

Revaluorization of the Geotrafic Position of the Republic of Croatia

Marko Šarić^{1*}¹PhD Candidat Faculty of Logistics, University of Maribor, Slovenia, EuropaDOI: [10.36347/sjahss.2023.v11i09.001](https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2023.v11i09.001)

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***Corresponding author:** Marko Šarić

PhD Candidat Faculty of Logistics, University of Maribor, Slovenia, Europa

Abstract**Review Article**

The paper re-evaluates the traffic-geographical position of the Republic of Croatia after joining the EU and the Schengen area. Croatian strength is in the fact that it can connect several regions within Europe and that it functions as a link between Western Europe and the Western Balkans and Central Europe and the Mediterranean, however, its political-geographical and transport position can and should be further strengthened, as never before in its difficult and long history. Despite the pressures of malicious neighbors and internal opponents of European values, the Republic of Croatia entered the Schengen Area on January 1, 2023. Before that, it entered the European Union, and Croatian borders became the borders for entering Germany, Italy or France. Croatia's neighbors from the EU can no longer unilaterally block the flow of goods and services in the north-south direction, which is of vital importance for the strategic revaluation of Croatia's geotrafic position. The Adriatic-Ionian transport route is also important for the complete Croatian transport revaluation. The paper also analyzes the historical geopolitical position that influenced the Croatian transport policy.

Keywords: Croatia, Shengen Zone, Traffic Policy, Geographical and Traffic Location.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The political-geographical and transport situation imperatively dictates to each nation its national-state duties (Pillar I. 2006). It is Croatia's national and state duty to connect all parts of the national territory (mainland and Adriatic Croatia), as well as the territory inhabited by Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) by road and rail transport into a single integrated unit so that the national identity is protected and successfully developed. It is also Croatia's duty to connect Central Europe with the Adriatic Sea, especially now that there are no political and economic obstacles to entering the EU and the Schengen area, in such a way that as many countries and companies as possible use, but never own, Croatia's traffic-geographical position.

Croatia has a favorable, yet highly specific and almost unique geographical and transport position. Situated between four major European geographical regions – the Alpine region, the Pannonian Plain, the Mediterranean, and the Dinaric area as part of the mountain system of Southeastern Europe – Croatia plays a connecting role in linking these mentioned regions and holds a significant intermediary position in the exchange of their goods and services. Through its

territory, routes lead from Western and Central Europe to the countries of Southeastern Europe and the Middle East, as well as from the countries of the central Danube region and their hinterlands to the seaports on the Adriatic Sea. To fully exploit this geographical and transport position, besides the advantages of the natural location, it is necessary to possess a well-developed transport network, appropriate size and quality of transportation means, transshipment equipment, and storage space in ports and land terminals, as well as shipping, customs, financial, sanitary, and similar services, along with a well-managed tariff and customs policy (Pađen J. 2000). Today, this position can definitely be improved, as we have already emphasized after Croatia's entry into the EU and the Schengen Area.

Croatia's national interest has been and remains full membership in European and Euro-Atlantic integrations, along with the adjustment of Croatian legislation to the legal acquis of the EU, the rule of law, and the functioning of state institutions. Only such principles can distance Croatia from the Balkan corruption chaos and economic-political isolation (Šarić 2005).

1.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methods used in this research work were as follows:

- Inductive method, a form of indirect reasoning that derives a general conclusion from individual or specific facts, drawing conclusions about the general from observations of specific instances and facts;
- Deductive method, a form of indirect reasoning in which the concluding judgment is derived from the general to the specific or individual;
- Analysis method, involving the dissection of known statements, premises, concepts, conclusions, models, etc., into their constituent parts;
- Description method, used to depict facts, concepts, and processes.

2. CROATIA'S GEOPOLITICAL POSITION AND ITS IMPACT ON CROATIAN TRANSPORT POLICY

Croatia's unique geographical and transport position also comes with its weaknesses. One of the major weaknesses is that the Croatian state territory is not a unified geographical entity but borders large geographical units, namely:

- Dinaric-Balkan system,
- Alpine system,
- Pannonian plain,
- Adriatic Sea.

