INTRODUCTION

After the fall of communism and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact the geopolitical situation in the Adriatic and Black sea regions changed too. The Adriatic Sea zone, divided until 1991 among Italy (NATO member), ex-Yugoslavia (a communist and socialist country “standing between East and West”, one of the leaders of non-aligned countries), and Albania (an isolated communist country with good relations with the Soviet Union until 1961 and China 1961-1977), became territorially more divided and entered the area dominantly controlled by NATO, i.e. the Western alliance. NATO, formed in 1949, with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, was obliged to re-examine its role so NATO spread towards east (Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the Baltic states, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Albania, Macedonia, Croatia), and became the most powerful force and the factor of strongest influence in the region. Benevolence and inclination of Romania, Bulgaria (in Partnership for Peace since 1994), Albania, Macedonia, Slovenia (in Partnership for Peace since 1995), and Croatia (in Partnership for Peace since 2001) show that all these countries also tend to be part of NATO. The same is expected to happen also with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally (after Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland joined NATO) it seems that in the end of the 20th century the whole SE Europe, as well as all the states of the Balkans, except Serbia, show an interest to be included in NATO. The older territorial division between Warsaw Treaty and NATO, with the ex-Yugoslav buffer zone, have disappeared.
Table 1.
Main geographical data about the Adriatic Sea regarding neighbouring countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>country</th>
<th>length of the continental coastline in km</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>length of the islands' coastline in km</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>sum km</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>% of the sea surface (estimate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1,778</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>4,057</td>
<td>97.2</td>
<td>5,835</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1,249</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1272</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3,737 (47.2%)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4,174 (52.8%)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>7,911</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \phi = 40^\circ 07'N \text{ i } 18^\circ 31'E \text{ (Otranto)}; \lambda=45^\circ 47'N \text{ i } 13^\circ 35'E \text{ (Trieste Bay)}; \text{ Area = 138,595 km}^2 = 0.375 \% A_{\text{ws}} \left( 510 \times 10^6 \text{ km}^2 \right); \text{ Volume = 34,977 km}^3 = 0.025 \% V_{\text{ws}} \left( 1,370 \times 10^6 \text{ km}^3 \right); \text{ Weight = 36,750 x}10^6 \text{ t} = 0.025 \% W_{\text{ws}} \left( 1,440 \times 10^6 \text{ t} \right); \bar{\varnothing} \text{ depth: ca 173 m (\bar{\varnothing} \text{ world sea depth} = 3,795 m); \bar{\varnothing} \text{ land high is 875 m; Length = 783 km, Wideness}_{\bar{\varnothing}} = 248 \text{ km; Coast line = 7,911 km (continent: 3,737 km, islands: 4,174 km)}; \text{ Physical-geographical division: NW part (depths to 50 m), Jabuka valley (243 m), Pelagosa (Palagruža) range (130 m), Southadriatic valley (1,645 m, 1,400 m, 1,228 m, 1,364 m).} \]

The collapse of communism in 1990 started a new process of disintegration of ex-SFR Yugoslavia, an artificial state, integrated in 1918 of very heterogeneous states and territories. That changed tremendously the regional geopolitical constellation on the Eastern Adriatic too. After 1991, newly independent states: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Federative Republic of Yugoslavia ( Serbia and Montenegro) were constituted. It caused a new administrative division of the ex-SFR Yugoslavia belonging part of the Adriatic Sea among four new countries (excluding Macedonia which has no exit to the sea). Croatia is most of all of them oriented towards the Adriatic Sea and Mediterranean. It is not a surprising fact, as the greatest part of the eastern Adriatic Sea coast, almost all islands and largest ports, belong to Croatia. But also Montenegro (which continued to share its destiny with Serbia in Milosevic’s FR Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2001). In 2002 it was reorganised into some kind of Serbia and Montenegro federation, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have share in the Adriatic Sea, although in a very small portion, specially in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With an area of 56,538 km² and 4.4 million inhabitants, Croatia plays a new geopolitical role in the contact zone, which connects middle Europe with South Eastern Europe. Croatia joined Partnership for Peace in 1999. Croatian territorial and internal sea waters cover 31,479 km², which makes a significant part (22.7 %) of the surface of the
Adriatic, whose total area is 135,418 km². That is why the zone is very interesting from geostrategic point of view. Slovenia, with only 44 km of the coast line in the Trieste Bay region, having no exit to open sea, claims from Croatian and Italian side some benefits, in order to get its own pass to the open sea. The problem of the sea borders in the Trieste Bay has not been solved yet. Slovenia has been the member of Partnership for Peace since 1995.

