

Croatia
since
Independence
1990–2018





Croatia in brief

Official name	Republic of Croatia (Republika Hrvatska)
Language	Croatian
Surface	56,594 km ²
Population	4,203,600 (2015, est.)
Capital	Zagreb (800,000 inhabitants)
Political system	Parliamentary republic
Gross domestic product	EUR 45.6 billion, EUR 10 435 per capita (2016)
Currency	Kuna (HRK)
National holiday	25 June
Membership in international organisations	United Nations (1992), NATO (2009), European Union (2013)



Croatia since Independence

1990–2018

This selection of about a hundred chronologically ordered photographs with comments revives in pictures the most important events that have marked the profound transformation of Croatia since its independence – both the political and social upheavals of the country, and the cultural and sporting achievements that have left their stamp on the collective memory of the Croats.

Located at the crossroads of the Mediterranean and Central Europe, on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, Croatia, a country of 4.3 million inhabitants, is both an old nation and a young European state. Although its history is millennia old, Croatia did not regain its independence until 1991, a year and a half after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which freed the countries of Central Europe and allowed for the triumph of democracy.

Contemporary Croatia is the heir of the 9th century Croatian duchies in the Marches of the Carolingian Empire, and of the medieval Croatian Kingdom founded in 925. In 1102 it entered a personal union with the Hungarian crown, to finally be integrated,

from 1527 to 1918, into the Austrian Habsburg Empire that became Austria-Hungary in 1867. At the same time, as early as in 1409, the coastal province of Dalmatia became Venetian – apart from the independent Republic of Dubrovnik – and remained so until its brief incorporation into the Illyrian Provinces of Napoleon, before joining the other Croatian lands of the Austrian Empire.

With the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1918, Croatia became one of the components of the Yugoslav kingdom, which in turn became a communist federation in 1945, one Croatia would leave at its dissolution in 1991, after the failure of its democratic transition. However, Croatia was forced to defend its independence by facing a deadly war that led to the occupation of a quarter of the country, ending in 1995 with the liberation of the occupied territory. After a vast programme of reconstruction, economic and social modernisation and revival of tourism, Croatia became a member of NATO in 2009 and joined the European Union in 2013, and is due to take over the EU presidency in 2020.

1990

30 May



Franjo Tuđman elected president by Parliament in the first democratic elections

Almost parallel to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, on 25 July 1990, just one day after the first free elections, and though still part of the Yugoslav Communist Federation, the pluralist Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*) elected Franjo Tuđman, former member of the resistance, dissident and leader of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), as the head of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, renamed the Republic of Croatia (Croatian: Republika Hrvatska). Dating back to the early Middle Ages and embodying state continuity since the Kingdom of Croatia (10th century), the *Sabor* is one of the oldest parliaments in Europe. Remarkably, Latin was its official language from the 13th century until 1847, when it was replaced by Croatian.

Photo: HINA

1990

17 August



Beginning of the armed insurgency by Serb separatists

On the outskirts of villages where Serbs constituted a significant minority (12% of the population), armed militiamen, who did not recognize the new Croatian democratic government, set up numerous roadblocks to disrupt communications between the north and south of Croatia. The Yugoslav Army, predominantly composed of Serbs, armed them, lent support and prevented Croatian police from intervening. After the illegal referendum on 21 September, they self-proclaimed the “Autonomous Region of Krajina” over a quarter of the Croatian territory that they intended to unite with Serbia. As the rest of Central and Eastern Europe moved towards democracy, a troubled period commenced in Croatia that would soon lead to war.

Photo: Nikola Vukošić (top left), Hrvatski vojnik (bottom left), Wikipedia (right)

1990

22 December



Adoption of the new Constitution and introduction of the traditional chequered flag

The Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*) unanimously adopted a new Constitution under which the Republic of Croatia, still a member of the Yugoslav Federation, was established as a democratic and welfare state. The red Communist star, appearing since 1945 on the tricolour red, white and blue Croatian flag, was replaced by the historical red and white checkerboard coat of arms, in use in the Kingdom of Croatia since the Middle Ages.

Photo: HINA

1991

31 March



First fatal ambushes by Serb separatists

Seven months after the beginning of the separatist insurgency supported by the Yugoslav Army, a Croatian policeman was killed by Serb militiamen in an ambush near Plitvice Lakes. After declaring their separation from Croatia on 28 February, the Serb separatist leaders proclaimed on 1 April they would be uniting with Serbia, an act they tried to legitimize subsequently by way of an illegal referendum held on 12 May 1991. On 2 May, the escalation of violence was raised to new heights after separatists ambushed 12 Croatian policemen, killing them and mutilating their bodies.

Photo: HMDCDR / Drago Havranek

1991

25 June



Croatia's declaration of independence

Following unsuccessful talks with Belgrade aimed at transforming the Yugoslav Federation into a confederation, and as the escalation of violence continued, an overwhelming majority of Croats (93.24%) voted in favour of Croatian independence in a referendum on 19 May 1991. One month later, on 25 June, the Croatian Parliament declared the Republic of Croatia “an independent and sovereign State”, simultaneous with neighbouring Slovenia. The declaration of independence explicitly guaranteed all national minorities, in particular the Serb minority, the respect of their civic, political, cultural, religious and linguistic rights.

Photo: HMDCCR

1991

July–August



Open and intensive intervention of the Yugoslav Army against Croatia

After the Yugoslav Army intervened briefly in Slovenia, it launched an attack on Croatia with 3000 armoured combat vehicles, 2000 pieces of heavy artillery and 450 fighter planes. Once a common federal army, financed by all the federal republics, the army now supported the regime of Slobodan Milošević in Belgrade, the last Communist leader in Europe, who used it to wage war and carve the borders of a Great Serbia on the ruins of the Yugoslav Federation. The disarmed Croatia tried to cope by forming a national guard.

Photo: LZMK

1991

August



Ethnic cleansing returned to Europe

Many villages in the regions bordering with Serbia (eastern Slavonia) were occupied and devastated, while their inhabitants, for the most part Croats or members of minorities other than Serbs (Hungarians, Ruthenians), were massacred or exiled with the intention of establishing “ethnically pure” areas. This marked the return of ethnic cleansing to Europe for the first time since 1945. The Yugoslav Army’s air force, now entirely under the orders of the national Communist regime of Milošević and in the service of his expansionist policies, bombed the outskirts of the town of Vukovar, and besieged the town with 30,000 troops and more than 1000 armoured combat vehicles.

Photo: HMDCDR / Goran Pichler

1991

7 October



Bombing of the Presidential Palace in Zagreb

Upon expiry of a three-month moratorium on Croatian and Slovenian declarations of independence imposed by the international community, the fighter planes of the Serbo-Yugoslav army bombed the Presidential Palace in Zagreb. Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Marković and President of the Yugoslav Collective Presidency Stipe Mesić, all three Croats and gathered in the palace at the time of the bombing, miraculously escaped. The following day, Croatia confirmed its independence and permanently severed all ties to the moribund Yugoslav Federation, the institutions of which, now in the hands of Milošević, could no longer be described as federal.

Photo: LZMK / Hrvoje Knez

1991

October



A quarter of Croatia occupied by the “federal” army

Serbo-federal troops continued their offensive operations throughout the Croatian territory, where their barracks were scattered. A quarter of the country was occupied and devastated, and hundreds of thousands were driven from their homes. While the international community seemed powerless to stop Milošević, Croatia tried to organize its defence despite the international arms embargo, which favoured the better-equipped aggressor.

Photo: HMDCCR

1991

November



Mobilization of the Croatian diaspora

The Croatian diaspora, estimated at 3 million people, was mobilized worldwide, from Western Europe to North and South America, all the way to Australia. Numerous demonstrations were held to sensitize international public opinion and to put an end to the military aggression targeting their homeland. Intellectuals, artists, scientists and even athletes all over the world called upon the international community to come to Croatia's aid.

