Public Diplomacy in Croatia: 
Sharing NATO and EU Values with the Domestic Public

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Summary
In a globalized world, with dynamic flows of information and communication, public diplomacy also supports internal understanding of international values and relations. The sharing of international standards, democratic changes and market reforms in Central, Eastern and South-East Europe has become more effective by communicating with the domestic public. This has also been experienced in Croatia, which has long been considered as one of the more advanced transition countries. Croatia’s strategic goal of becoming a functional market democracy has always been in line with NATO and EU values, although the costs and benefits of accession were, and still are, to be discussed both abroad and with the domestic public. Creating pluralistic, well-structured and institutionalized platforms for permanent public dialogue is a multifaceted activity that allows all segments of society to practise democracy. The lessons learned in Croatia confirm that a government — if and when it develops a domestic dialogue — not only gains public support for its foreign policy goals at home and abroad, but also becomes better articulated internationally.

Keywords
foreign policy, public diplomacy, communication strategy, transition countries, Croatia, European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Introduction
When discussing the role of public diplomacy, particularly for the domestic market, it should be remembered that the general legal framework for diplomatic
activities continues to be provided by the Vienna Conventions. It is, however, almost an understatement to say that diplomacy has evolved since Vienna. Diplomacy today spreads in a number of directions, from ‘MFA-to-MFA’ and ‘state-to-state’ to ‘state-to-society’. It uses a number of public-oriented concepts and platforms, aiming at different target groups and/or selected niches of foreign and domestic audiences. In this dynamic process, certain state responsibilities remain intact, as they should, but non-state actors have also become increasingly active in the field.

This shift in modern diplomacy has also been felt in Croatia, which was ‘reborn’ and internationally recognized in the early 1990s. Croatia’s declaration of independence and the Independence War happened shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which brought about more parallel processes of establishing democratic society and its institutions, with a new course taken towards a liberal economy. The 1990s in fact ushered in a triple simultaneous transition, namely from communism to democracy, from a self-managed economic system to a market-oriented economy, and from aggression and war to peace and post-war development. Starting from scratch in the 1990s, Croatia’s emerging diplomatic force was immediately faced with the complex tasks of communicating internationally the events that were taking place in Croatia, as well as establishing itself within the international order as a credible new partner.

Croatia’s newly established diplomatic service faced the challenges of very demanding foreign policy goals by applying both traditional and new public diplomacy instruments. After achieving international recognition of Croatia as an independent state, Euro-Atlantic integration became the next priority foreign-policy goal. From the very beginning, Croatia understood the benefits of these foreign relations and integration for its development and international posture, as well as of mastering their high standards and criteria for its young polity and economy. In establishing Euro-Atlantic relations, and particularly in order to become a member of NATO and the European Union (EU), and thereby effectively to share the same values and beliefs as NATO and EU members, Croatia demonstrated awareness of the need to communicate those same values to and with its domestic public. This represented a novel practice for both Croatia’s citizens and public institutions, where communication with the domestic public contributed to revising, refining and rebuilding a new national identity.

2) A number of factors with multiple effects — such as culture, education, science, research, innovations, natural beauty, tourism and sports — have contributed significantly to effective public communication, visibility and the image of Croatia. See Mladen Andrlić, ‘Public Diplomacy and Croatian Experience’, in Nada Zgrablić Rotar (ed.), Media and Tourism (Zadar: University of Zadar, 2009).
3) Croatia has been a member of the UN since 1992, as well as the Council of Europe since 1996, the WTO since 2000 and NATO since 2009.
To address the issue of public diplomacy’s domestic dimension, EU and NATO accession serve as the ideal examples of why we can argue that today’s public diplomacy cannot be devoid of its domestic audience — namely, domestic public support is a precondition for gaining EU and NATO membership. When it comes to joining the EU, the Croatian Constitution stipulates that there should be a positive national referendum result prior to joining; in the case of NATO accession, although a national referendum is not stipulated by national law, after completing necessary reforms, the final condition for joining is to gain a majority of public support. Croatia not only reached these goals, with NATO membership status in April 2009, signed the EU Accession Treaty in December 2011, and received EU membership status in July 2013. Croatia nowadays also leads the European and transatlantic integration processes of its neighbours in South-East Europe.

