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RETURN TO  
THE HOMELAND:  
THE BUILDING  
OF A STATE



Until recently, major activities of different immigrant groups have been directed towards persuading local and federal politicians to politically condemn the country from which they escaped because human rights had been violated. In most cases, they wanted the governments of their new homeland to implement economic blockades and not to establish or maintain friendly diplomatic relations with their native countries. This type of activity was especially rambling before the fall of the Berlin Wall and it involved the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. However, turn of the last century people who have researched diaspora, particularly the relation between diaspora and native countries, have noticed a new trend in the activities of different diasporas. This entails the growing interest and influence that members of diaspora achieve in their native countries. For instance, I'll mention just a few cases that illustrate and confirm this trend in the best way. The article "A world of exiles" in the January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003 issue of the Economist, a well-known English weekly magazine, reports that the Australian government did not permit the opening of a Macedonian embassy an ex-Yugoslav Republic but now an internationally recognized, newly established state. This is because a large number of Greeks live in Australia, and due to that number and their economic and political power the Australian government does not want a confrontation with them, which would certainly happen if the doors of this embassy were opened. Regarding the Greek diaspora, it is also interesting to mention the case of the Alexander the Great Foundation in Chicago whose leadership claims that their members will donate 45 million US dollars to carve a 73 metre high statue of Alexander the Great on Mount Kerdyllion. A great number of publications have been written on the significance and influence of the Italian diaspora in the USA and Canada, South America (especially Argentina), and particularly about its organization and influence in the

USA. With regards to the Jewish diaspora, one can be daily informed just by reading the pages of the New York Times, Boston Globe or Los Angeles Times, as well as serious, specialized magazines.

However, there are other unheard of diasporas which cannot be compared to the aforementioned in terms of their number and influence, but through their financial contributions and active role in the internal politics of their native countries they had great influence. So for instance, during the war between Somalia and Eritrea from 1998 until 2000, 333,000 emigrants from Eritrea agreed to give 2% of their salaries to finance the war. It is a well known fact that in the 19-year war between Tamil Tigers and Sri Lankan government, where 65 thousands of people have lost their lives so far, Tamil diaspora has been helping the Tigers in their military combat in all possible ways, especially financially.

When the Berlin Wall fell and the USSR as well as Yugoslavia disintegrated, ten new democratic and free countries were created. During that process or, in other words, their rebuilding, diaspora played a very important part in many cases. For example, a returnee from Canada became the Latvian president, and an American of Latvian origin became the Minister of Defence. A large number of diplomats and Members of the Parliament are ex-emigrants. The other two Baltic states, Estonia and Lithuania also have similar examples. In Estonia, two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Minister of Defence are former emigrants. The president and the head of staff in Lithuania are also Americans of Lithuanian origin. Bearing in mind that a relatively large number of prominent and successful business people, writers and university professors returned once liberty and democracy was restored in Lithuania.

When we speak about diasporas contribution to their native countries, we should certainly point out the Mexican and the Philippine diaspora, especially their economic contributions. Moved by the world trend of diaspora-homeland relations, India, for instance, has drastically changed its relation towards 20 million members of its diaspora at the beginning of 1990. Among other things, every year a gathering of Indian emigrants from all over the world is organized. This year, for example, there were two Nobel Prize winners at the gathering, Sir V. S. Naipaul, the Nobel Prize winner for literature and prof. Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize winner for economics. Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the Prime Minister of Mauritius was also among the guests. A large number of university professors,

business and influential people who left India and went to the western world, were also present at this significant gathering. It is very interesting to mention that 70% of all foreign investments in the Chinese economy in the last fifteen years have been made by its emigrants.

Since Dubrovnik, that is to say, Croatia is the host of this Metropolis conference "Diaspora and Homeland", I will briefly describe the relation between Croatia and its diaspora, or in other words, its contribution to the creation of the free, democratic and sovereign Republic of Croatia.

The relation between Croatia and its diaspora was always a reflection of social and political events that prevailed in the homeland. During their history, Croats left their country on a massive scale as a result of the political terror they suffered, as well as difficult economic conditions, especially at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Croatian diaspora, particularly their active part, always kept close ties with the homeland and helped it in various ways. This help usually consisted of sending financial support to family members as well as organizing all sorts of humanitarian aid during different kinds of disasters that struck their villages and towns, etc. They also financially supported many projects such as hospital modernisation, church building, etc. They did this because Croats have always thought of the Croatian Catholic Church as the sole institution that has guarded and protected Croatian national interests. When Serbia and the Yugoslav National Army attacked Croatia in 1990, Croatian diaspora showed great solidarity with the homeland. Croats, even those born in America, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela, Australia and other countries, voluntarily joined the newly formed military units, and with rifles in their hands they went to the front-lines.

Parallely, Croatian immigrants organized demonstrations around the world, in front of the parliaments of the main world capitals. Masses of 10 to 30 thousand people gathered at these demonstrations. They sought the recognition of an independent, sovereign and democratic state of Croatia. Different groups were lobbying politicians and governments around the world. This activity brought some good results. Serious analysts and experts for South-East Europe believe that Germany's early recognition of Croatia prior to the decision of the EU members was on account of Croatian diaspora. Besides the embargo on weapons, Argentina illegally sold the weapons to Croatia as a result of Croatian immigrants influence. Australia was the first country outside the European Union to recognize

Croatia, among other things, because of the influence of Croatian immigrants.

At the newly established Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20% of the employees were members of Croatian diaspora who had professional experience and spoke three, four or more foreign languages. During the HDZ's rule, Gojko Šušak, the Minister of Defence, a returnee from Canada, was one of the most influential politicians in the Government of Dr. Franjo Tuđman. Ivica Mudrinić, also a returnee from Canada, was the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Communications, and later the Director of Croatian Television.

The late Vinko Nikolić, Boris Maruna and Ante Beljo, eminent returnees from Spain, the USA and Canada were the Directors of the Croatian Heritage Foundation, a very important institution which maintains ties with Croatian emigrants around the world. As a token of recognition for everything they contributed in creating a free and democratic Croatia, at the initiative of the first President, Dr. Franjo Tuđman, the government of the Republic of Croatia set up a special electoral unit for diaspora, so that individuals from the USA, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and Venezuela could have parliamentary representation.

When we take into consideration investments in the Croatian economy, it is indisputable that since a free and democratic Croatia has been established, Croatian immigrants have been ready to invest in their homeland, but they have always been motivated more by emotional impulse than by business logic. Unfortunately, the situation was not positive for their investments. The war was certainly one of the objective barriers. However, regardless of the war, in the period between 1992 and 1999 Croatian emigrants invested 151.385 million DM in the Croatian economy through the Croatian Privatization Fund only. According to the statistics of the Croatian National Bank, direct foreign investments amounted to 256.6 million DM in 1993. They were constantly increasing every year and reached a final amount of 3.082,6 million DM in 2001. Particularly until 1996 a large majority of foreign investments in most cases were directly or indirectly connected with Croatian immigrants. Regardless of the fact that nowadays relations between the homeland and Croatian diaspora are not as strong and active as they were before the year 2000, those relations and contacts are still being maintained.