This is the reason why the present-day Croatian republic did not constitute a unified geographical and transport entity back then, with well-defined natural borders that would have facilitated internal homogenization and state-national cohesion. Numerous Croatian adversaries (Vienna, Budapest, Rome, and Belgrade) adeptly exploited these negative aspects of natural barriers to disrupt the transportation and national unity of the Croatian people and Croatian lands. Here, we will analyze three major imperial threats that influenced Croatian transport policy and Croatian national unity:

1. Germanic Negative Influence on Croatian Transport Policy: Drang nach Osten

"Drang nach Osten" (German: urge, pressure, eastward expansion) refers to the German policy of expansion toward the east. In the Middle Ages, it referred to Slavic territories between the Elbe and Oder rivers. In the late 19th century, it denoted the policy of advancing toward the Middle East and Central Asia through the Balkans. An exemplary instance of this policy was the project to construct the so-called Baghdad Railway, which aimed to establish a route from Hamburg–Berlin–Constantinople (Istanbul)–Baghdad–Persian Gulf, thus gaining influence over the entire region. Its culmination was during the Nazi era,

with a shift toward Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the USSR

(source: <https://enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?ID=16180>, accessed on July 1, 2023). This German doctrine also affected Croatian territories, effectively obstructing the connection between northern and southern Croatia, central Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and marginalizing all Croatian ports on the Adriatic coast. Nazi Germany mainly acted against Croatian interests in conflicts with Italy (Croatian Dalmatia and Croatian littoral) and Hungary (Croatian Međimurje).

2. Austro-Hungarian Negative Influence on Croatian Transport Policy

Vienna's and Budapest's interests showed a disregard for Croatian interests when shaping transportation policies within Croatian territories. Railway routes constructed within Croatian lands were often in conflict with Croatian national and transport interests or were only partially fulfilled (e.g., Rijeka). None of the eastern Adriatic ports in Croatian lands (Senj, Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Dubrovnik, Boka Kotorska) received standard gauge railways, despite their rich maritime history, natural protection for Šibenik and Split due to geographical location, and Zadar's natural hinterland richness. The consequences of this Austro-Hungarian policy were dire, as these ports were isolated during the intense capitalist development of the 19th century and excluded from mass movement of goods and people with their natural hinterlands. In Bosnia, narrow-gauge railways were built with exits towards the north only through Sisak. Istrian railways were connected to Trieste and Vienna, never to Zagreb or Rijeka. The case of the port of Rijeka is unique, as it obtained a railway connection (Riječka krpica, <https://proleksis.lzmk.hr/43980/>, accessed on July 3, 2023), but through Hungarian deceit, it was excluded from Croatian territorial control and illegally annexed by imperial and hostile Hungary, without the knowledge of the Croatian side [1].

¹ Although Croatia had formal autonomy within Austria-Hungary, Ban Croatia experienced severe political humiliation by electing the Hungarian Khuen-Hédervárya as the Ban of Croatia, overthrown by the official, Great Hungarian and chauvinist Budapest. He was appointed to the position of the Croatian ban in order to curb Croatian statehood, internal transport connections and resistance to Hungarianization. In the fight against the Croatian support, he relied on the Serbian citizenry, which generously and fanatically supported him; He gave the Serbs in central Croatia and Slavonia broad national-ecclesiastical autonomy, with the clear aim of breaking up the Croatian lands and destroying the Croatian name, and turning Croatia into a marginal Hungarian province (Serbs in Croatia: Khuenova doba / Mato Artuković, 2001). 1991. Serbs in Croatia, again this time with the help of official Belgrade, not Budapest, break the territorial and spatial-

The efforts of the Croatian Parliament to connect eastern Croatian macro-region Slavonia with Zagreb and Rijeka via the railway route Zemun–Požega–Sisak–Rijeka yielded no results due to political blockades from Vienna and Budapest (Pađen J. 2000).