Photo: Neven Jagodić

1991

18 November



Fall of the town of Vukovar, “Croatia’s Stalingrad”, after a three month siege

Once a prosperous river port on the Danube at the far east of the country, and the birthplace of Nobel Prize winning chemist Lavoslav Ružička, Vukovar was burned to the ground during three months of uninterrupted bombing and was conquered after 87 days of siege. The first demolished European town since 1945, whose inhabitants were deported, Vukovar became a symbol of the Croatian resistance: despite the overwhelming superiority of the assailant, its 110 armoured combat vehicles were nevertheless destroyed and the heroic resistance of the town drew the Serbian offensive to a halt, which then lost momentum along the 960 km front line in Croatia, stretching from Vukovar to Dubrovnik.

Photo: Romano Cagnoni

1991

18 November



More than 2500 dead and missing, survivors deported

During the siege and destruction of Vukovar, 1131 civilians and 879 defenders were killed. 260 wounded and staff of the town hospital were executed, 550 persons were reported missing and 31,000 civilians were deported to camps in Serbia, many of whom would never return.

Photo: Ron Haviv

1991

6 December



Dubrovnik, the “Pearl of the Adriatic”, besieged and destroyed

The medieval town of Dubrovnik, a World Heritage Site, was besieged and bombed from both the nearby hills and from the sea where the “Yugoslav” navy had formed a naval blockade aimed at preventing Croatia from obtaining the arms that were vital for its defence. The siege of the town that began in October 1991 would not end until the end of May 1992, when it was broken by Croatian forces. During those eight months, fewer than a thousand Croatian defenders faced 30,000 enemy soldiers, supported by 120 pieces of artillery and 150 armoured combat vehicles. In all, 428 Croatian soldiers and policemen and 92 civilians (including the author of this shot, photographer Pavo Urban) were killed in and around Dubrovnik, while 30,000 refugees were forced to flee the fighting.

Photo: HINA / Pavo Urban

1991

6 December



“Black Friday” in Dubrovnik

During the terrible St. Nicholas Day in 1991, more than one thousand rounds were indiscriminately fired at the fortified Old Town, killing 19 civilians and 4 defenders, and damaging or destroying more than 460 buildings, including 9 palaces, all ravaged by the flames. 37 rounds were fired at the Franciscan Monastery, built in 1317 and home to the third oldest pharmacy in the world. Dubrovnik (Ragusa), an old city state and flourishing maritime republic, still containing many Gothic and Renaissance palaces, was also the first European state to abolish slavery in 1416.

Photo: HINA / Božidar Gjukic

1992

15 January



International recognition of Croatia

While Croatian forces recorded their first successes against the Serbo-Federal army in western Slavonia, Croatia and Slovenia were being recognised as independent states by the international community. After Iceland on 19 December, followed by the Vatican City State and San Marino on 13 and 14 January, the Europe of the Twelve followed suit on 15 January, as did Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Hungary, Malta, Norway, Poland and Switzerland. By the end of January, 44 countries had recognised Croatia as a sovereign state. Croatia's diplomatic victory would eventually lead to a laying down of arms due to the 15th ceasefire, which finally came into force on 2 January. A quarter of Croatia was nevertheless still occupied by Serbian forces and the front line remained virtually unchanged until the strategic reversal in summer 1995 (Photo: "May She live forever!", front page of the daily *Večernji list* on 16 January 1992)

Photo: Ivica Radetić

1992

8–23 February



First participation of the independent Croatia in the Olympic Games

Less than a month after its international recognition, Croatia took part in the first Olympic Games in Albertville (France) as an independent nation. The modest Croatian Olympic delegation was made up of only four athletes competing in two disciplines: skiing (Alpine skiing and Nordic skiing) and figure skating. However, in the context of the war, the participation was felt throughout the country as a historic moment.

Photo: HOO

1992

21 February

Spring

1992



Deployment of UN blue helmets to Croatia

Established by UN Security Council Resolution 743, the peacekeeping mission of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was deployed to the occupied territories of Croatia from where most Croats were driven. The mission consisted of ensuring the demilitarisation of the three United Nation Protected Areas (UNPA) in Croatia. Though they succeeded in enforcing the ceasefire, they did not succeed in demilitarizing these areas, or in ensuring the return of 250,000 Croatian refugees. While the UN blue helmets were taking up positions in Croatia, neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina entered into war. The Serb separatists besieged its capital, Sarajevo, and conquered two thirds of the country, further hindering the situation in Croatia.

Photo: Croatian Homeland War Memorial and Documentation Centre (HMDCDR) / Toni Hnojčik



War spreads to neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina

After Croatia, war engulfed Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serb separatists rejected the result of their referendum on independence, supported by Bosnian Croats (18% of the population) and Bosniaks (44%), but boycotted by Bosnian Serbs (31%). Supported by the “federal” army, the Serbs began a siege of Sarajevo and seized two thirds of the country in six months, forcing 2 million people to flee their homes as refugees. Close collaboration of the separatists of both countries weighed on the situation in Croatia. In 1995, the Croatian Army, which was equipped in the meanwhile, liberated most of the occupied areas in Croatia and western Bosnia, leading to the Dayton Peace Accords. However, it was not until January 1998, at the end of a transition supervised by the UN, that the Croatian territory was reunified, and eastern Slavonia with the town of Vukovar reintegrated.

Infographics: Dražen Karaman

1992

22 May



Croatia becomes a UN Member State

Following recognition by 82 countries in less than six months, Croatia was admitted to the United Nations, becoming the 178th Member State. As a historic event, it was the highlight of diplomatic efforts by Zagreb to gain international recognition of the country, which took its place among the free and sovereign nations. In his address at the Palace of Nations in New York, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman emphasized that Croatia had gained international legitimacy, confirmed its state sovereignty and was determined to build an open, democratic and free society. Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were also admitted to the United Nations on the same day.

Photo: UN / M. Tzovaras (left) UN / M. Grant (right)

1992

24 May



A nation celebrates

An enormous crowd came to greet Croatian President Franjo Tuđman at the central square in Zagreb upon his return from the United Nations in New York, where the admission of Croatia marked the return of the country to the international scene, a historic moment indeed. After the Kingdom of Croatia was founded in 925, Croatia was successively associated with the Hungarian crown throughout the 12th century, then became part of the Austrian Empire from the 16th century (which became Austria-Hungary in 1867) until 1918. At that time, it became a part of Yugoslavia, initially a monarchy and later a federation from 1945, before Croatia regained its independence in 1991.

Photo: LZMK

1992

8 August



First Olympic medal at the Barcelona Olympics

Despite it being its first participation in the Olympic Summer Games in Barcelona, the Croatian basketball team won the silver medal in the finals against the American “dream team”, considered the best team in history, thus bringing Croatia its first Olympic medal. The team, starring Dražen Petrović and Toni Kukoč, even managed to briefly outscore the team of Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson. In this clash of the titans, Petrović, with 24 points, scored two more than his legendary American rival, “Air Jordan”.

Photo: Richard Mackson / USA Today

1993

January



More than 660,000 displaced Croats and refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina

The occupation by Serbian forces of more than a quarter of Croatian territory and, from 1992, two thirds of neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, from which Bosniaks and Croats fled ethnic cleansing and war, caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Thousands more were imprisoned and tortured in camps. In early 1993, there were 261,000 internally displaced persons in Croatia and 403,000 refugees from neighbouring Bosnia. This was a heavy burden for Croatia and its 4.5 million inhabitants, with one refugee per seven inhabitants.