Although the practice of the domestic dimension of public diplomacy is widespread and on the rise, there are limited scientific analyses and resources on the issue. The purpose of this contribution is to show that modern democratic countries cannot achieve foreign policy goals without involving the domestic public, as shown by the example of Croatia’s path to membership in NATO and the EU. In doing so, this contribution addresses how Croatia has used public diplomacy practices of informing, dialogue and building partnerships in sharing NATO and EU values with its citizenry. The first section discusses the background, goals, activities and stakeholders of Croatia’s strategies to communicate and share EU and NATO values with its citizenry. The second section reflects on the differences between the two accession processes and — useful for other accession countries — the most pertinent challenges faced.

**Practising Public Diplomacy in Croatia**

The processes of achieving EU and NATO values, as well as of joining their membership, are among the most comprehensive public diplomacy endeavours in contemporary Europe. This was also the case for Croatia, where the domestic public was, and still is, attracted by tailor-made national communication strategies. With certain immediate responses from the citizens, a broader platform for wider and more structured public dialogue has also been introduced. This section delves into the background, goals, activities and stakeholders of the strategies that Croatia developed to gain public support for its NATO and EU membership.

**Background**

Both NATO’s and the EU’s legal stipulations and preconditions for membership require domestic support prior to accession. With respect to NATO, securing a significant level of public support remained one of the last preconditions for accession in 2007. In the preceding years, all of the relevant benchmarks and the
underlying reforms were successfully implemented, such as a functioning democratic political system and market economy, the treatment of minorities in accordance with Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) guidelines, the resolution of all open issues with neighbours, and the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to the Alliance. After restoring the peace and during the post-war reconstruction, Croatia turned towards the Euro-Atlantic integration process while its neighbourhood remained unstable. The region’s instabilities in the early 2000s made the Croatian population even more aware that NATO’s guarantee of collective security constituted a necessary option. Polls showed that after NATO’s 1999 Kosovo-related Operation Allied Force, public support for NATO membership rose to 60 per cent.

Regarding the European Union, the complexity of the process of joining the EU in many ways — and particularly for all of the countries that had to reset their foundations, such as the former Eastern Bloc countries and Croatia — entailed a good practice of democracy-setting and deepening horizontal and vertical communication. Moreover, the EU’s institutional and decision-making structures clearly influence national administrative arrangements, tracking the national foreign ministry’s role in domestic policy arenas. In Croatia’s case, formal relations with the EU really began with the Stabilization and Association Agreement, signed on 29 October 2001, although Croatia’s interest in closer ties with the European Communities was already shown in the 1990s. A comprehensive programme of adapting to the EU standards — which was initialled by the time of Croatia’s application for EU membership on 21 February 2003 — was followed by the national plans adopted on an annual basis, with the necessary legislative and administrative reforms. The strategic orientation, political willingness and transparency of the Croatian government, but also of the opposition, have also been important.

The strong point in Croatia’s accession path, which ensured depoliticizing and continuity of the process, was the decision not to link the goal of EU membership to a single party but to reach a wider consensus. The Alliance for Europe was created by all the political parties that were represented in the national parliament. After it had successfully met all of the requirements and conducted all of the necessary reforms, Croatia reached the final step of its accession path. In June 2011 it finished the technical part of one of the longest and most complex negotiation processes in EU enlargement history, and the EU–Croatia Accession Treaty was signed on 9 December 2011, with Croatia announced to become an EU member state before 15 July 2013.