3. Yugoslav Communist Dictatorship and Greater Serbian Aggression as Negative Influences on Croatian Transport Policy

The Yugoslav communist dictatorship showed no interest in internal connectivity within the Socialist Republic of Croatia. Despite being the second-largest republic in size and Croats being the second-largest nation in Yugoslavia, transportation policy exclusively favored Belgrade's interests. Priority was given to Serbia's internal connectivity (Novi Sad–Belgrade–Niš) and connecting Belgrade with republican centers. During the Yugoslav communist dictatorship, priority was placed on constructing the bizarrely named "Brotherhood and Unity" highway, which was not in Croatia's interest. This would later be revealed by the brutal Greater Serbian aggression of the Yugoslav People's Army, Serbia, Montenegro, and local Serbian terrorists from Croatia. The Podravska Magistrala was constructed, connecting northern Slovenia, eastern Croatia, and Vojvodina, as well as the Adriatic Highway connecting Montenegro and Croatia. However, internal connectivity within Croatia was non-existent or unsuccessfully concluded (e.g., Split–Zagreb and Zagreb–Rijeka highways). It can be definitively concluded that the construction of crossroads or expressways was neglected, preventing Croatian territory from being connected. The brutal Greater Serbian aggression from 1991-95 blocked transportation in a significant portion of the Republic of Croatia. The formation of the puppet state of the so-called Republic of Serbian Krajina under the control of official Belgrade, the state of Serbia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), severed road and railway connections between northern and southern Croatian territories and hindered access to eastern Croatia and regional centers like Osijek, Požega, Vinkovci, and Slavonski Brod, while Vukovar was under Serbian occupation. Railway traffic was halted on lines such as M301 Beli Manastir–Osijek, M601 Vinkovci–Vukovar–Borovo Naselje–Vukovar, M604 Oštarije–Gospić–Knin–Split, M606 Knin–Zadar, M607 Split–Makarska, M608 Šibenik–Zadar–Split, M610 Split–Sinj–Knin, and M611 Knin–Drniš–Šibenik

Road traffic on highways, state, regional and local roads was also suspended or difficult. Highway A3 Bregana-Lipovac near Okučani, as well as on the

traffic unity of the Republic of Croatia, the occupation of 1/3 of the territory lasts 1991-1998. (<https://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=15884> . 3.7.2023).

following state roads in the Republic of Croatia: D25 Korenica (D1) – Bunić – Lički Osik – Gospić – Karlobag (D8), D27 Gračac (D1) - Obrovac - Benkovac - Stankovci - D8, D33 G.P. Strmica (gr. BiH) - Knin - Drniš - Šibenik (D8), D37 Sisak (D36) - Petrinja - Glina (D6), D42 Vrbovsko (D3) - Ogulin - Josipdol - Plaski - Grabovac (Rakovica) (D1), D47 Lipik (D5) - Novska - Hrvatska Dubica - Hrvatska Kostajnica - Dvor (D6), D50 Žuta Lokva (D23) - Otočac - Gospić - Gračac (D27), D54 Maslenica (D8) - Zaton Obrovački (D27), D55 Borovo (D2) - Vinkovci - G.P. Županja (State Border/BiH), D56 Drniš (D33) - Muć - Klis-Grlo (D1), D57 Vukovar (D2) - Orolik - Nijemci - čvorište Lipovac (A3), D59 Knin (D1) - Kistanje - Bribirske Mostine - Putičanje - Kapela (D8), D211 G.P. Baranjsko Petrovo Selo (gr. Mađarske) - Baranjsko Petrovo Selo (D517), D212 D7 - Kneževi Vinogradi - G.P. Batina (gr. R. Srbije), D213 D2 - G.P. Erdut (State Border/R. Srbija), D217 Ličko Petrovo Selo (D1) - G.P. Ličko Petrovo Selo (gr. BiH), D216 Vojnić (D6) - Kolarić - G.P. Maljevac (gr. BiH), D224 Mošćenica (D37) - Blinjski Kut - Sunja - Panjani (D30), D424 Zadar (Luka Gaženica), D502 Zemunik Donji (D424) - Smilčić - Karin (D27), D517 Beli Manastir (D7) - Belišće (D34), D519 Dalj (D213) - Borovo (D2), D522 Udbina (D1) – Lovinac.

(source: Zakon o cestama Narodne novine 84/11, accessed on July 3, 2023). The war damage to vital infrastructure is estimated at around 43 billion euros, with the number of deceased members of the Croatian military and police forces and civilians standing at around 15,900 (<https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/srbija-i-agresorska-jna-duzni-su-hrvatskoj-43-milijarde-eura-ratne-s>, accessed on July 1, 2023).