Photo: UN / M. Grafman

1994

18 March



Washington Agreement restores Croat–Bosniak alliance

After jointly advocating for the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats were also the targets of ethnic cleansing by Serbian forces that occupied 72% of Bosnian territory, causing more than 100,000 deaths. Paradoxically, this desperate situation, due to the cruel lack of a means of defence, provoked a conflict between the two allies in 1993, playing into the hands of the aggressor. In order to restore their strategic alliance and coordinated resistance, a joint Croat–Bosniak Federation was established with the support of Washington, Zagreb and Sarajevo. Croatian and Bosniak presidents, Franjo Tuđman and Alija Izetbegović, also signed an agreement establishing a confederation between Croatia and this Federation.

Photo: CIA

1994

30 May



Kuna, the new national currency

In replacement of the Croatian Dinar, a provisional currency in circulation since independence, the Croatian National Bank put the new Croatian currency into circulation, the Kuna (HRK), which is divided into 100 lipas. The Kuna (meaning marten) was the historical Croatian currency in the Middle Ages.

Photo: Croatian National Bank / Božidar Bengesz

1994

August



The number of refugees drops to 400,000

While some of the displaced persons left refugee camps in Croatia to go abroad, in the summer of 1994 there were still 197,000 internally displaced persons and 212,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Croatia, or a total of almost 410,000 refugees or displaced persons. In 1994 alone, the amount of care provided to refugees amounted to US\$ 229 million, 89% of which was provided from the State budget and 11% from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Photo: UN / John Isaac (left), UN / Steve Whitehouse (right)

1994

10–11 September



Pope John Paul II in Croatia

The first Apostolic Visit to Croatia was perceived by all Croats, 90% of whom declare themselves as Catholic, as a blessing and a testimony of solidarity in hardship, considering that more than a quarter of the country was still occupied at the time. A mass held at Zagreb's Hippodrome was attended by one million people, or every fourth Croat. The Pope appealed to the people to have the courage to forgive and asked them to clear their hearts of all hatred and any desire for revenge. As the first Slavic peoples to receive baptism, back in the 7th century, the Croats are still very attached to the Roman Catholic Church, which recognized the Kingdom of Croatia as an independent state in 879.

Photo: LZMK

1995

1–2 May



Operation Flash: western Slavonia liberated

To put an end to the escalation of violence exercised by the Serb separatists in the region of Pakrac, the Croatian Army took advantage of the 4-year long status quo to equip and professionalise its troops. On 1 May, it launched Operation Flash (*Bljesak*): in less than 32 hours, the Croatian forces liberated the whole of western Slavonia (i.e. about 500 square kilometres), liberating the entire eastern part of the country in one fell swoop. From that moment on, the balance of power shifted in favour of Croatia.

Photo: Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia / *Hrvatski vojniki* / Tomislav Brandt

1995

1–2 May



Indiscriminate bombing of Croatia's capital

Powerless in the face of the Croatian military's operation in western Slavonia, Milan Martić, leader of the Serb separatists in Croatia, ordered retaliatory rocket strikes on Zagreb using rockets loaded with cluster bombs, killing seven people and wounding more than 200. In 2007, he was convicted of crimes against humanity and war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague for murders, deportations, torture and other atrocities, as well as for the rocket strikes that used multiple rocket launchers to strike the Croatian capital of Zagreb, a non-military objective. He was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

Photo: HINA

1995

28 May



Inauguration of the new national library

The National and University Library, Croatia's largest library, serves as both the national library and the library of the University of Zagreb. Today it houses some 2.5 million volumes, including 216 incunabula, 67,000 rare books and 142,000 manuscripts. The first book printed in the Croatian language dates from 1483: written in the Glagolitic script, the traditional Medieval Croatian alphabet, it is also the first liturgical book of the Roman rite to not be printed in the Latin language and Latin script.

Photo: Marko Maras

1995

22 July



Strategic alliance between Zagreb and Sarajevo

Following the serious deterioration of the situation in Bosnia (the UN 'blue helmets' held hostage by Serb separatists, the massacre of 8000 Bosniaks in Srebrenica and Žepa), the presidents of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina met in Split on 22 July 1995 to sign an agreement to further strengthen military cooperation between the two countries, allowing Sarajevo to claim military aid from Zagreb in order to help the Bosnian Bihać enclave, under siege by Serb forces.

Photo: Gordan Laušić

1995

4–7 August



Operation Storm liberated most occupied territories

After four years of failed negotiations with separatists, the Croatian Government decided to liberate the occupied territories by force. On 4 August, Zagreb committed about 130,000 Croatian troops to Operation Storm (*Oluja*), by far the largest operation since the conflict began: in less than four days Croatia regained control over most of its territories that had been occupied since 1991, thus marking the end of the self-proclaimed 'Republic of Serbian Krajina'.

Photo: Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia / Multimedia Department at the Petar Zrinski Military College

1995

4–7 August



A strategic turning point

After restoring control of 10,400 square kilometres (representing 18.4% of its territory), Zagreb managed to reestablish communications between the north and south of the country, thus reconnecting with the coastal region of Dalmatia. This put an end to an untenable situation that had been hindering the country's development and posing a constant threat since 1991. Only 5% of the territory, in the eastern part of the country, remained occupied, but this strategic shift made an important difference and announced the forthcoming end of the conflict.

Photo: Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia / Croatian Homeland War Memorial and Documentation Centre

1995

6 August



The Croatian Army breaks the siege of the Bihać enclave in Bosnia

On the second day of Operation Storm, the Croatian Army reached the Croatian-Bosnian border and joined the Bosnian forces in Bihać, thus ending the plight of 230,000 Bosnians who spent 1201 days under siege in a UN 'safe area'. Bombed by the Serbs and on the verge of falling, the city was at risk of suffering the same fate as Srebrenica, just one month before. At the border, Bosnian General Atif Dudaković (right) welcomes and thanks Croatian General Marijan Mareković, who led the operations. By the end of September, the Croatian-Bosnian joint operations helped in liberating vast territories in western Bosnia, thus leading the way to the end of the war.

Photo: Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia / *Hrvatski vojniki* (archives)

1995

6 August



The Croatian flag on the Knin Fortress symbolizes the end of the war

Knin, the stronghold of the Serb separatist rebellion, was liberated by the Croatian Army on 5 August, less than 30 hours after the start of Operation Storm, quickly putting the Serb forces to rout. The next day, while military operations continued inland, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman himself climbed to the top of the fortress in Knin, the medieval capital of the Kingdom of Croatia and the bastion of separatists since 1990. The strong image of the national flag flying atop the fortress symbolizes the victory and the end of the war for all Croats. But most importantly, it announced the return of 250,000 compatriots to their homes, after being uprooted from their homes in 1991, forced to flee and live as refugees.

Photo: Central Military Archives / Alem Hadžiegrić

1995

5–8 August



Organised evacuation of the Serbs from Croatia

Despite the Croatian radio broadcasts in which the Croatian president urged the Serb population in the liberated territories to remain in their Croatian homeland, more than 90,000 civilians and 30,000 paramilitary troops left for Bosnia and Serbia in a convoy, in response to the evacuation order given by the Serb separatist leaders, who organised and supervised the exodus in accordance with pre-established plans. Only 10,000 Serbs decided not to leave their homes. As for the majority of the Croatian territory, which was not occupied, more than 100,000 Serbs suffered the same fate as their Croatian fellow citizens throughout the war. In the years that followed, the Croatian Government financed the reconstruction of almost 150,000 homes in devastated areas, which led a part of Croatian Serbs to decide to return home. (Photo: convoy of Serb civilians leaving Croatia and heading to Bosnia, passing through a small Croatian village near Topusko, occupied and destroyed in 1991)

Photo: ONU

1995

8 August



Serb separatists surrender

“General! I, Colonel Čedomir Bulat, commander of the 21st Corps, surrender to you the corps, and I congratulate the Croatian Army on their victory!” were the words of the Serb officer (middle) to Croatian General Petar Stipetić, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces (left), before signing the act of surrender of the separatist Serb forces in the presence of UNPROFOR officers. After being completely surrounded by Croatian forces in the Kordun region, 5000 Serb soldiers had to lay down their arms before being allowed to return to Serbia.