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The referendum that was held on 22 January 2012 resulted in a majority of 66 per cent of Croatian citizens voting in favour of EU membership, and the ratification procedures in the 27 existing EU member states have already begun. By early July 2012, eleven parliamentary ratifications had been completed — namely in Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, Malta, Latvia, Lithuania, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Romania and Austria. All in all, 23 or 24 member states are expected to have ratified the Treaty before the end of 2012.\(^7\)

**Goals**

In the case of NATO, the Croatian government’s objectives were to present the public with all of the relevant information about NATO in an open and transparent way, to encourage discussions and debates, and finally to raise the level of public support for Croatia’s membership to NATO.\(^8\) The first aim was to inform Croatian citizens about the advantages, necessities and perspectives of membership. Second, there was a need to reach opinion-makers through indirect informal channels, the multipliers and wider population, which required a multifaceted approach, involving the expertise of unofficial actors and specialized networks. Third, the aim was to maintain strategic and continuous dialogue with citizens in order to create an understanding for complex international relations in security and defence, and to generate an interest in foreign policy and diplomacy in general. The fourth aim was to prepare the public for activities once Croatia became a member state, in fields such as peace operations for the defence sector, bidding for supplies and maintenance for the economic sector, and research and development to involve experts and scientists.

In the case of the EU, Croatia’s first communication strategy aimed at informing the Croatian public about the EU Accession Process, which was adopted by the Croatian Parliament in October 2001. The dynamics of the process, however, called for — and resulted in — a new strategy being adopted in January 2006. Both strategies were developed from the onset in cooperation with experts in the fields of marketing and public relations, members of parliament, media representatives, academic and religious communities, as well as civil society and the EU Delegation in Croatia, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia\(^9\) as the main coordinator. What was stated to be one of the key objectives in conducting the strategy was not ‘the marketing of the EU’ with the citizenry,

\(^7\) Address of the Assistant Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia Mr Hrvoje Marušić at the Joint Session of the Committee for Foreign Politics and the Committee for European Integration of the Croatian Parliament, Zagreb, 29 June 2012.


\(^9\) Croatia’s process of European and transatlantic integration is also shown by changing the foreign ministry’s name from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI) in 2006, and to the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) in 2012.
but creating relations and partnerships between citizens and decision-makers. Timely and objective two-way communications with Croatian citizens about the EU and all aspects of EU membership were crucial as the referendum approached.

Besides the support of the EU member states and foreign publics, it is the domestic public that is the most important partner not only for joining, but for becoming a functioning member of both NATO and the EU. The goals have therefore been defined to involve citizens maximally by keeping them informed, establishing dialogue and forming partnerships, of which the latter is most closely related to the very essence of contemporary public diplomacy with a domestic awareness.

Activities and Stakeholders

The overall organization and communication pattern in Croatia — which included informing, dialogue and collaboration with various partners — was somewhat similar for joining NATO as well as the EU. Activities were coordinated by the foreign ministry, involving the following different partners on the international and national levels: other departments within the Croatian government; the NATO Public Diplomacy Department; the EU Delegation to Croatia; embassies of NATO and EU member states; foreign political foundations; NGOs; universities; the media; and national and local state administration. Partners were involved in activities such as training and lectures, participating as speakers at roundtables and public debates, appearing on television and the radio, as well as in printed media with interviews, and attending central public events of the public diplomacy projects, such as the NATO Road Show, European Week or European Day.

In both the EU and NATO cases, public opinion polls were used as a kind of reality check and reference points to know which segments of communication needed improving, which target groups needed more information, and to make sure that the message and messengers were understood.10 This was done not only out of fear that opponents of NATO and EU membership would sway the national public, but to find out whether the information that was being provided was available and understandable to everyone. Communication processes about NATO were conducted in response to the needs of the Croatian audiences that the polls indicated. Since 2002, the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has used both quantitative and qualitative research and hired different market research agencies to survey public opinion on Croatia joining NATO. The Croatian

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government started conducting opinion polls on EU membership as early as in 2000, and in 2003 the Commission’s Eurobarometer was extended to encompass Croatia. As well as opinion polls, traditional informational activities were undertaken, including the publication of a myriad of brochures (for example, ‘Croatia on the Road to the EU’ and ‘Myths about the EU’). Television and radio were the most popular and widely used media, as well as the press,11 and local television and radio stations proved to be quite successful in reaching and engaging the local public. Understanding the importance of new media for a wide outreach, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created specialized web pages with the purpose of providing accurate and up-to-date information on the current activities and progress of the government’s efforts during the accession period.

