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Acceptance Speech of Edward A. Andrus Upon Receiving the 'Order of Stjepan Radic' Medal from Republic of Croatia at the Croatian Embassy in Washington DC on December 5, 2012

Ambassador Paro, I am honored to accept this award, and I do so on behalf of the NFCA/NFCACF, our Croatian American member organizations throughout the US – including the Croatian Fraternal Union – as well as our individual members. In particular, I wish to thank our dedicated volunteer Executive Committee members and my two colleagues who worked with me almost daily on these important bilateral and multilateral matters during the five years that I was NFCA President. They are NFCA Vice President **Zvonko Labas**, who I am happy to say is with us tonight having flown in from his new second home in Florida, and our Director of Public & Government Affairs, who was indispensable in guiding us through the intricate processes of government – **Mr. Joseph Foley**. Or as we have renamed him – **Josip Foleovich**. It was a privilege for me to work with these two gentlemen in supporting the Republic of Croatia becoming a member of NATO! Stjepan Radic, whose award we receive tonight, was known to say to the Croatian people: "Do not rush like geese in the fog." I think it is fair to say that we took his advice to heart. Zvonko, Joe, and I communicated continually via phone, email, and by directly meeting here in Washington, New York, and anywhere else required. We continually strategized on what we should do and what results we expected. We would accept small positive steps of success knowing full well that at the end we would score. The worthy goal of NATO for Croatia was always on our minds!

With the Co-Chairs of the Congressional Croatian Caucus (CCC) with us here tonight – Congressmen **Elton Gallegly** and **Dennis Kucinich** – I want to especially thank them for their valuable leadership in the US Congress. Mr. Gallegly was there at the beginning and was instrumental in the formation of the CCC – along with his retired California colleague Congressman **George Radanovich** – and he has been the strongest supporter for Croatia all the way through to this day. With the formation of the CCC in 2004, the efforts of the NFCA received a tremendous boost. With 49 Founding Members of the Caucus it was clear to us that the Congress was favorably disposed toward Croatia, and that our efforts to keep them informed of Croatia's impressive progress would eventually assist in getting Croatia over the NATO goal line.

We also were blessed at that time to have an outstanding American Ambassador to Croatia, **Mr. Robert A. Bradtke**. He was a veteran with 33 years experience with the US State Department at the time of his appointment, had served in Croatia many years before, spoke Croatian, and loved Croatia just like the rest of us. Early on, he invited us to his swearing in ceremony with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and made himself accessible to us. Ambassador Bradtke was perfect for the times and the mission. He was even successful in convincing President George W. Bush to visit Croatia and deliver an address in Zagreb's old St. Mark's Square – where Croatia's leaders had spoken to her people over the centuries. President Bush received thunderous applause as he told all of Croatia that – as a member of NATO – no one would ever take their freedom away again.

In parallel with our efforts, of course, was the great effort of the Embassy of Croatia in Washington under Ambassador **Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic** and her top Political Attaches, **Marijan Gubic** and **Tania Raguz**. It was gratifying for me to receive a call from Kolinda on the night of September 25, 2008, to inform us that the US Senate had



just, by unanimous consent, approved the NATO Treaty with Croatia. Later we were invited to the White House to be with President Bush at the Treaty signing ceremony. And, in April 2009, we were invited to NATO Operational Headquarters at the US Naval base in Norfolk to witness Croatia's formal induction into NATO. At this ceremony, I saw Croatian Generals with tears running down their faces while describing what that day meant to them as they remembered their comrades-in-arms who had died along the way in their great cause for freedom. We also had tears in our eyes as **Anne Pavlich**, Zvonko, and I watched the Croatian flag rise up among the flags of the other NATO member states. Zvonko's father had been an officer in the Yugoslav Navy and lost his life opposing communism. I know that Zvonko felt a sense of completion as he had dedicated himself to finishing his father's work!

Ambassador Paro, on this special occasion for the NFCA it is important for you to know that we recognize that the people of Croatia, its leaders, and its military did the heavy lifting in fulfilling the goal of full NATO membership. The NFCA, as Americans, made sure that their good work of transitioning the military and instituting the rule of law was recognized and acknowledged by America's leaders.

When it was first suggested to me - by past presidents **Steve Rukavina** and **John Kraljic** - that I should consider becoming the NFCA President, I was concerned because I did not speak the Croatian language. But they assured me that my business skills, learned over many years as an IBM marketing executive, would actually be more important in succeeding at the work of the NFCA during that period of time. They also assured me that they, along with Zvonko Labas, would act as my interpreters. Zvonko also fulfilled an important role as one who well understood the history of Croatia and taught us many lessons, which we needed to fully grasp our work. I am delighted they all did this because it got me deeply into my ethnicity more than I could ever have imagined. It was a fascinating experience for me. As I looked more and more into my own roots, I have found a beautiful country with lovely people - well beyond that which I had previously known.

Finally Ambassador Paro, I want you to know how much this award means to the NFCA. Over the past 20 years of its existence the NFCA has distinguished itself many times in its efforts to assist Croatia and her people both during and after Croatia's war for independence. But with this one very special award tonight, the Republic of Croatia has highlighted the NFCA as a contributing force in American foreign policy by acknowledging officially and formally our organization's ability to positively assist in achieving Croatia's main goal of security for its people. To see her now as a full member of NATO, the most formidable military force in the history of the world, brings great joy to the hearts of all of our members. Please convey our sincerest thanks to President Ivo Josipovic and the Croatian people for this significant recognition tonight. Puno hvala!

photography:



photo: Joško Paro (ambasador), Janice Gallegly and Elton Gallegly, Dennis & Elizabeth Kučinić, Joe Foley



photo: Ed Jambrušić, Zvonko Labaš, Neven Mimica, Joe Foley



photo: Tom Steić, Anne Pavlič, Janice Gallegly and Elton Gallegly, congressman



photo: Mike, Conie, Betty and Ed Andrus at Croatian Embassy



photo:NFCACF president Ed Andrus speech

(sent by: Joe Foley, NFCACF /HIA-website)

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