Photo: Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia / *Hrvatski vojnici* (archives)

1995

1–21 November



Peace negotiations in Dayton

Croatian military victories brought about significant changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as half of its territory was liberated in autumn of 1995, forcing Belgrade to the negotiating table. In Dayton (OH) the United States organized 3-week long negotiations to end the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, home to its three 'constituent peoples': Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, constituting 44%, 18% and 31% of the population, respectively. The negotiations between the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian presidents took place behind closed doors. The Accord divided the country into two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Croat–Bosniak part, forming 51% of the territory) and Republika Srpska (Bosnian Serb Republic, forming 49% of the Bosnian territory). In return for Croatian concessions to Serbs in western Bosnia, the latter accepted to surrender to the Bosniaks the territories around the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, which had been under siege since 1992.

Photo: Associated Press / Joe Marquette

1995

14 December



Signing of the Paris-Dayton Accords puts an end to the war

The presidents of Serbia (Slobodan Milošević, left), Croatia (Franjo Tuđman) and Bosnia (Alija Izetbegović, right), at the Elysée Palace signing the Paris-Dayton Accords, the agreements which officially put an end to the conflict, in the presence (left to right) of: Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González, US President Bill Clinton, French President Jacques Chirac, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, British Prime Minister John Major and Russian Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin.

Photo: NATO

1996

13 January



Bill Clinton in Zagreb

On his return from Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), where he had visited a contingent of American soldiers in charge of implementing the military part of the Dayton-Paris Agreement, the US President Bill Clinton travelled to Zagreb, where he was received by the President of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman. In accordance with the Dayton Agreement, on 29 February the Bosnian Serbs lifted the siege of the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, which had started in April 1992 and where 14,000 people were killed. The siege lasted 44 months, three times longer than the siege of Stalingrad.

Photo: HINA

1996

6 November



Croatia becomes the 40th Member State of the Council of Europe

After Croatia's membership of the UN and OSCE, accession to the Council of Europe was one of its first great diplomatic successes. This is also testament to Croatia's major progress in terms of respect of democratic standards and human rights. On the left, Mate Granić, Minister of Foreign Affairs, gives a speech at the seat of the organisation in Strasbourg.

Photo: Council of Europe

1996

24 July – 4 August



First Olympic gold

In the final against Sweden at the Olympic Games in Atlanta, Croatian handball players dominated the game, bringing the first gold medal to Croatia as an independent nation. The water-polo team won the silver medal against Spain.

Photo: Croatian Handball Federation

1996

3 December



President Tuđman's historic visit to Vukovar

If the majority of Croatian occupied territory was liberated during Operation Storm in August 1995, this was not the case with Eastern Slavonia, the border region divided from Serbia by the Danube. Under the November 1995 Erdut Agreement, negotiated between the Croatian and Serbian presidents in Dayton and subsequently signed by Zagreb and the separatist Serbs, the UN Security Council established a Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) with a mandate to achieve the return of displaced persons of that region under Croatian sovereignty within two years. This was the context in which President Tuđman made the first, historic trip to the heroic town of Vukovar, a symbol of Croatian resistance and the centre of this region, the last missing part of the national territory before the full reunification of the country. (Photo: second visit of the Croatian President to Vukovar, 8 June 1997, when he took the "Peace Train".)

Photo: HMDCDR / Božo Biškupić

1997

February



Poreč and Trogir included in the World Heritage List

Two remarkable sites, the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč (4th century) and the Romanesque centre of Trogir, were included in the World Heritage List by UNESCO. Thus, they joined three other Croatian sites already designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1979: Dubrovnik Old Town, the Palace of the Roman Emperor Diocletian and the centre of Split, and Plitvice Lakes National Park. The Euphrasian Basilica, a masterpiece of Byzantine architecture, with its mosaics from the 6th century decorating the apse of the sanctuary, is also a perfect example of primitive Byzantine architecture of the Mediterranean Basin. Founded more than 2300 years ago, Trogir is the best-preserved Romanesque-Gothic urban complex, not only on the Adriatic coast but in the whole of Central Europe.

Photo: Wikipedia / Klaus D. Peter (left), Wikipedia / Qypchak (right)

1997

31 December



More than 5 million tourists visit Croatia

Two years after peace returned to Croatia, tourists also came back to the Dalmatian coast. With 5.6 million holidaymakers in 1997, the tourist industry was finding its feet. The photo shows the façade of the Palace of the Roman Emperor Diocletian in Split, a World Heritage Site built in AD 305.

Photo: visitsplit.com

1998

15 January



Zagreb recovers the last occupied territory

After a two-year negotiation process, the region of Eastern Slavonia and the Town of Vukovar on the banks of the Danube are peacefully reintegrated under Croatian sovereignty. The last territory under the UN administration is thus restored to Croatia which finally, seven years after its declaration of independence, regained its full territorial integrity. UNTAES thus became the first UN mission with a successful outcome within the set time limits. Although many Serbs decided to stay, others chose to settle in Serbia even before Croatian jurisdiction was restored to the area.

Photo: MoD / Hrvatski vojnik / Davor Kirin

1998

8 July



Croatia third in FIFA World Cup in France

Davor Šuker, Golden Boot of the tournament who scored six goals, here facing Fabien Barthez and Bixente Lizarazu, during the semi-finals of the World Cup which Croatia lost 2:1 to France. In their first-ever time in the FIFA World Cup, Croatia reached the semi-finals, after beating Germany 3:0. For the players in the checkerboard shirts, it was an epic achievement when they reached 3rd place, behind France and Brazil, and ahead of the Netherlands whom they beat 2:1 in the 3rd/4th Play Offs. Apart from Davor Šuker, in this “golden generation” under the guidance of Miroslav Blažević, there were many other gifted players, such as the captain Zvonimir Boban, Robert Prosinečki, Aljoša Asanović, Slaven Bilić, Igor Štimac, Robert Jarni, Goran Vlaović and Mario Stanić.

Photo: FIFA / Getty Images

1998

3 October



Beatification of cardinal Stepinac

On the occasion of his second pastoral visit to Croatia, Pope John Paul II beatified cardinal Alojzije Stepinac. Although Stepinac was one of the most fervent voices against Nazi savagery during the war, his culpable independence from the Yugoslav communist regime, and, notably, his refusal to create a national Catholic church detached from Rome, was the cause of his conviction in 1946 during a Stalinist political process. Celebrated in Croatia for his martyrdom, Stepinac became a true national symbol of Croatian resistance to the two totalitarian regimes, Nazism and communism, which both brought bloodshed to Europe during the 20th century. The process of his canonisation started in 2014 and is now nearing completion.

Photo: HINA

1999

16 October



Opening of Sveti Rok Tunnel

After six years of works, the motorway tunnel Sveti Rok with two tubes (two lanes in each) drilled through Velebit Mountain and 5679 metres long, was officially opened. A technological exploit, the tunnel became a key link of the future A1 motorway, first connecting Zagreb to Zadar, and then to Split, as it significantly shortened the journey time between the continental part of the country and the Dalmatian coast on the Adriatic. It was constructed by the Croatian companies *Hidroelektra niskogradnja* and *Konstruktor*. The construction of Brinje tunnel (bearing the title of the safest motorway tunnel in Europe) followed in 2004, and in 2005 the longest tunnel in Croatia was constructed, Mala Kapela tunnel, 5821 metres long.

Photo: Boris Ščitar / PIXSELL

1999

10 December



Death of President Franjo Tuđman

After a decade at the head of the country, the first Croatian president passed away at the age of 77. In spite of difficult circumstances, this former member of resistance to Nazism knew how to lead Croatia to independence, build a modern army and liberate occupied territories, launch a vast programme of reconstruction, as well as establish stable democratic institutions. He thus provided the country with solid foundations which would later enable it to join NATO and the European Union.