Other, more interactive, activities were also undertaken. In NATO’s case, in particular, the so-called NATO Road Show featured more than 60 roundtables, holding public lectures at county centres for the regional public, war veterans’ organizations and the private sector. Open debates and workshops were held for the student population at the universities of Rijeka, Split and Zagreb.12 Member states’ embassies organized study visits for Croatian officials, diplomats and members of negotiating teams to NATO and EU institutions. Study visits by Croatian journalists to NATO institutions, financed by the US Embassy, proved to be very successful and useful for their education and contributed to maintaining permanent interest in this topic. Furthermore, the EU Delegation to Croatia organized study visits to Brussels for Croatian journalists from local and national media to inform them about EU issues and the functioning of EU institutions, as well as Croatia’s pre-accession process. Foreign partners in Croatia with longer traditions of public diplomacy also reached out to Croats. For example, the British Council organized a series of study visits for relevant officers from different ministries of the Croatian government and a series of exhibitions for a broad Croatian public. On the eve of the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, when Croatia was to be invited to join the Alliance, the Slovakian Ministry of Foreign Affairs — in cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic Centre and Slovak Atlantic Commission — organized GLOBSEC Express, a conference for young leaders from the Balkan and NATO states in Bratislava, followed by sessions on a special railway from Bratislava to the Balkans as a symbol of a dynamic Alliance bringing cooperation and partnership.13

When compared to traditional propagation of information by governments, public diplomacy is based on dialogue, listening to the public and establishing partnerships.14 This is an innovative approach to the culture of diplomacy,

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12) [Internal] Archives of the NATO Department, Division for Multilateral Relations (Zagreb: MFEA).  
13) [Internal] Archives of the NATO Department, Division for Multilateral Relations (Zagreb: MFAEI).  
14) Suzana Simichen Sopta, ‘The Role of Public Diplomacy in Contemporary International Relations’ (in
which was previously not used to attuning to others and the domestic public, especially in the transition countries that were striving towards a modern market economy, representative democracy and more transparency in public institutional processes. The practice of public diplomacy additionally assists the transformation of public institutions that retain remnants of bureaucratic dogma and top-down approaches, and contributes to accountability and transparency. Instead of engaging, informing and influencing international audiences, the communication processes directed the foreign and domestic actors to engage, inform and influence the domestic public with a network of interrelated public diplomacy activities. It was a creative way to use the existing intellectual and economic resources to create synergy for activities that interacted with and explained to the domestic public why NATO membership was important to Croatia.

In the case of the European Union, and given that EU membership is a project of the entire society, the partners are defined and projects are designed to reach the entire population, with special emphasis on generators of public opinion, the youth — the future European citizens — and groups that are sensitive to societal changes. A number of activities can be mentioned in this respect. The most comprehensive events are celebrations of Europe Week and Europe Day, which are traditionally held at the most frequented places in Zagreb and in all Croatian counties, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with partners such as the Delegation of the EU, EU member states’ embassies and the County Councils for European Integration. Events also include two-day series of lectures for students, entitled ‘Days of the EU’, which are aimed at informing them about the adjustments resulting from membership.15 Two events for Zagreb youths aimed to sensitize a more alternative audience with a concert called ‘A Night in Europe’, held in a night club, and the EUrban Festival, which was held in front of the Museum for Contemporary Art.16 In addition, the (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration) ‘MFAEI Open Door Days’ were organized for primary and secondary school pupils.17 In order to reach other cities and regions, different public events were held, such as local debates, lectures, presentations and competitions, with effective coverage by the local media.18

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15) In 2010, the topic was anti-corruption. The lectures were organized by the MFAEI in cooperation with the Croatian Students’ Association at the Faculty of Economics. The event was opened by the President of the Republic, State Secretary for European Integration, and Head of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Croatia.

16) These events were organized by the MFAEI in cooperation with certain youth NGOs, as well as with the Spanish Embassy and the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Croatia.

17) More than 100 pupils visited the ministry, where they were informed about Croatia’s EU accession process, with special emphasis on EU projects for the youth. Special lectures for pupils and students in twelve cities other than Zagreb were also organized during 2010.

