



For Immediate Release - January 4, 2018

## **“US Congress Orders Up a New Study on Growing Russian Interests and Current Intrusions into the Western Balkans”**

Washington DC, USA: The National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation (NFCA) commends US Representative Eliot Engel (D-NY) and co-sponsor Representative Robert Aderholt (R-AL), both active members in the Congressional Croatian Caucus, for their successful amendment included on the Floor of the US House of Representatives to the FY18 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The US Defense Department’s policy bill for 2018 was signed into Public Law on December 12.

Due to increasing concern with Serbia’s defense ties with Russia, this important legislative language directed the Department of Defense to study the defense relationships between Russia and other countries of the Balkans. Specifically, the report will cover the “defense and security relationship between Serbia and the Russian Federation...a list of Russian weapons systems valued at \$1,000,000 or more that have been provided to Serbia since 2012... a description of the participation by Serbian armed forces in Russian military training or exercise since 2012... how the countries bordering Serbia assess the risk the Serbian armed forces (and intelligence cooperation with Russia) pose to their national security... and how military relations between Serbia and Russia affect United States defense and security cooperation with Serbia

and cooperation between Serbia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).”

Congressman Engel, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, stated: “I am increasingly concerned with Serbia’s military relationship with Russia and believe the US needs a plan to counter Moscow’s destabilizing influence in the Balkans. My amendment will hopefully shed light on how these activities are affecting America’s friends and allies and making the region less safe.”

NFCA President Steve Rukavina lauded the sincere concern that Congressmen Engel and Aderholt have for the continued success of the new nation-states of the Western Balkans. Rukavina said: “NFCA commends these Members of Congress and the entire Conference Committee for their critical expression of support regarding the continued movement of the Balkans toward integration into western multilateral economic and defensive organizations such as NATO and the European Union.”

In the final Conference Report 115-404 adopted by the Congress and signed into Public Law as part of H.R. 2810, the Conferees (on pages 965-6) expanded significantly the original language of the Engel Amendment. The Defense Department’s report to the US Congress, with concurrence of the Secretary of State, shall include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia in the “assessment of security cooperation between each of the specified countries and the Russian Federation, the US, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), among of other elements.” Furthermore, “the Conferees remain concerned over Russia’s intensifying effort to assert its malign influence in the Western Balkans. The conferees condemn Russia’s involvement in the attempted coup against the government of Montenegro, and believe the US should maintain a policy of support for the sovereign right the countries of the Western Balkans to pursue integration into the Euro-Atlantic community..” A copy of the full language from Conference Report 115-404 is attached for greater detail.

For additional information on this release, please contact NFCA Public Affairs Director Joe Foley in Washington on [\(301\) 294-0937](tel:3012940937). The **NFCA** is the national umbrella organization established in 1993 for Croatian Americans, related professional associations, and the many fraternal lodges that collectively represent approximately 90,000 members. For individual membership and chapter information, recent newsletters, opportunities to donate to the NFCA, and for other Croatian American news please visit our web site: [www.nfcacf.org](http://www.nfcacf.org).

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Attachment: FY18 NDAA Conference Report final language

115th CONGRESS  
Conference Report **115-404**  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FY2018  
NOVEMBER 9, 2017 — Ordered to be printed  
Mr. THORNBERRY, from the Committee on Conference, submitted the following  
CONFERENCE REPORT  
[To accompany **H.R. 2810**]

The Committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2810), to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2018 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, having met, after full and free conference, have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses as follows:

***TITLE XII—MATTERS RELATING TO FOREIGN NATIONS***

***Subtitle D—Matters Relating to the Russian Federation***

***Report on Security Cooperation with respect to Western Balkan countries (Section 1237);  
Pages 965-966***

The House bill contained a provision (sec. 1239) that would require the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to submit to the congressional defense committees and others a report on the defense and security relationship between Serbia and the Russian Federation. (*the Engel-Aderholt Amendment language*)

The Senate amendment contained no similar provision.

The Senate recedes with an amendment that would require the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to submit to the congressional defense committees and others, a report on security cooperation with respect to Western Balkan countries, including Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The amendment would require that the report include assessments of security cooperation between each of the specified countries and the Russian Federation, the United States, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), among other elements.

The conferees remain concerned over Russia's intensifying effort to assert its malign influence in the Western Balkans. The conferees condemn Russia's involvement in the attempted coup against the government of Montenegro, and believe the United States should maintain a policy of support for the sovereign right of the countries of the Western Balkans to pursue integration into the Euro-Atlantic community through institutions including NATO and the European Union.

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