Photo: HINA

1999

10 December



Croats pay homage to “the father of independence”

After the announcement that President Franjo Tuđman, the first president of the Republic and the leader of Croatia's independence, had passed away, many Croats paid homage to the architect of Croatia's renaissance. Thousands of candles were lit in public places throughout the country.

Photo: Zoran Filipović

2000

3 January



First political alternation

Less than a month after President Tuđman passed away, a centre-left coalition of social democrats (SDP) and social-liberals (HSLHS) won the general election. For the first time since independence, HDZ (centre-right) founded by Tuđman was in opposition. The SDP leader Ivica Račan was to be named Prime Minister. He intensified Croatia's engagement on its path towards European integration.

Photo: HINA

2000

7 February



Stjepan Mesić elected President of Croatia

The leader of the People's party (HNS, centre-left), Stjepan Mesić, was elected president in the second round of the presidential elections. He drew 56.0% of the vote against the social-liberal Dražen Budiša, student leader of the 1971 "Croatian Spring". As Tuđman's former close collaborator, in 1990, Stjepan Mesić was the Prime Minister in the first Croatian non-communist government, then the president of the Parliament, before breaking with Tuđman in 1994 to found a new party, the Croatian Independent Democrats (HND), and to later join HNS in 1997. In 2005 he was re-elected for another five-year term of office.

Photo: HINA

2000

24 November



Zagreb Summit puts enlargement to South-East Europe back on the agenda

As the first European summit organised outside the European Union, under the French presidency of the EU, the Zagreb Summit brought together the heads of state and governments of the EU-15 member states, as well as those of the countries of South-East Europe (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Albania). It marked an important phase in the approach of the countries of the region to the EU in anticipation of their future integration, as part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Photo: HINA

2000

30 November



Šibenik Cathedral designated as a World Heritage Site

Among the first buildings of the Early Renaissance, the Šibenik Cathedral of St. James was built from 1433 to 1477. It is a work of the architect Juraj Dalmatinac (Giorgio da Sebenico, circa 1420–1473), but its highest part was finished by Nikola Firentinac (Niccolò Fiorentin, 1418–1506). Of all Croatian monuments, it best illustrates the passage from the flamboyant Gothic style to Renaissance. The cathedral was the first building in Europe whose stone vault was built without mortar or wooden structural elements, only with stone panels chiselled to fit and interlock.

Photo: www.all-free-photos.com

2001

9 July



Goran Ivanišević wins Wimbledon tournament

As a professional tennis player from 1988 to 2004, Ivanišević won 22 ATP singles titles, including Wimbledon in 2001 (as a wildcard), which was the last trophy of his career. This left-hander with a powerful serve has held the record of 1477 aces in one season since 1996, and since 2001 the record of 213 aces during a tournament. He is one of six players in history with more than 1000 aces in a season and, together with his compatriot Ivo Karlović, one of only two players with more than 10,000 aces in a career (10,131). Two other Croats have also won a grand slam tournament: Iva Majoli (Roland Garros, 2007) and Marin Čilić (US Open, 2014).

Photo: BBC

2001

29 October



Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU

The signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in Luxembourg constituted the first phase of Croatia's path towards European integration. The agreement also opened the European market to the vast majority of Croatian merchandise (from left to right: Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, Ivica Račan, Croatian Prime Minister, Tonino Picula, Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs).

Photo: LZMK

2002

25 February



Janica Kostelić, Queen of the Olympics in Salt Lake City

With her final victory in the giant slalom, after winning in the combined and in the slalom, on top of the silver in the super-G, at the age of 20, Croat Janica Kostelić became the first female ski racer of all time to win three gold medals in the same Olympic Games. Thanks to that historical exploit, Croatia rose to 11th among countries with medals. On her triumphal return to Zagreb, she was welcomed by Prime Minister Ivica Račan.

Photo: HINA

2003

21 February



Croatia applies for EU membership

During the Greek presidency of the European Union, Croatian Prime Minister Ivica Račan travelled to Athens where he submitted Croatia's official application for accession to the EU to his Greek colleague Kóstas Simitis. Because of the war Croatia faced in the early 1990s, this application came a decade after the applications of other Central European countries. For comparison, the war damage, estimated at 37 billion dollars, accounted for 190% of Croatian pre-war GDP, while the damage from the 2011 tsunami and earthquake in Japan accounted for 8% of Japan's GDP.

Photo: HINA

2003

February



First contingent of the Croatian army joins NATO's mission in Afghanistan

Barely five years after the last UN blue helmet peacekeeper left Croatian territory, no longer in need of international solidarity, Croatia was able to contribute actively to the efforts of the international community in war and in zones of instability. It put at the service of collective security and peace the experience Croatian soldiers had gained during the War of Independence. In 2016, under the banner of the UN, NATO or the EU, Croatian soldiers took part in ten peacekeeping missions in the world.

Photo: HINA

2003

5–9 June



Pope John Paul II's 3rd pastoral visit to Croatia and the 100th papal visit abroad

On the occasion of his third visit to Croatia, the Pope visited Rijeka, Osijek, Đakovo, Zadar and Dubrovnik (photo). The history of the Church in Croatia dates back to the dawn of Christianity: Saint Maurus of Parentium, the Bishop of Poreč, Saint Domnius, the Bishop of Salona, and Saint Anastasius were among the first Christian martyrs; Saint Jerome, the father of the Church and the author of the first Bible translated into Latin, was born in Dalmatia and is its patron saint, as well as Pope John IV, (640–642), native of Dalmatia; the City of Split is home to one of the most ancient cathedrals in the world; and Croats, whose Christianisation began in 641, were the first Slavs to embrace the Christian faith. Finally, if Latin was the universal language of the Catholic Church until Vatican II (1962–1965), from the 9th century on, Croats had the unique privilege to say mass in Croatian and to use the Glagolitic alphabet instead of Latin.

Photo: HINA

2003

25 September



A new Nature Protection Act

More than 10% of Croatia's territory consists of protected areas, namely two strict reserves, eight national parks and 11 nature parks, where you can still come across wolves, lynxes and bears. A natural miracle, the Plitvice Lakes National Park, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979, encompasses a series of 16 terraced lakes and one of the rare primeval forests of Europe. In terms of freshwater resources per inhabitant, Croatia is third in Europe, just behind Iceland and Norway. Besides, thanks to its 1244 islands and islets, the total length of its coastline reaches 5835 km, which makes it the third longest in the Mediterranean, after Greece and Italy.

Photos: HTZ / Ivo Pervan (left), Pablo BM (upper right-hand corner), HTZ / Renco Kosinović (lower right-hand corner)

2003

18 October



The tie, a Croatian-born fashion accessory

An indispensable attribute of male attire, the tie was born in Croatia from where it conquered the world, elegantly decorating the neck... Tracing its origins to the strip of cloth that Croatian cavalymen wore during the Thirty Years' War, it came to be accepted at Versailles in the 17th century after having been introduced to France by the "Royal-Croate" recruits, a regiment that entered the service of Louis XIII and was renamed "Royal-Cravate" by Louis XIV. Croatia is also home to the longest tie in the world, 808 metres in length and tied by Academia Cravatica around the Roman amphitheatre in Pula. The word "tie" (Fr. cravate) is merely the Frenchified form of the Croatian word "Hrvat", meaning "Croat".

Photo: Academia Cravatica

2004

29 August



Second Olympic gold for Croatia's national handball team

After the first Olympic gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics, Croatia's national handball team won a second gold at the Athens Olympic Games, with Germany and Russia taking the silver and bronze. The year before, the teammates of Ivano Balić, winner of the World Handball Player of the Year award in 2003 and 2006, also won the world handball championship in Portugal, ahead of Germany, France and Spain.