4. Unfavorable Political Environment Surrounding Croatia

The unfavorable political environment surrounding Croatia, which impacts its transport and economic development, remains unchanged since Kurečić (2001) referred to Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina as such. After the brutal Russian aggression in Ukraine, and given their ambiguous position as EU and NATO partners, Hungary can also be identified as a potential negative influence. Although Hungary nominally supports European values, the government maintains strong ties with Russia, China, and Serbia. Such contacts contradict the interests and principles of the EU, NATO, and OECD. The Republic of Serbia and Croatia have numerous unresolved issues straining their relationship, including the issue of the missing from the Homeland War, border disputes on the navigable portion of the Danube River, and others. The fact that the relationship between the two nations isn't improving is evidenced by Serbia's accusations that Croatian intelligence services are involved in organizing protests

against the Serbian government. As a NATO member, Montenegro represents a slightly less unfavorable environment for Croatia. However, its multi-ethnic makeup and recent internal turmoil caused by disputes involving the Serbian Orthodox Church and strained relations with Serbia contribute to Montenegro being a less stable neighbor for Croatia. Montenegro's transport policy is more focused on the construction of the Bar-Boljare highway, which is part of the future Belgrade-Bar highway, rather than the Adriatic-Ionian corridor, emphasizing Montenegro's Mediterranean orientation. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia's final neighboring country, is hindered by its internal organization, preventing the state from having a stable policy in various areas, including foreign policy. Due to the necessity for confirmation from all three constituent nations for any decision, stability and effective foreign policy are challenging to maintain. While Croatia has significant disputes with Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the jeopardized rights of Croats to democratically elect their representative in the BiH

presidency, Croatia supports Bosnia and Herzegovina's international integration and connectivity with the Budapest-Osijek-Ploče corridor. This corridor connects all Croatian areas in Herzegovina, central Bosnia, and the Posavina region with the Republic of Croatia, ensuring strategic depth, national security, and the protection of state borders. The historical deformation of Croatia's state territory defines the region as a borderland. When measuring borderland based on a simple distance of 10-50 km from the border line, 50 percent of Croatia's state territory is borderland. Only two Croatian counties are not borderland: Bjelovar-Bilogora and Požega-Slavonia. Consequently, Croatia's national interest places a strong emphasis on Bosnia and Herzegovina's survival and connecting eastern and southern Croatia through the aforementioned Budapest-Osijek-Ploče corridor. It is worth noting that during Serbian occupation of 33 percent of Croatian territory, Croatia was only 10 km wide in the "Karlovačka vrata" region, from Serbian terrorist positions in Kordun to the Slovenian state border.



Figure 1: Occupation of the Republic Of Croatia 1991-1998 (dark-yellow color), OCCUPIERS; Yugoslavia, Yugoslav People's Army, Serbia, Montenegro, Serbian terrorists from Croatia

Source: Croatian Encyclopedia, 2022

3. IMPACT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND SCHENGEN AREA ON CROATIA'S TRANSPORT POLICY

When considering the transport-geographical position of the Republic of Croatia, it is crucial to highlight the international, pan-European corridors (Figure 2) that pass through it. The most significant is undoubtedly Corridor Vb, which connects two major Croatian cities, Rijeka and Zagreb, and continues on to Budapest. It holds great importance due to Rijeka being Croatia's largest port, through which essential goods for

Croatia and landlocked countries, including Hungary, pass. For these countries, Croatia provides the fastest access to open seas. Corridor Vc is particularly significant as it links southern Croatia to the east from Ploče, through Mostar and Sarajevo to Osijek, and further to Budapest. As previously mentioned, this corridor ensures Croatia's full strategic depth and national security of its own territory and the protection of state borders, addressing the historical distortion of Croatia's state space.