After World War II the Croatian littoral played an important role inside the ex-Yugoslav Adriatic zone. But, the supremacy of Italy, one of the members of NATO since 1949, continued, although the naval forces of ex-Yugoslavia were significant, to be the part of one of the strongest military forces in Europe. In Tito’s Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia was one of the six federal republics. With a coast of 5790.2 km in length (4057.2 km islands) it was the main littoral republic, having 90 % of ex-Yugoslav coast. Almost all Eastern Adriatic islands belong to Croatia. The Croatian islands are situated in a range of some 450 km along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. They form the main part of the Adriatic islands and have major strategic significance. Besides 718 islands and islets there are 389 cliffs and 78 reefs. The total area covers 3300 km² (about 5.8 % of Croatian mainland territory) and the length of its coast is 4,057.2 km. Twenty of these islands occupy an area larger than 20 km² each, and other 57 ones cover the surface from 1 km² to 20 km². The biggest islands are Krk (409.9 km²), Cres (404.3 km²), Brač (394.6 km²), Hvar (299.7 km²), Pag (284.6 km²), and Korčula (276.0 km²). In the mostly low inhabited island zone, the most populated in 1991 were: Korčula (17,038 inhabitants), Krk (16,402), Brač (13,824), Hvar (11,495), Rab (9,025) and Lošinj (8,134).

Along the East Adriatic coast, excluding the zone of Trieste, there are approximately 300 ports. A dozen of them are large ports for transoceanic ships (Koper in Slovenia, Rijeka, Ploče, Split, Zadar, Šibenik, Dubrovnik and Pula in Croatia, Kotor and Bar in Montenegro, Durrës and Vlorë in Albania), with a total traffic of almost 50 million tons in 1990, and 30 million tons in 1999. The largest ports are: Koper and Rijeka, opened to the Danube Basin and the Alpine Region, Ploče, whose basic function is the transit traffic from and to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bar which is strategically connected with Serbia, Durrës the main Albanian port. Almost all mentioned ports have a long and important tradition. The main passenger ports are Split and Zadar each of them with ca two million passengers a year, and especially Dubrovnik with a significant international maritime tourist traffic.

A long and attractive coast is an optimal predisposition for developing tourism. There are a lot of tourist destinations in different parts of Croatian, Slovenian and Montenegrin littoral and on islands. Especially nautical tourism has been growing up lately. In optimal tourist years Croatia was visited by over ten million tourists per year, who spent almost 70 million overnight stays annually, which put Croatia in the fifth position on the European scale. The war in Croatia (1991-1995) had a disastrous influence on the tourist traffic (only about 20-30 % of the pre-war one). From 1994
tourism has been approaching, little by little, the old position in the national economy (35% in 1994, 70% in 1997, and 90% in 2002 of the pre-war tourist traffic). Until the liberation of Croatia, foreign tourists were forbidden to approach the islands of Vis and Lastovo as they were military areas of ex-Yugoslavia. In free Croatia these islands too find their place in the development of the international tourism on the Adriatic.

After the NATO military action started in the Kosovo region of the FR Yugoslavia in 1999, touristic flows in that season diminished in Croatia as well as in Montenegro, Albania and even Greece and Italy. Main and dominant military ports and puncts on the western coast (Italy) such as Bari, Taranto etc. were controlled by the main regional strategic and military logistic centre of NATO in Aviano. The main military centres on the eastern coast: Koper (Slovenia), Pula, Šibenik, Split and Ploče (Croatia), Kumbor (Boka Kotorska in Montenegro), and Durrës and Vlorë (Albania), were mostly old-fashioned and technologically below standards. Being included in the NATO Partnership for Peace, Slovenia (1995), Albania (1995) and Macedonia (1995), as well as Croatia which joined the group later (2001), and all four taking part in the Kosovo crisis in FR Yugoslavia in 1999, were supported by specific programmes and connections from the Western alliance side, and connected with it. Of course, loyal Slovenian, Croatian, Albanian and Macedonian partnership with NATO in the Kosovo action in 1999 was proved.

