodes College and the University of Zagreb. They have generously volunteered their time for this event and we are truly privileged to have them here. Please give them a round of applause.

For the fourth year in a row, our Croatian-American Club is bringing together 40 alumni of The Fund for American Studies and Georgetown University, from the regions of Central Europe and the Middle East - from Latvia in the north, to Egypt in the south. We are young professionals from 20 countries working in every sector imaginable: we are big thinkers and innovative problem-solvers, humble public servants and civil society social engineers, private sector movers and shakers and bright lights in the halls of power. We are leaders in our fields and among our peers. We are multilingual, highly educated, and we have a lot of frequent flier miles. Many of us, or perhaps only some, can even say without laughing they are snappy dressers, especially those with HAKFAS discount cards at participating Croatia business suit retailers. But most importantly, we are engaged with the issues, and we want to make a difference in the world. With a TFAS education - and with alumni clubs that keep us connected - we will.

This week, on Monday, twenty years ago, the Berlin Wall came crashing down. And with it, the philosophical architecture of the Cold War. From the rubble a new world emerged, and with it a shared identity crisis. Not only did Central Europe wake up the morning after to a new world, but so did everyone else on the western side of the Wall. We were, after all - commie, Yankee or non-aligned - the children of the Cold War, including NATO, and we all needed to adapt to a brave new world.

When NATO was created after World War II, as I learned from my professors at SAIS, the joke was that it had a triple mission: to keep the Germans down, the Americans in, and the Russians out of Europe. The joke is much the same today, but NATO is here not to fight against someone specifically, as it was in the Cold War, but to protect and uphold a set of values. NATO today, alongside with the

EU, represents the two pillars of the democratic world. It is an alliance protecting the values of liberal democracy – rule of law, freedom, human rights. I would argue that the fundamentals of the Alliance are still there, and are still sound, but with every new era come new challenges. We are here to talk about those challenges.

We will ask and try to answer the questions of what NATO is, and what does it stand for? What lies ahead? What is NATO doing in Afghanistan? Does the security here in Zadar depend on the security there in Kabul? Is NATO a shield for the European integration process? Would a weak NATO mean a weak Europe?

I would argue that the modern Croatian experience is a perfect test of this question. It was hardly imaginable fifteen years ago that Croatia would so quickly transition from an object of international relations, a problem, to an active participant of international relations, a solution. With remarkable achievements in implementation of the reforms, the Croatian Armed Forces moved from territorial defence to deploying mobile forces oriented towards the mission of the Alliance, as well as of the United Nations. The inclusion of Croatia and other Central European nations in NATO has resulted in the integration of these re-established democracies into the transatlantic community of nations. Just as Zadar was a space for exchange between civilizations in the past, Croatia has again become a strategic intersection between seemingly disparate worlds: the West and the Middle East, the Islamic and developing countries.

But as one of the new kids on the block Croatia now must grapple with the exciting and thorny issues all present and future NATO members must confront. The most urgent and relevant of these issues were laid out in no uncertain terms by geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski in an article on NATO in the September/October edition of Foreign Affairs magazine. I want to sum up his argument, as the Americans do, in fifty words or less.

NATO has to remain a credible western regional organization. Only on that basis can NATO play a role in protecting others. According to Brzezinski there are two main obstacles to this goal – the speed of NATO's decision making process and the threshold for action.

The first problem is that NATO functions on a Three Musketeers Oath – one for all and all for one. The problem is that there are 28 musketeers, and for them to act, all 28 members must vote unanimously. This might be called the riddle of the oath of the musketeers. The second problem is that action is determined by each member, quote, “as they deem necessary,” close quote.

This means that vulnerable NATO members need a native defence force capable of fighting off invasion for at least 2-3 weeks on their own until NATO can even vote on a possible unanimous action. This may jeopardize NATO’s ability to be an effective regional peacekeeper, and thus a credible multilateral organization. For example, Brzezinski said, during the August War, Russia’s tanks were 30 kilometres from Tbilisi. Had Georgia been a member, would NATO have intervened rapidly enough? Or at all?

Brzezinski asks the question: does the decision to come to a member’s defence really need to be unanimous? In the present arrangement, each of the 28 members can stop the other 27 from intervening, effectively giving each member veto power. How about a qualified majority or a blocking minority? Is that a realistic solution for a military alliance? I believe these issues warrant serious discussion.

I believe Brzezinski is calling for a new realism in foreign policy, one that is at the heart of the challenges facing NATO, and as the new kids on the block, the challenges now facing us. As the former head of the NATO Liaison Office in Ukraine said, the challenge for us Central and Eastern Europeans, is to use the membership in NATO well, in following our own vision and interests. It is up to us to define what that vision is and to figure out how that vision fits alongside the other ships docked at our ports.

Thank you for your attention.