

For Immediate Release October 28, 2008

"President George W. Bush signs NATO Accession Protocols for Croatia"

Washington, D.C. - At a well-attended signing ceremony in the East Room of the White House on Friday evening, October 24, 2008, President Bush signed the much-awaited North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Accession Protocols for Croatia and Albania. On the dias with the President were NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Ambassador Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic of Croatia, and Ambassador Aleksander Sallabanda of Albania. The President has been a strong supporter of NATO expansion and of the inclusion of Albania and Croatia in the Alliance. In celebrating the progress of the two countries, the President said, "The people of Albania and Croatia are helping move the world closer to a great triumph of history - a Europe that is whole, a Europe that is free, and a Europe that is at peace".

The President applauded Croatia and Albania for overcoming communism and war in order to become peaceful democracies. Secretary General Scheffer added that the two new nation-states have demonstrated, by word and by deed, that they are willing and able to shoulder the responsibilities of NATO membership. At the conclusion of the signing, those in attendance broke out into a sustained standing ovation for President Bush who was clearly moved by the show of appreciation. Croatia and Albania will become the newest members of NATO when all 26 members of NATO have ratified the Accession Protocols. Membership ratification is expected to be fully accomplished in time for the 60th Anniversary of the Alliance celebration in the Spring of 2009.

The NFCA's delegation of twelve members attended as guests by Presidential Invitation to witness this historic event at the White House. Prior to the signing of the Treaty, all guests were welcomed to visit and converse in an exclusive section of the White House that included the famous Green, Red, and Blue Rooms. NFCA President Ed Andrus said that this signing is the most important event in the history of the Croatian diaspora in the United States. He went on to say: "The signing of this treaty joins the United States and the Republic of Croatia as partners in an agreement to defend each other in the event of aggression. When Croatia finally joins NATO it will become a member of the most formidable defensive organization in the history of the world. Furthermore, Croatia will have defensive capabilities greater than she has ever known in her long history."

Ambassador Grabar-Kitarovic invited NFCA members and others in attendance back to a celebration reception at the Embassy of Croatia in northwest Washington after the White House ceremony. Many guests had come in from across the U. S. to attend this special event, were

in a celebratory mood, and eager to engage with Madam Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission Marijan Gubic, new Counselor for Political Affairs Dario Mihelin, and other diplomatic friends from the Republic. Those in attendance representing the NFCA reached all the way back to the historical founding of the NFCA in the early 1990s. Three former NFCA Presidents were in Washington for the Treaty signing: the first NFCA President and current U.S. Federal Judge Edward Damich, Mijo Radocaj from Ohio, and John P. Kraljic from New York.

Other NFCA representatives in Washington were the NFCA's Central Region Vice President Frank Jerbich and member Marie McGuckin, who flew in from Chicago for the White House event. NFCA's Executive Vice President Joseph Brigich was in attendance from Pittsburgh and also represented the historically important Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU). NFCA member Dr. Judy Vogelsang attended as the Honorary Consul for Croatia from Kansas City. NFCA Director of Public & Government Affairs, Joe Foley, who has expertly strategized for the NFCA in Washington over the years in pursuit of our lofty goals for Croatia, guided us diplomatically through the evening's activities and introductions at the White House. Other NFCA members in Washington for the Treaty signing ceremony included Slavko Brkich of Philadelphia, Tom Steich of Cleveland, Petar Kraljic of NY, National Secretary Anne Pavlich, and National Treasurer Zvonko Labas. Mr. Labas noted before the ceremony: "I have painstakingly waited decades for the establishment of this close political and strategic relationship between my two countries the one of my birth and the one now of my citizenship. It is so gratifying to be seeing it happen in my lifetime."

It was an uplifting time at the Embassy reception as everyone enjoyed the political success for the Republic, great Croatian wines, and excellent food prepared by Embassy's long-time "Chef Ivo." President Andrus noted again -- as he did after the NATO Protocols smoothly and quickly passed the U. S. Senate on September 25th via a successful lobbying campaign before the Presidential elections adjournment: "All members of the NFCA should feel gratified by this major accomplishment as all have long supported the persevering efforts of the NFCA. This could not have been done without the loyal membership of the individuals and organizations that make up the NFCA."

The NFCA is the national umbrella organization of Croatian American groups that collectively represents approximately 130,000 members. For additional public affairs information, please contact the NFCA's Government and Public Affairs Director at (301) 294-0937, or NFCA Headquarters at (301) 208-6650, or by email at <NFCAhdq@verizon.net>. For recent NFCA newsletters, important NFCA membership and chapter information, and other Croatian American news please visit the NFCA's Web Site at <<http://www.nfcaonline.com>>.

National Federation of Croatian Americans (NFCA)