Photo: HINA

2005

26 June



Opening of the Zagreb–Split motorway

A symbol of Croatia's post-war reconstruction efforts, the 380 km A1 motorway helps connect the capital of Zagreb with the Adriatic port of Split, Croatia's second largest city. Constructed in just three years despite the mountainous areas it crosses which called for the building of numerous civil engineering structures and the drilling of tunnels, two of which are almost 6 km long, it finally brought closer together the north and the south of the country which are now only a three hours drive away. Today, Croatia has more than 1400 km of motorways, almost 1000 km of which were constructed from 1998 to 2009.

Photo: Wikipédia / kelvis

2005

3 October



Start of European Union accession negotiations

Two and a half years after Zagreb's application for membership, the 27 Member States officially opened in Luxembourg Croatia's European Union accession negotiations led by Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović (to be elected President of Croatia in 2015). Opened within a challenging political context after the rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty by the French and the Dutch, these negotiations would prove to be rather demanding for the candidate country.

Photo: European Union

2005

4 December



Croatia wins the Davis Cup

Winning 3:2 in the finals against Slovakia, following Mario Ančić's eventual success over Michal Mertinak (7:6, 6:3, 6:4), Croatia becomes the 12th nation to win the silver "salad bowl". Croat Nikola Pilić also became the first captain to win the trophy for two different nations, the first three times receiving it for Germany. From left to right: Mario Ančić, Goran Ivanišević, Nikola Pilić, Ivan Ljubičić and Ivo Karlović.

Photo: HINA

2006

10 July



International tribute to Nikola Tesla (1856–1943)

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great inventor, physicist and engineer, UNESCO declared 2006 as “Nikola Tesla Year”. Born in Croatia, he died in the United States of America where he spent the second half of his life, he was a pioneer of the alternating current system. It is to him that we owe, among other things, the alternating current induction motor that is still used in most electrical and household appliances. The father of hydroelectric power, he constructed the first hydroelectric power plant at Niagara Falls in 1895. The same year, the Croatian City of Šibenik became the first European city with street lights powered by hydroelectric power. (Photo: statue of Nikola Tesla in the centre of Zagreb, work by the great Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović).

Photo: Udruga Nikola Tesla genij za budućnost

2006

31 December



Croatia passes the 10 million tourist mark

For over a decade now, Croatia's tourism has been breaking records year after year. In 2006, more than 10 million tourists and over 53 million overnight stays were recorded, which is of strategic importance for the country's economic development and for its 4.5 million inhabitants. This photo shows the Roman forum of Zadar, the three-thousand-year-old Dalmatian port, and in the background the Pre-Romanesque rotunda of the Church of St. Donatus dating from the 9th century.

Photo: TZG Zadar / Mladen Radolović Mrlja

2008

4–5 April



George W. Bush in Zagreb

The day after the NATO Summit in Bucharest, where Croatia was officially invited to join the Alliance, President Bush made an official visit to Croatia, the first of a US head of state apart from the brief visits to Zagreb of Richard Nixon in 1970 and Bill Clinton in 1996. In his speech on Saint Mark's square President Bush paid tribute to Croatians for the reforms accomplished and declared that the history of Croatia was the best of testimonies that freedom was priceless and deserved every sacrifice. In the photograph: George W. Bush and Croatia's Prime Minister Ivo Sanader.

Photo: HINA

2008

1 December



Croatia chairs the UN Security Council

For the first time since joining the United Nations in 1992, and only ten years after the departure of the last blue helmet from Croatian territory, Croatia assumes the rotating presidency of this central UN body. Croatia was in fact elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 2008–2010. The photo shows Croatian President Stjepan Mesić and Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at a Security Council meeting chaired by Croatia.

Photo: UN / Ryan Brown

2009

1 April



Croatia joins the North Atlantic Alliance

After becoming a member of the Partnership for Peace in 2000, the first step towards membership of NATO, then joining the Action Plan for Peace in 2002, Croatia concluded the first round of negotiations in April 2008. At the end of the ratification process of the Accession Protocol signed in July 2008 in Brussels, Croatia formally became a NATO member, the most powerful military alliance ever. In the photo, Croatian President Stjepan Mesić and his US counterpart Barack Obama. In the background, Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader.

Photo: HINA / NATO

2009

6 July



First woman at the head of the Government

After the surprise resignation of Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, Jadranka Kosor, also member of HDZ (centre-right), was appointed Prime Minister. This was the first time since independence for a woman to take the reins of Government, which she would lead until the conclusion of the EU accession negotiations in 2011. Elected Member of Parliament in 1995, she also held the office of Vice-President of Parliament, then of Vice-President of the Government. A candidate at the presidential election of 2005, she lost in the second round to Stjepan Mesić.

Photo: HINA

2009

10 July – 25 August



60th Dubrovnik Summer Festival

More than two thousand musicians, actors and dancers from many countries take part in the traditional Dubrovnik Summer Festival which takes place each year from 10 July to 25 August in the unique setting of the old walled city, classified as a World Heritage Site. Concerts given in the Renaissance atmosphere of the Rector's Palace or plays staged on the Lovrijenac Fortress overlooking the waves of the Adriatic are simply an unforgettable experience.

Photo: Dubrovačke ljetne igre

2009

9–10 August



U2 in concert in Zagreb

As part of its global “Kiss the Future” tour, which began in June 2009 and ended in July 2011, the famous Irish rock band gave two outstanding concerts at Maksimir stadium in the Croatian capital. Given the success of the first concert, a second one was organised the next day, bringing together more than 124,000 fans. The leader of the group, Bono, began the concert by declaiming the famous verse by Ivan Gundulić (1589–1638), the greatest poet of Dubrovnik, who inspired generations of Croatians: “Oh beautiful, oh dear, oh sweet freedom!”

Photo: HINA

2009

11 December



The new location of the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art

Designed by the Croatian architect Igor Franić, the new building of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb covers an area of 14,600 m², of which 3500 m² are reserved for permanent exhibitions and 1500 m² for temporary exhibitions. In addition to a media library, it houses many collections of Croatian and foreign artists as well as the archives of the famous Croatian photographer Tošo Dabac, works from the studio of the sculptor Ivan Kožarić, collections of Vjenceslav Richter and Benko Horvat, and donations from Silvana Seissel. Carsten Höller's 32-metre double spiral slide allows visitors to leave the building in a very original way.

Photo: MSU / Damir Fabijanić

2010

11 January



Ivo Josipović elected 3rd President of the Republic

The candidate of the Social Democratic Party, Ivo Josipović, won the second round of the presidential election with 60.26% of the vote against Milan Bandić, the mayor of Zagreb. Professor of criminal law, composer and independent Member of Parliament affiliated to the Social Democrats (SDP) from 2008 to 2010, he emerged as a candidate in the presidential election by easily winning the nomination of SDP in July 2009.

Photo: HINA

2010

4 November



Serbian President apologises for the victims of war

“I am here to pay respect to the victims and to all those who have been killed. Bowing before the victims, I come here to once again give words of apology and express my sincere regrets with a view to creating conditions for Croats and Serbs to turn a new page in our history.” It is with these words, which the Croats had waited to hear for 19 years, that Serbian president Boris Tadić offered, in the martyred city of Vukovar, the official apology of Serbia for crimes committed during the 1991–1995 war. After the normalisation of bilateral diplomatic relations in 1996, followed by the extradition by Belgrade in 2001 of Slobodan Milošević who was tried in The Hague for crimes against humanity, this constituted a strong new gesture and an important step in the reconciliation of the two countries. Croatia, an EU member state today, supports Serbia’s efforts to join the European Union.