18) These events were organized by the MFAEI in cooperation with county bodies, line ministries and other state bodies and agencies, the EU Delegation and foreign embassies, as well as NGOs. The intensity
intensity of the events, top-level representation and media coverage resulted in a very high visibility project reaching the entire population. Such a comprehensive communication effort can usually also count on the greatest media coverage.

However, public diplomacy activities can only be successful if they are accompanied by more year-round programmes for all target groups and at all levels. With regard to this, the MFAEI — together with its partners — has organized a number of educational programmes. Since 1999, the Croatian government has a scholarship programme for EU graduate studies. The training cycle of ‘The ABC of the EU’, carried out by the MFAEI, is also worth mentioning. Eight seminars that form this cycle cover different aspects of history, the functioning of the EU, decision-making processes, as well as specific and relevant policies. This programme alone has so far been attended by over 8,000 civil servants. Other ministries and offices are also involved, by conducting specialized projects and training sessions focused on specific target groups and in more specific fields, such as local debates on EU accession. Regular debates at the local level have been organized for various interested target groups, with the participation of officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Central Office for Development of Strategy and Coordination of EU Funds, the Ministry of Regional Development, Agency for Regional Development, members of the EU negotiating team, Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Croatia and EU member states’ ambassadors.

The intensity of these activities is best demonstrated by the fact that in the second half of 2010, debates were held in all Croatian counties. Youths and/or young public are stated to be among the major target groups. The European Integration Winter and Summer Schools are aimed at university and high school students, and both organized on an annual basis for 50 to 70 participants, with lectures given by experts from the public, private and civil society sectors. In addition, outreach to the wider public has been established through the free ‘Hallo EU’ hotline\(^\text{19}\) and a network of 129 information points on ‘Europe in Croatia’, consisting of an internet kiosk with access to relevant web pages and shelves with MFAEI publications at libraries, county and municipal halls, faculties and other education and training institutions.\(^\text{20}\)

The importance of partners from the civil sector is indispensable for multiplying efforts and at the same time achieving greater levels of credibility. Croatia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been cooperating with NGOs on several levels,
providing them with financial support for implementing projects that focus on information and educational activities in Croatia’s EU accession process. For example, the non-governmental organization GONG implemented the project ‘Europe in the Classroom’, which included 300 workshops for high-school students. The MFAEI trained the trainers who conducted the workshops and — to ensure the project’s long-term feasibility — trained another 100 high-school teachers, who actively participated in lectures, seminars, workshops and other activities that were organized by a number of NGOs.

As the date of the referendum was nearing, a more intensive campaign reaching out to every individual citizen through a series of mini-conferences, social networks and television spots with messages from leading politicians took place. On 22 January 2012, the citizens of Croatia expressed their wish to join the EU with 66 per cent of the referendum votes in favour.

**Differences between the EU and NATO Accession Approaches**

Croatia’s approaches to communicating and sharing NATO and EU values overlap, as shown above, but they are not the same. This section assesses the differences between both communication processes.

First, the processes were taking place in different timeframes. Activities relating to the EU involved a wider audience, had wider scope and were the result of continual efforts to disseminate information since 2003. The dynamic was also different. An intensive campaign for joining the EU was launched recently in 2011, at the final stage of negotiations and prior to the public referendum. The NATO campaign, on the other hand, was concentrated and intensively conducted during a two-year period from 2007-2009, and later on — after Croatia joined NATO — it continued with specialized activities. In addition, while a national public referendum is obligatory for joining the EU, it does not exist in the process for joining NATO. However, both processes depend directly on public support.

Second, while the goals of both causes’ communication activities were similar and overlapping, they had different scopes and target audiences. NATO concerns overall national security and the defence sector, specific segments of the economy and research experts, while the EU touches upon the life of every citizen, whether in the fields of the economy, agriculture, education, currency, travel, or government. In short, when considering the goals of the two ‘diverging’ campaigns, they both have the converging aims of informing, educating and raising awareness of the EU and NATO and establishing partnerships to do so. The key difference would be that NATO focuses on decision-makers and generators of public opinion, while the core of the EU campaign is each and every citizen.
Third, different levels of partner involvement exist in launching the public diplomacy activities. The reasons for different platforms should also be perceived through the prism of the long duration of the overall process and the segments of society that they encompass. The communication strategy that was aimed at informing the Croatian public about the European Union and preparations for EU membership was, from the very beginning, developed in cooperation with experts in the fields of marketing and public relations, representatives of parliamentary committees, the media, academic and religious communities, as well as civil society and the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Croatia. Meanwhile, the nature of NATO and implied national security issues did not allow for the wider public to be involved in setting up strategic guidelines for the public diplomacy process. Therefore, after all the political parties had reached consensus, the State Council for Croatia’s Membership in NATO was formed as the body in charge, and implementation was conducted by diplomats and other experts with a view to creating a permanent dialogue between the Croatian government and the public.