Figure 2: Traffic Corridors In Croatia (<https://mmpi.gov.hr/vijesti-8/ten-t-days-polozaj-hrvatske-u-prometnoj-mrezi-europske-unije/6502>, 11.7.2023)

Other pan-European corridors passing through Croatia include Corridor X, which goes towards Salzburg-Ljubljana-Zagreb-Belgrade. A possible alternative or supplement could come from the development of the Adriatic-Ionian route, which holds exceptional importance for Croatian national and state interests. The Adriatic-Ionian corridor project had significant political weight in its inception, which persists to this day. The stabilization of the Adriatic-Ionian region is marked as a strategic political goal of the European Union, with the ultimate result of stabilizing the political and security situation in Southeast Europe. The Stabilization and Association Agreement that Croatia signed with the European Union in 2001, considered significant for later obtaining the status of a candidate for EU membership, was complementary to the Adriatic-Ionian initiative (Šarić 2003). Now, as of July 2023, when Croatia is a full member of the EU, NATO, Schengen, and the Eurozone, being one of 15 world states with such membership, it can further revalorize the Adriatic-Ionian transport route through its very good political influence. The Adriatic-Ionian railway and road corridor provide a strategic advantage to Croatia over Serbia and the aforementioned Corridor X. Serbia

(Little Russia in the Balkans), a regional competitor to Croatia, which does not wish to be part of the European security-political structure, needs to be transportatively and politically isolated until Serbian state doctrine changes: "all Serbs in one state," regardless of state borders (https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/pros_exp/bcs/rep-srb-b.htm. 13.7.2023).

Transport revalorization is a strategic national and state interest of the Croatian nation. Transport is very important for Croatia, and only in the last 20 years has transport valorization been initiated in this sense. Without strong transport, Croatia cannot fulfill its destiny as a strong master of the Eastern Adriatic and Central Europe, unable to unlock all its transport, tourist, agricultural, and human potentials. In this sense, the Adriatic-Ionian motorway is particularly important. The geo-transport position of the Adriatic-Ionian motorway speaks to its exceptional strategic importance for all seven countries through which it passes. The route of the Adriatic-Ionian motorway (JJAC) is laid along the eastern coast of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas from Trieste in Italy to Igoumenitsa in Greece. The most significant part of the motorway through Croatia is

practically already built, and it is the A1 motorway that has great importance for all countries involved in its construction (Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece). The Republic of Croatia is an integral part of two macro-regional strategies of the European Union: the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR)(<https://mint.gov.hr/strategija-eu-za-jadransku-i-jonsku-regiju-eusair/17790>. 3.7.2023).

As a member of these two macro-regional strategies of the European Union (Danube and Adriatic-Ionian regions), Croatia will continue to strengthen its position as a country at the crossroads of Central Europe and the Mediterranean (Nacionalna razvojna strategija Republike Hrvatske do 2030. godine u poglavlju „Jačanje položaja Hrvatske u srednjoj Europi i na Sredozemlju“ .1.7.2023. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_02_13_230.html).

On the aforementioned corridor, the built Pelješac Bridge plays an important role for Croatia, as its construction established a strong road connection between all parts of the Croatian national territory, contributing to the robust development of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County and the Pelješac Peninsula, i.e., southern Croatia.

Croatia, as a geographically significant member of the EU and Schengen, creates conditions for strong political influence on European transportation policy, thanks to its EU and Schengen Zone membership. Specifically, Croatian amendments have been accepted, placing Croatia on four European corridors. For financing, we have 26 billion Euros available through EU funds (www.hgk.hr. 5.7.2023).

Accepted amendments include:

- Connecting Istrian Ypsilon to Slovenian highways
- Railway connection Pula - Buzet - Divača - Trieste
- New railway route Zagreb - Maribor - Graz
- Port of Rijeka on the Baltic-Adriatic corridor, with equal status as Trieste, Koper, and Ravenna
- Road connection Rijeka - Trieste
- Linking the Lika railway directly with Rijeka, Zagreb, and further towards Northern Europe
- Western Balkans Corridor passing through Croatia, with the port of Ploče as the most important geostrategic port on that route
- Split as the gateway to the Mediterranean corridor

The transportation network on nine European corridors encompasses tunnels, bridges, railways, and

Croatia is currently only on two corridors, but with the newly adopted amendments, it is expected to be on four. Therefore, the Republic of Croatia is involved in four out of the total nine European transportation corridors:

- Mediterranean Corridor
- Rhine-Danube Corridor
- Baltic Sea - Adriatic Sea Corridor
- Western Balkans - Eastern Mediterranean Corridor