Photo: HINA

2010

30 December



Blanka Vlašić crowned the world’s sportswoman of the year

Croatian athlete, holder of the 2nd best performance of all times in the high jump (2.08), was crowned in 2010 consecutively best European athlete, then best world athlete as well as best European sportswoman and then best world sportswoman. Her impressive record of achievements includes ten gold medals, in particular those won at the world championships (Osaka 2007, Valencia 2008, Berlin 2009, Doha 2010), at the Athletics World Cup finals (2007, 2008 and 2009) and the 2010 Barcelona European Athletic Championships. She won silver at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and eight years later a bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Photo: Erik van Leeuwen

2011

6 May



The biggest smile in the world

After difficult years, optimism is seeming to gain ground in Croatia. Gathered on Zagreb's main square, 768 people grouped together to create what was then the biggest human "smiley" in the world. Approved by the Guinness World Records, the performance beat the previous record, which involved 551 participants and was made in the Latvian capital of Riga.

Photo: Šime Strikoman

15–25 September

2011



Rimac Concept One: the fastest electric car in the world

The young Croatian innovator Mate Rimac, only 23 years old, unveiled at the Frankfurt Motor Show the Rimac Automobili Concept One, the fastest electric sports car in the world, produced in Croatia. Equipped with four motors developing a total of 1224 hp, it goes from 0 to 100 km/h in 2.5 seconds and reaches 355 km/h, with a driving range of 350 km. Rimac inscribes himself within the tradition of many famous Croatian innovators, such as Ivan Blaž Lupis (torpedo), Ivan Vučetić (fingerprint identification), Franjo Hanaman (tungsten filament light bulb), Josip Belušić (speedometer), Nikola Tesla (induction motor), Slavoljub Penkala (mechanical pencil and pen with built-in reservoir) or Tomislav Uzelac (MP3 digital format).

Photo: Rimac automobili

2011

18 November



20th anniversary of the fall of Vukovar

As it does every year on 18 November, Croatia remembers the terrible siege of the City of Vukovar in 1991. At the city's memorial, alongside the hundreds of graves of the city's defenders, 938 white marble crosses symbolise the same number of victims buried by the besieger in a mass grave near the city.

Photo: Dario Njavro

2011

18 November



Every 18 November Croatia remembers

Throughout Croatia, it is time for recollection and remembrance: everywhere, along the streets, in public squares, on windowsills, memorial candles are lit never to forget the price of freedom and democracy. More than 20,000 people were killed and 37,000 wounded during the Croatian War of Independence, in the heart of Europe, on the threshold of the 21st century. In addition, 1571 people are still reported missing and the burial sites of another 422 remain unknown.

Photo: HINA

2011

9 December



Signing of the Treaty of Accession to the European Union

Six years after the opening of accession negotiations, concluded on 30 June 2011, Croatian President Ivo Josipović and Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor sign in Brussels, with the heads of state and government of the EU-27, the treaty formalising Croatia's accession to the EU as of 1 July 2013. As part of these negotiations, Croatia, the first country to join the Union after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, had to incorporate no less than 162,000 pages of European regulations into its national legal system, twice as many as the ten countries that joined the EU in 2004.

Photo: Union européenne

2011

23 December



Return of the left to power

After the victory of the centre-left coalition in the general election of 4 December 2011, Zoran Milanović, leader of the Social Democrats (SDP), replaced Jadranka Kosor (HDZ, centre-right) as Prime Minister, after she had led the country during the final two years of EU accession negotiations. After having enjoyed a parliamentary majority for two four-year parliamentary terms and exercised power for eight years, HDZ returned to the opposition benches.

Photo: HINA

2012

22 January



Croatians say “yes” to Europe

In the referendum in which they were called to decide on the accession of Croatia to the European Union, two-thirds of voters (66.27%) gave their support to the European future of the country. This clear-cut success of the “yes” vote is even greater if we bear in mind that voting took place against the backdrop of the Greek crisis, which at the time was making European headlines. From left to right: Prime Minister Zoran Milanović, President of the Republic Ivo Josipović, and President of Parliament (Sabor) Boris Šprem.

Photo: HINA

2012

22 January



D-526 before accession to the EU

The Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Vesna Pusić, surrounded by foreign diplomats, savours the victory of the “yes” vote in the referendum at the time of the announcement of the official results in Parliament. At the end of the ratification process of the Treaty of Accession by all member states, Croatia would become, on 1 July 2013, the 28th member state of the EU.

Photo: Sanjin Strukić / PIXSELL

2012

16 November



Return of general Ante Gotovina after his acquittal by the ICTY

The Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague found Croatian generals Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač not guilty of any of the charges brought against them. The judges dismissed on appeal the charges alleging that the military operation "Storm", of which general Gotovina was operational commander, was "a joint criminal enterprise whose objective was to expel the Serb population". They also rejected the thesis about "illegal artillery attacks" during the military operations, dispelling any suspicion as to the legitimacy of the summer 1995 operation "Storm" that aimed to restore the territorial integrity of the country.

Photo: HINA

2012

16 November



Popular tribute to the acquitted generals

Upon their return to Zagreb after seven years of provisional detention, the generals acquitted by the ICTY, Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač, are welcomed as heroes by a jubilant nation after a long-awaited verdict that was received with great relief and where the sentiment of a grave injustice was finally remedied.

Photo: HINA

2013

1 July



Croatia Becomes 28th Member State of the European Union

Twenty-two years after its independence and more than ten years after applying for membership, Croatia officially became a Member State of the European Union and achieved one of its principal strategic objectives, crowning more than two decades of efforts since the return of peace. At the same time, the Croatian language became the 24th official language of the European Union. The first “family” photo of 28 heads of state and government was taken at St Mark's Square in Zagreb, on the fringes of celebrations organized for the occasion.

Photo: HINA

2013

14 July



60th Pula Film Festival

Organized each summer since 1954 in the majestic Roman amphitheatre of Pula, the Pula Film Festival is one of the oldest in Europe. Among other festivals taking place in Croatia, the most renowned are Animafest Zagreb (animated), Mediterranean Film Festival Split, International Festival of New Film Split (experimental), Motovun Film Festival (independent), ZagrebDox (documentary) and Zagreb Film Festival (auteur film).

Photo: Pula Film Festival / Slaven Radolović

2014

1 October



Academy of Music revamped

Founded in 1829 and turned into the National Conservatory in 1921, the Zagreb Academy of Music is finally endowed with a hi-tech building opposite the National Opera House, recognisable by its giant “metronome’s needle”. Accommodating 115 professors and 580 students, stretching over 12,000 m², the building contains four concert halls, 35 rehearsal studios and 51 ultramodern music classrooms. It also has a recording studio, a multimedia room and a library containing 62,000 works.

Photo: Željko Filipin

2015

15 February



Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović elected President of the Republic

The fourth head of state since Croatia's independence and the first female President, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, HDZ (centre-right) candidate, prevailed in the second round of the presidential elections over the social democratic candidate Ivo Josipović, by winning 50.74% of the votes. Former diplomat and minister of foreign affairs and European integration, she led the European Union accession negotiations from 2005 to 2008.

Photo: HINA

2015

9 August



300th Alka Tournament

An equestrian competition taking place every first Sunday of August since 1715 in the town of Sinj in the Dalmatian hinterland, it commemorates the victory of 15 August 1715 when 700 Croatian horsemen managed to repel the assault of 60,000 Ottoman soldiers that sieged the town. One of the last authentic chivalry tournaments, Sinjska Alka was added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. The horseman (Alkar) rides his horse down the race track and tries to hit the central ring of the alka with his spear in full gallop. The alka is a metal object made of two concentric circles connected with three equidistant bars suspended on a rope 3.32 metres above the race track.

Photo: PjL

2015

11 December



Zagreb Christmas Market voted best in Europe

The Croatian capital was awarded the title of best Christmas market in Europe. Zagreb received the most votes by voters from 176 countries on the Internet site European Best Destinations. This title was confirmed the following year: in December 2016, Zagreb established itself again at the top of the rating, in competition with Strasbourg, Colmar, Aix-la-Chapelle, Vienna, Dresden, Tallinn, Prague, Budapest and Brussels. This success was repeated in 2017, for a third year in a row.