Slovenia and Croatia claim to be part of the Mediterranean and Central Europe (they are members of the Central European Initiative), and lay stress on traditional economic and geopolitical connections. But all the events and changes that take place in SE Europe or in the Balkan region influence however the situation in Croatia, owing to the fact that Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the FR Yugoslavia have been a relevant ethnic entity.

STRATEGIC FEATURES WHICH PRECEDED THE MOST RECENT CHANGES IN THE ADRIATIC SEA REGION

The borders on the Adriatic changed again after WW 1, when Yugoslavia appeared as a new state, and Italy widened to the territories of Trieste, Istria, North Adriatic islands, Rijeka, Zadar and Lastovo. The story of the constitution of ex-Yugoslavia, after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, included primarily the realisation of the dream of creating “Great Serbia”. The indoctrinated theses of the greatest Serbian leaders were mostly accepted, which caused an absurd theory that Serbia was Yugoslav Piedmont, and that the Serbian nation, lead by the Serbian orthodox church had to be a dominating nation. In practice, in the period 1918-1941 the Serbian king became the king of all southern Slaves (excluding Bulgarians), the Serbian currency became the official currency, the Serbian artillery remained the only one in the country and the Serbian law became the exclusive one. The dream of other southern Slaves: Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins and others to live in democracy and brotherhood
never realised. Predominantly Roman Catholic Croats as well as Macedonians and Montenegrins with their own national orthodox churches and others were abandoned and suppressed. The concordat with the Roman Catholic Church was never ratificated, the Montenegrin and Macedonian churches were forbidden, the Montenegrin king was obliged to leave the country, and the internal administrative organisation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia did not recognise historical and traditional borders. At the same time, although the 19th century claims of the Kingdom of Serbia to Albanian territory diminished after WW I they were laying hidden in ex-Yugoslav political strategy.

After ex-Yugoslavia was established, some parts of the Croatian littoral (Istria, Rijeka, some Croatian islands and Zadar), already occupied by Italy (1918-1920) fell under Italian administration (Rapallo Peace Threat). The navy, belonging to the A.-H. Monarchy, fell mostly into Italian hands. Croatian ports were left without their significant fleet. It enabled the supremacy of Italy over the Adriatic Sea. During the period of 1918-1941 the ex-Yugoslav geopolitical role on the Adriatic was subordinate. Instead of Zadar, which became Italian exclave and strategic military point, Split began to play an important political and military role among littoral cities. Dubrovnik became the centre of secondary importance, and Šibenik developed more and more its strategic significance. Suffering monarchic dominance and political pressure which enabled democratic initiatives, it was only in 1939 that Croatia managed to reunite most of its ethnic territories, even those in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, all the littoral territory, except Boka Kotorska and parts mentioned above, which were under Italian rule, was finally again included in the autonomous Banovina Hrvatska (Vice-Royalty of Croatia), which lasted only to the beginning of World War II.

With such a heritage World War II opened a very cruel page of history in this part of Europe. The Quisling states were established in Croatia, Serbia and Albania influenced by the tripartite pact signed by Germany, Italy and Japan, as it happened in Norway, France, Hungary, Romania, under German or Italian nazi/fascist occupation. The Serbian king ran away to England. Tito's resistance movement, connected with Soviet communist ideology, using partisan war strategy, and promising democracy, federalism, liberty, equality and brotherhood, succeeded. Croatia played an important role in the European anti-fascist resistance war. As the main part of the Croatian Adriatic littoral was occupied by fascist Italy, the Quisling Independent State of Croatia had no particular significance on the Sea. There were some attempts to include Albania in Communist Yugoslavia after WW II. Being protected by Italian strategy between the wars, and with Soviet (naval and submarine military base on the island of Sazan 1948-1960), and later Chinese one, after WW II, Albania remained an independent country and an autonomous factor on the Adriatic Sea. Italy, after the capitulation of fascism in 1943, restored its borders with ex-Yugoslavia in the period 1945-1953, and lost the mentioned areas (excluding Trieste) with mixed or predominant Slavic population. Namely, after WW II, Istria, islands and Zadar came back to the Republic of Croatia,
and a little part of Istria was given to the Republic of Slovenia, both of them being federate states of ex-Yugoslavia.