Croatia is positioned on two core network corridors: the Mediterranean Corridor and the Rhine-Danube Corridor. The Mediterranean Corridor connects the southern Iberian Peninsula, passes through the Spanish and French Mediterranean coasts, traverses the Alps in northern Italy, enters Slovenia, and continues towards the Hungarian-Ukrainian border. It encompasses both road and railway corridors, and an integral part is the Rijeka-Zagreb-Budapest route (a railway and road route commonly referred to in Croatia as the Vb Corridor). From a geostrategic standpoint, the seaports of Rijeka and Ploče hold special significance, with Rijeka being close to the LNG terminal and the port of Ploče being strategically important due to its proximity to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The fact that Croatia is a part of the Schengen Agreement strengthens its political, geographical, and transportation position within the EU, as emphasized multiple times. Croatia's entry into the Schengen Area on January 1, 2023, holds significant geo-economic and geo-transport importance for Croatia, as it means that EU focuses more on and provides better technology and funds for the surveillance of its eastern and southern borders.

Equally important is the fact that the movement of goods and people can flow more freely into Croatia from the Schengen Area, which is particularly advantageous for Croatian tourism and transportation, receiving a substantial boost in this scenario. For bus carriers, this signifies the complete elimination of waiting times at border crossings for passenger checks, which used to last for several hours. The same applies to international rail transport.

The inclusion of Croatian airports into the Schengen Area on March 26, 2023, is expected to further increase the numbers of air passengers and contribute to tourism, as procedures and controls in air transportation will be reduced - there will be no border controls, and transfer flights within Schengen will be much faster. In the early years following entry, air traffic in all new Schengen member states has increased by around 10% annually. Freight transport will benefit primarily due to the elimination of border controls towards Slovenia and Hungary, resulting in savings from faster delivery of goods, driver working hours,

optimized driver rest times, and reduced fuel consumption during waiting times, which subsequently has a positive environmental impact.

As an example, over 3,200,000 freight vehicles and buses crossed the Croatian-Slovenian and Croatian-Hungarian borders in both directions in 2021, with Croatian carriers accounting for nearly 35% of these crossings - around 1,100,000 crossings. Since average wait times are between two to three hours at border crossings, each of these crossings generated a cost/lost profit of around 100 euros per crossing for our carriers. The estimation is that the direct benefits of Schengen entry for more than 5,000 international road carriers in Croatia will exceed 110 million euros annually (source: www.hgk.hr, July 5, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Today's geopolitical and transport position is not perfect, primarily due to the extensive border with the relatively unstable Western Balkans region, with which Croatia, unfortunately, remains entangled in tensions. However, Croatia's geopolitical and geotransport position also offers the opportunity to mediate in solving some problems and build international credibility and political influence, thereby realizing its interests in the region. The countries of Central Europe and the Mediterranean represent a stable environment to which Croatia belongs, and maintaining strong economic and political relationships with them is crucial. As these countries are predominantly landlocked nations naturally oriented toward Croatia as their nearest access to the open sea, it is clear that Croatia and Central Europe are mutually interdependent. Croatia's strength lies in its ability to connect multiple regions within Europe and serve as a bridge between Western Europe and the Western Balkans, as well as between Central Europe and the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, Croatia can and should further strengthen its geopolitical position. This has been achieved through Croatia's entry into the Schengen area. Croatia's national borders now also serve as entry points to Germany, France, Italy, and Austria. The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), of which Croatia is a member, allows our country to fully revalorize its transport position in the Mediterranean and exert invaluable political and economic-transport influence in the European Union. With the construction of the Adriatic-Ionian highway, the Croatian nation surpasses all its regional competitors and becomes a key state in this part of the EU.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the geotransport and geopolitical position has undergone significant positive changes, from political-economic blockades by Vienna, Budapest, Rome, and Belgrade,

traditional Croatian adversaries, when Croatian interests were often not respected and were even deliberately undermined. Today, the Republic of Croatia stands among the top 15 European Union countries, a member of prestigious clubs: the EU, NATO, the Schengen Zone, and the Euro Zone. It is now in a position to achieve all its goals, becoming a master of the Eastern Adriatic and a crucial factor in Central Europe.

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