Fourth, the formation of the negotiating structure was an additional momentum that conveyed knowledge and experience about the EU to the institutions and associations that they represented. In addition, it provided a good basis for sharing EU topics with the broader public. The negotiation structure encompassed people from 400 different state and non-state institutions and organizations, various sectors, and both public and private enterprises, who not only ensured efficiency during the negotiations, but also in the post-accession period. Overall, 1,500 people — of whom 900 were not from the public sector — served as an additional network for distributing information and gaining feedback. A similar group of experts from relevant public institutions supported the NATO accession, but on a much smaller scale and their role did not encompass disseminating information.

Consequently, the EU campaign is closer to the basic premises of the practice of public diplomacy, while the NATO campaign diverges, as it does not involve all of the possible stakeholders in the preparation process. However, the results prove that even when it comes to communicating sensitive policies with the public that require such an approach, as in the case of NATO accession, it too can lead to exemplary public diplomacy efforts.

**Challenges Encountered**

It is important to address several challenges that both projects faced during their implementation. First, contrary to the institutional setting and practices of the leading EU countries such as France, the United Kingdom or Germany, Croatia had no public diplomacy or strategic communication department within its
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nor has a specialized unit been established within the missions abroad. Activities related to external communications are based on ad hoc initiatives. As a rule, experts from various departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs extend their support to diplomats who are responsible for culture and public relations abroad. At the same time, they are expected to invest much of their own creative capabilities to develop suitable promotional and cultural activities in the receiving countries. The communication projects that were conducted in support of Croatia’s NATO membership serve as a good example of how public diplomacy should become an integral part of foreign policy formulation and implementation in the everyday work of a foreign ministry.

Certain challenges were presented by groups that opposed NATO and EU membership. They formally organized throughout Croatia and their campaign stressed the negative aspects of membership through internet pages and pamphlets, and they staged small-scale public protests to gain media attention. Because NATO membership does not require a referendum, the adversaries aimed to accumulate enough citizens’ signatures (10 per cent of the population) required by law to hold a referendum on membership. The official position was to involve opponents of NATO membership in the public debates, roundtables and televised ‘pro-and-con’ shows. The fact that Croatian government officials and other partners did engage in open discussions with the opponents and did not try to suppress their freedom of expression turned out to be a good way to respond to the issue. Those actions — even though the advocacy results were unforeseeable at the time and the Croatian government was pressured to achieve wide public support for the NATO invitation — added credibility to the campaign of the Croatian government and its non-state partners. It thereby showed that Croatia indeed practised NATO values — that Croatia really practised what it preached.

When it came to Croatia’s membership in the EU, however, it must be pointed out that the government was reluctant to debate openly the possible drawbacks of EU membership when faced with opposing views. Many citizens, but also the Delegation of the European Union in Croatia, have stressed that there have not been enough expert debates on objective pros and cons.

Some of the messages articulated during the NATO campaign, such as that NATO membership offers numerous financial opportunities to the Croatian economy, were later quoted by journalists as examples of state propaganda, because the results were not evident during the first year and a half of Croatia’s membership. A very similar challenge regarding the use of EU funds also lies ahead as Croatia steps forward to acquire full membership in the European Union. In this case, the duration of the negotiation process comes as an added value, because throughout this time Croatia was entitled to pre-accession funds, which — although to a certain extent different — bring about knowledge and set the structure. Therefore, the platform on state, regional and local levels, but also
within civil society, private sector and expert groups, has been established and it is up to the government to use these resources to address and educate specific groups and to ensure benefits for its society.