Photo: HTZ Zagreb / Mirsad Mehulić

2016

1 January



Migrant crisis

In just a hundred days from mid-September to the end of December 2015, more than 560,000 refugees coming from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other Middle East countries passed through Croatia on their way towards Germany and Northern Europe. Facing an unprecedented migrant wave and drawing on its experience from sheltering Croatian and Bosnian refugees during the War, the Government established numerous reception centres and deployed emergency medical teams, which were aided by a large number of volunteers. The spirit of solidarity inspired by this humanitarian drama also contributed to the Red Cross collecting numerous donations to help the migrants. However, after the agreement reached in March 2016 between the EU and Turkey, this flood of refugees significantly decreased and practically dried up.

Photo: HINA

2016

11 February



Zadar, Best European Destination of 2016

A burgeoning tourist destination, the seaside city of Zadar was voted Best European Destination of 2016. Apart from its legendary sunsets, this three-thousand-year-old city has numerous advantages: situated in the proximity of 6 national parks or nature reserves (Paklenica, Kornati, Krka, Velebit, Telašćica and Lake Vrana), it is surrounded by an archipelago of around two hundred islands. Its Sea Organ, the hi-tech installation “Greeting to the Sun” and St. Donatus Church (9th century) are among its most visited tourist sites.

Photo: HTZ Zadar / Davor Strenja

2016

24 March



Rijeka designated European Capital of Culture 2020

A jury of independent experts designated the port city of Rijeka the European Capital of Culture in 2020. Rijeka will be the first Croatian city to hold this title since Croatia joined the European Union in 2013. The year 2020 will be marked by Croatia in more ways than one, since in the first semester Croatia will also take over the presidency of the European Union.

Photo: Domokdr

2016

27 April



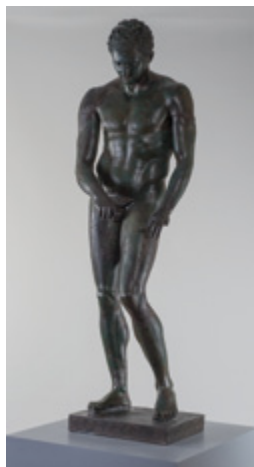
A century of institutional Islam in Croatia

As early as 1916, Croatia was one of the first countries in Europe to grant Islam official status of traditional religion. The centennial anniversary of this recognition by the Croatian Parliament was marked by numerous celebrations in Croatia, where the small Muslim community is among the oldest in Europe. As such, the Islamic Community enjoys many rights (public subsidies, mosques, Islamic teaching, and days off for religious holidays) and represents an example in Europe. Perfectly integrated within the Croatian nation, Croatian Muslims also actively participated in the war of independence with more than 1100 of them fallen on the field of honour. The Islamic Centre in Rijeka, inaugurated in May 2013, is depicted in the photo. (Photo: the Mosque in Rijeka, designed according to the plans of the Croatian artist Dušan Džamonja).

Photo: Hajrudin Mujkanović

2016

30 April



A museum dedicated to the Croatian Apoxyomenos

Discovered in 1996 off the Croatian island of Lošinj at a depth of 45m, this majestic, perfectly preserved Greek statue (1st–2nd century BC), raised from the sea in 1999 and under restoration until 2005, represents a naked athlete scraping his skin with a strigil (or Apoxyomenos in Greek). Of the eight known to date, the Croatian Apoxyomenos is the only one that is complete and in an exceptional state of conservation. In order to highlight this invaluable piece of heritage, a museum dedicated to the statue was opened in Mali Lošinj, inaugurated by the President of the Republic in April 2016.

Photo: Croatian Conservation Institute / Ljubo Gamulin (left) / Danijel Frka (top right) / Jurica Škudar (bottom right)

2016

2 July



2Cellos concert in Zagreb

The famous Croatian cello duo gave an outstanding outdoor concert performance in Zagreb before 50,000 enthusiastic fans. After Luka Šulić and Stjepan Hauser became world famous for their reinterpretation of "Smooth Criminal" by Michael Jackson, they have since achieved international success with cello covers of hits by bands such as U2, Guns N' Roses, Nirvana, AC/DC, as well as of songs by Sting and Zucchero. Since 2011, they have been performing regularly alongside Elton John on his world tours, including the 2012 Queen's Jubilee concert in front of Buckingham Palace.

Photo: HINA

2016

5–21 August



Harvest of medals in Rio

Croatian athletes participating in the Rio Olympic Games won a total of 10 medals (5 gold, 3 silver and 2 bronze). Although ranking 126th in the world in terms of size, Croatia had a high 17th place in the medals table. Gold was won by Sandra Perković (discus throw), Sara Kolak (javelin throw), Šime Fantela and Igor Marenčić (sailing, 470), Martin and Valent Sinković (rowing, double sculls) and Josip Glasnović (trap shooting). Silver was won by the national water polo team, Tonči Stipanović (sailing, laser) and Damir Martin (rowing, single scull), while bronze was won by Filip Hrgović (boxing, over 91 kg) and Blanka Vlašić (high jump).

Photo: HINA

2016

18 October



Andrej Plenković at the head of the Government

After a turbulent political year marked by early elections, Andrej Plenković, the newly elected president of HDZ (center right), was appointed Prime Minister. With populism riding high throughout Europe, this jurist, former diplomat, Secretary of State for European Affairs and Member of the European Parliament, rose to the challenge of winning the elections on a reform programme that was resolutely pro-European and designed to support economic recovery. At international level, support for the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other Balkan states, to the EU is among Croatia's priorities.

Photo: Service photo du Gouvernement

2017

21 March



Opening of the new Zagreb airport

Planned for the transport of 5 million passengers per year, compared to 2.6 million in 2015, with a possibility of extension to accommodate up to 8 million passengers, the brand new terminal of the "Franjo Tuđman" airport should enable Zagreb, currently the air transport hub of the national air carrier Croatia Airlines, to become a regional platform in the medium term. Designed by Croatian architects and built mainly by Croatian and French companies, the new Zagreb airport is the latest among major structural investment projects to support the modernisation efforts that Croatia has been undertaking in all fields of activity for two decades now.

Photo: MZLZ / Josip Škof

2017

31 December



More than 18 million tourists

With 18.5 million visitors and 102 million overnight stays registered in 2017, the Croatian tourist industry is breaking new records, and the 2018 season looks even more promising. Entered in the UNESCO World Heritage List and chosen for the shooting of the TV series Game of Thrones as well as for the seventh episode of the Star Wars saga, Dubrovnik alone registered more than a million visitors. The most popular destinations are the Croatian Adriatic coast (Istria and Dalmatia) with its thousand islands, eight sites recognized as the heritage of humanity, as well as the capital Zagreb and numerous national and natural parks throughout the country.

Photo: Bracodbk

2018

6 March



Concept Two beats all speed records

An attraction at the Geneva Motor Show, the Rimac Automobili Concept Two, the world's fastest new electric hypercar, was unveiled to the general public. Completely different from Concept One, the new car delivers 1914 hp with a torque of 2300 Nm and reaches 100 km/h in 1.97 seconds, the fastest acceleration for a car in the world. With a top speed of 412 km/h, it exceeds the Concorde at take-off! Manufactured entirely in Croatia, near Zagreb, it has a range of 650 km without recharging, thanks to its lithium and iron phosphate batteries, and can run without human intervention.

Photo: Rimac automobili

2018

24 June



Both Čilić and Ćorić win on the ATP circuit

A great day for Croatian tennis: Borna Ćorić wins on grass 7:6, 3:6, 6:2 in the final of the ATP tournament in Halle (Germany) against Roger Federer, world number one, while at the same time, on that fateful 24 June in London the best Croatian tennis player and world number three, Marin Čilić, Wimbledon finalist in 2017 and winner of the US Open in 2018, wins the prestigious ATP Queen's tournament for the second time in his career, beating former world number one, Novak Đoković, 5:7, 7:6 (4), 6:3.

Photo: Tennis TourTalk / New Straits Times