



# news

Wednesday, 12 th September, 2012

## "NFCACF Cultural Foundation 2012 Assembly of Delegates Successfully Convened in Cleveland"



photo: 2012, 19th Annual NFCACF Assembly Delegates with Ambassador Paro and his Diplomatic Staff

**Washington, DC:** The National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation (NFCACF) successfully completed its 19th Annual Assembly of Delegates in Cleveland, Ohio this summer. The many Delegates attending the Assembly represented Croatian communities from throughout the United States. Those states represented included **California, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and the Washington, DC area.**

The convening session began with NFCACF President **Bill Vergot** welcoming all Delegates, recently appointed Croatian Ambassador to the United States **Josko Paro**, and his top Embassy staff to the Cleveland Assembly. In addition, Mr. Vergot appreciatively acknowledged members of the Executive Committee of the Croatian Fraternal Union – National President **Bernie Luketich**, Secretary/Treasurer **Ed Pazo**, and Vice President for Member Services **Franjo Bertovich** – who also were in attendance. The 19th Assembly opened with a presentation by **Dinko Bacic**, Co-Founder of Croatian International Humanitarians (CIH). The Delegates and attendees were briefed on the various activities of CIH that include the collection of food and vital supplies for individual families-in-need, as well as orphanages and safe houses in cities across the Republic of Croatia. These cities now comprise the CIH support network are Pula, Rovinj, Varazdin, Zagreb, Osijek, Vukovar, Split, and Dubrovnik. For more information on Croatian International Humanitarians, please visit the organization's website: [www.fbhumanitarci.com](http://www.fbhumanitarci.com).

President Vergot next led a discussion concerning the NFCACF's Mission. A new draft Mission Statement was submitted by Delegate **Charles Stefanac** of Michigan and was adopted with a slight clarification by the Assembly.

President Vergot continued the early Assembly program by highlighting the NFCACF's accomplishments during the past year. He overviewed the numerous high level meetings that NFCACF representatives had conducted with Members of Congress and their staff as well as with the US State Department's foreign policy officials for SE Europe. President Vergot also emphasized the efforts the NFCACF have made with its ongoing advocacy on behalf of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Delegates were briefed on the successful recent visit of Cardinal Vinko Puljic of Sarajevo to United States - including discussions with Members of Congress and Speaker of the House John A. Boehner - regarding the ongoing political and economic difficulties being experienced by Croatian Bosnians. Mr. Vergot also highlighted recent generous NFCACF member donations to the Cardinal's new hospital in Sarajevo.

The Assembly Delegates were provided an excellent presentation by Ambassador Josko Paro, who commented on the successful effort Croatia has achieved on its path to becoming a full member of the European Union (EU). Full EU membership for Croatia is projected to be June 2013. Ambassador Paro reaffirmed Croatia's resolve to assist its neighbors - especially in their process of integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EU - as a regional leader in the Balkans neighborhood. He also stated his belief that Croatia's economic state will improve in the next year. Ambassador Paro took numerous questions from the Delegates after his presentation to the Assembly.

A Washington public affairs update was provided by **Joe Foley**, NFCACF Public Affairs Director. Mr. Foley briefed Delegates on NFCACF's ongoing education of Members of the US Congress on various issues. The organization's consistent support for the inclusion of the Republic of Croatia in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) was examined in detail, and Deputy Chief of Mission **Vice Skracic** and Embassy Congressional Affairs Officer **Martina Tenko** provided additional diplomatic input. The VWP program's expansion will remain under discussion in Washington, and more Congressional hearings may be held in the coming months. Mr. Foley also updated the Delegates on NFCACF'S current examination of political and economic discrimination against Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the need to evaluate the successes and shortcomings to date regarding implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords.

A presentation by **Raffi Gregorian**, Senior Advisor/Deputy Director of the State Department's Office of South Central European Affairs, was heard by the Delegates in the afternoon session. Mr. Gregorian served as Principal Deputy High Representative in BiH from 2007 to 2010, as well as Supervisor of the Brcko District during this same time period. Prior to these assignments Mr. Gregorian was Political Advisor at NATO Headquarters Sarajevo, Staff Advisor to the President and Secretary of State for Kosovo and the Dayton Implementation, and was Senior Advisor to the Task Force on Military Stabilization. He received a Ph.D. in International Relations and Strategic Studies from the Johns Hopkins University in Washington. His presentation to the Assembly was entitled "Structural Inequality in Bosnia and Herzegovina", and the Delegates posed many questions to Mr. Gregorian upon the completion of his speech.

After an Executive Session where Delegates held a private discussion regarding organizational operations and improvements, the election of a new slate of NFCACF Officers took place. The election results for the next year are: President - **Bill Vergot**; Executive Vice President - **Zvonko Labas**; National Treasurer - **Michael Stempihar**; Assistant Treasurer - **Jay Hunter**; National Secretary - **Anne Pavlich**; Past President - **John Kraljic**; Parliamentarian - **Tom Steich**; Eastern Vice President - **Steve Rukavina**; Central Vice President - **Frank Jerbic**; and Delegates at Large - **Mario Spalatin** and **Charles Stefanac**.

President Bill Vergot closed the 19th Annual NFCACF Assembly of Delegates Convention by announcing the unanimous decision of the Delegates that the 20th Annual Assembly will be held in the greater Tampa-Sarasota area in June 2013.

The NFCACF is the national umbrella organization of Croatian American groups that collectively represents approximately 130,000 members. For additional public affairs information, please contact NFCACF Headquarters by telephone or by email via [info@nfcacf.org](mailto:info@nfcacf.org). For important NFCACF membership information, recent newsletters, and other Croatian American news please visit the new web site: [www.nfcacf.org](http://www.nfcacf.org). Those interested in donating to the NFCACF and/or becoming a member, please visit the website and use the easy PayPal button to do so.

National Federation of Croatian Americans  
Cultural Foundation (NFCACF)

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