Furthermore, the challenge was to engage the public sector in participating in the real work — that of appointing and sending experts, adapting laws and practices to foster Croatia’s functioning in both NATO and the EU, and conducting everyday communication with NATO and the EU, a skill that requires understanding of the functioning of these multilateral institutions, diplomatic skills and a good command of foreign languages. In order to address this challenge for NATO, continual training for public institutions and the broader public was held after Croatia became a member, in collaboration with NATO, NGOs, the media and foreign political foundations. As for the period after becoming a NATO member and as soon as Croatia had signed the EU Accession Treaty, its participation in numerous working groups began. The knowledge acquired through a wide network of existing negotiating structures is essential. However, for Croatia to voice adequately its interests and add to the overall development of NATO and the EU, the need for a fast, accurate communication flow and coordination becomes a priority.

The next step is to adapt the structures and institutions for the new role that they are assuming and continue to involve the domestic public in all the processes. The new reality of membership requires continuity in the field of public diplomacy at home and abroad, but with a different approach. Becoming a member is just the beginning, or — as the newest EU member states often stress — ‘it is when the real work begins’. For example, had the first year of Croatia’s membership in NATO been celebrated more, it would have contributed to building Croatia’s national brand among the international public. While the campaign to join the European Union tried to put forward the benefits, it also mobilized and informed Croatia’s citizens on the relevance of EU membership. In the period following accession in other countries, politicians easily tend to sideline communication and often use the EU as an excuse for their unpopular decisions, the results of which we increasingly witness today in both ‘old and new’ EU member states, especially in the current times of austerity, where the European Union suffers from crisis, economically and publicly.

Democracy implies participation. The award and punishment for a government’s decisions and policies lie in the hands of citizens, and not only on election day. Therefore, for the EU and NATO to be fully functioning and moving

forward, it is fundamental that governments and citizens of the member states understand and live their values, engaging in a constructive and reciprocal dialogue.

Conclusion

Current trends in the international community and relations, as well as the prevailing processes of globalization and integration, confirm public dialogue as the key element of public diplomacy. This is also increasingly present on the domestic front. Different mechanisms of social dialogue exist nowadays, and — because governments are increasingly bypassed by the people in their direct interaction — successful diplomacy thus relies on engaging the public, both at home and abroad. This is also why today’s foreign ministries obviously communicate not only with their counterparts, but also with wider domestic policy arenas. Moreover, there is a clear demand for synergic activities, involvement and the co-functioning of all the players in the communication process, from both the governmental and non-governmental sectors, including the media.

Public dialogue is a must. Creating relations between citizens and decision-makers remains among the key objectives of any public diplomacy strategy. These goals have been translated into successful activities in Croatia, resulting in well-informed segments of society. But the greatest portion of the work concerns timely and objective communication with citizens about all the different aspects of any accession and/or future membership. Croatia’s experience of accession towards NATO and the EU underlines the importance of public dialogue, particularly exchanging views with different segments of civil society and sharing information, namely the facts and figures that could lift the veil of prejudices, stereotypes and clichés.

Considering the lengthy duration of Croatia’s negotiations with the EU, its changing dynamism and stages along the way, and the fact that successful interaction with the public implies an interactive approach, a constant re-evaluation of the achievements remains crucial. In order to join the European Union, a country not only needs the support of the EU itself and of other member states, but it also needs the support of its citizens who will have a final say in the referendum. Good communication strategies entailing informational, dialogic and collaborative activities are precisely what make a contemporary diplomacy successful, and it is an essential competence for any country that is, or wants to become, both a NATO and EU member. Within this context, the dividing line between public diplomacy and public affairs and public relations blurs, thus making the word ‘foreign’ in the commonly accepted definitions of public diplomacy increasingly obsolete. The processes of joining NATO and the EU are a maturity test for all the structures of a modern state and society, providing the framework in which...
multi-layered characters of public diplomacy can flourish. It is therefore safe to say that these processes are among the most comprehensive and inclusive public diplomacy endeavours. For Croatia it was indeed a matter of fact, but also for all other nations that have already entered, and aim to enter, the accession process.

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