**THE WAR EVENTS 1991-1995**

Starting an aggression against Croatia (autumn 1991), the ex-Yugoslav navy, as part of general army force, that was predominantly influenced by Milosevic’s plans to establish the new “Great Serbian State”, attacked some littoral cities (Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Dubrovnik) but without any result. Spontaneous resistance movement, using mostly small boats belonging to the local inhabitants, answered all Yugoslav/Serbian attacks. Almost all the ex-Yugoslav Navy from Pula and Split was concentrated near the islands of Vis and Lastovo, making some kind of maritime blockade. They were supported by the ex-Yugoslav fleet situated in Boka Kotorska Bay (Montenegro). After the complete fiasco of this blockade, during the attacks on Zadar, Split and in the end, but most violently on Dubrovnik, the ex-SFR Yugoslav fleet finally left Croatian waters and was ranked in Boka Kotorska Bay or in southerly located ports of Bar and Ulcinj. Some of the ships were included in the recent Albanian emigrant process (the events in 1997). Only a part of the ex-Yugoslav Navy, situated mostly in Šibenik and Ploče, was left there.

The open aggression against Croatia finished at the beginning of 1992. The fact of the international recognition of Croatia in January 15, 1992 was “decorated” with 26% of the occupied land territory and war damages in the value of 30 billion U.S. dollars.

The international maritime embargo was introduced in the Adriatic to prevent any weapon supplies reaching the sides in the war 1991-1995. The geopolitical fact that the Adriatic Sea could be very easily controlled in the zone of Otranto, made this embargo very effective. But it enabled the continuation of war, and the attacked sides (first Croatia, then Bosnia and Herzegovina) were put in a very bad position especially if compared with aggressive Serbian and Montenegrin forces that were extremely well supplied with all kinds of weapons. In spite of such a situation, besides Slovenia that did it first, Croatia succeeded very quickly in stabilising its sovereignty over the Adriatic belonging to it.

As a result of the occupation of the southern part of Croatia, Prevlaka near Dubrovnik, the neuralgic point well known as a very interesting strategic location, was until 2002 under the control of UN forces. Although it has always been a part of the old Dubrovnik territory, as well as the part of the territory of the Republic of Croatia, it waited for more than ten years to return completely to the territory of Croatia.

Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina were also severely attacked by Serbs even before the open aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina began in 1992. They responded by self-defence, warning that it was only the beginning of the general Serbian attack on Bosnia and Herzegovina. There was almost no help from Moslem Bosnyaks and, what is the worst, when the aggression started in 1992, Moslems were quite unprepared
and were cleansed from the complete territory of Eastern Bosnia (except the enclaves: Goražde, Srebrenica and Žepa).

The result of the Serbian aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina was about one million refugees and several thousands of killed people. The attack was rapid and the Serbs managed to occupy 70% of Bosnian and Herzegovinian territory. The conflict was calmed down with the help of the USA, and Croats have formed federation with Moslems (Bosnyaks). The Dayton agreement, the Paris Conference, the Rome Meeting etc., proclaimed new chances for peace in this region.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

According to experts and institutions, EBRD reports, etc., Slovenia and Croatia are among those new countries with the best development prospects. It is quite understandable taking into consideration their resources such as tourism, agriculture, light industry, shipbuilding, traffic and trade. Even foreign exchange has been developing, in spite of war and post-war conditions. In contrast, the economic situation in Albania and in the FR Yugoslavia is much worse. Naturally, the economic stability and development is most secure in Italy, one of the members of the “club of seven”, the richest countries of the World. The economic circumstances also influence the geopolitical situation in the region.

The central geographical position, the stable geopolitical and economic situation of Italy, the most relevant NATO member on the Mediterranean, show the absolute domination in the middle Mediterranean region, which guarantees to Italy the primary significance on the geopolitical map and strong influence on neighbouring countries, as well as in European and strategic organisations. The geographical site of Slovenia and Croatia is significant because it occupies a unique position in the contact area between the Central Danubian basin and the Central Mediterranean. It is here that the narrowest and the lowest relief barrier between the Central Danubian/Pannonian basin and the Northern Adriatic is found, connecting East-central Europe and the Mediterranean.

Situated between Western European countries (Austria, Italy), and Eastern European countries (Hungary, Yugoslavia), Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina play an important geopolitical and traffic role in Europe. Connecting European West and East (Central and Balkan Europe, Near East), the Pannonian Basin and the Mediterranean region, these countries are in the focus of many different political and economic interests even today. It is necessary to apostrophise the importance of Croatia in connecting Višegrad and Central European countries with the Adriatic and the Mediterranean (transport, traffic, oil pipeline, strategic interests). Because of the war of 1991-1995, and the political situation after it, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were exposed to the risk of being marginalised. Needless to say that they suffered great damages in this sense. Solving the conflicts, Croatia has all the possibilities of making up for what was lost in the war and in the post-war period. Considering a very small
exit of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Adriatic, an adequate contract between the two countries is obviously important. It would include the special conditions of using the Croatian port Ploče by Bosnia and Herzegovina side.

The oil and gas resources of the Adriatic could play an important role if exploitable quantities are found there. Today coastal longitudinal traffic depends on some coastal ship lines, and the road traffic. The old coastal road should be replaced as soon as possible by a new highway connecting Trieste – Rijeka – Zadar – Split and Dubrovnik (so called Ionian direction). In fact its building started near Zadar in 1997. Continuing towards Montenegro, Albania and Greece/Turkey, this highway could develop into an important additional traffic connection between Western Europe and Asia. Using the attractive coastal zone of the eastern Adriatic it will start developing its tourist and other economic potentials. Similarly, a future project of littoral Rijeka – Zadar – Split – Dubrovnik railway could have the same important role. All these projects have been recently recognised in the so-called Adriatic-Ionian Initiative.

Since the last decade of the 20th century, Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been sovereign and independent states. Their role on the Adriatic cannot be compared with that of Italy, one of the biggest and strongest naval forces of the Mediterranean, or with the forces of others in this area (the USA, France, Greece, Spain, Russia, etc.). Today it is mostly the juridical and traditional international sea law that gives them the possibility of ruling and making profit of their own parts of the Adriatic Sea, particularly to Croatia. Not only the strategic position with many little islands enables Croatia not to use a big fleet but plenty of small speed boats in order to keep its sovereignty over the Sea, but also recent connections with NATO. Economic strategy, mostly in traffic (Družbadria, Janaf), tourism (summer tourism, nautical tourism, “Robinson tourism”, etc.), sea traffic, ship building, mariculture, salt pans, oil and gas exploring, fishery, etc. are the most interesting factors in developing this maritime region of the Mediterranean today.

The maritime borders between the eastern Adriatic countries and Italy have been defined according to the International Law of the Sea, and so far there have been no problems with them. But, there are a few claims from the Slovenian side for the sea territory in Piran Bay. Slovenia claims from Croatia the part of the Adriatic on the very short maritime border in Piran Bay. The bilateral commission has been trying to solve this local problem for almost nine years. Probably the problem should be solved by some kind of an international arbitration. The FR Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) also claims some privileges near the Prevlaka Peninsula over the surrounding part of the Adriatic Sea on the southern border between Croatia and Montenegro. The newest, so called “constitutional crisis” in the FR Yugoslavia, which appeared in the summer of 2000 as the potential geopolitical conflict between the Serbian (“Yugoslav”) government and internal (Montenegrin) government finished, indirectly influenced by some external factors (NATO, the European Union, the USA, etc.), with the new name of the state: Federation of Serbia and Montenegro (in 2003). The fall of the Milosevic regime,
pacification of the region, entering the Stability Pact programme, which was initiated by western countries and NATO brought the first results in stabilising the economic and geopolitical situation of the region. The newest Iraq Crisis in the Gulf region turned the attention of the world towards the oil problem. The USA, deeply involved in this conflict, brought about some new relations inside NATO. All Adriatic countries have been called to contribute on the side of the USA, especially the members of NATO and Partnership for Peace. The “Vilnius Group” countries (among them Croatia) as well as Italy and Hungary, have showed high degree of collaboration.

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