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### **PRESS RELEASE**

Today when we have joined North-Atlantic Organization, many in Croatia are taking credit for this success saying how this is a result of their hard work. In my book “American dream – a guy from Croatia” it is clearly stated how the Croatian journey to join NATO has started and who promoted and initiated the idea of Croatia joining the Alliance.

Knowing how important it was for Croatia to join the “Partnership for peace” program, already in 1996 I actively worked on starting cooperation between Minnesota National Guard and Croatian Army which I successfully concluded. The same year I have organized visit of generals Andreotti, LeBlanc and other officers of Minnesota National Guard to Croatian Army. This visit promoted further cooperation and training programs of Croatian officers in Minnesota. Among others, it was my pleasure to host general Gotovina during his visit to Minnesota.

Our main goal is not Croatia’s dominant military position in the region, but creation of balance with Serbia and Russia, and US can help us at that, being the major military force in the world. Cooperation with Minnesota National Guard has its tactical nature including engineering projects, bridge building, communications, logistic, military medicine etc. This cooperation is considered as a first step towards strategic cooperation, meaning Croatia joining the NATO. Cooperation between Minnesota National Guard and Croatian Army was very successful, it is still ongoing and became a model for other countries candidates for NATO. Many friendships, even Croatian-American marriages were created during this time, which only contributes more to the better bonding and success of the future joint projects.

I have been working on behalf of my homeland for a decade as Honorary Consul General in Minnesota, a position bestowed upon me on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1995 by president Tudjman for my humanitarian and otherwise assistance to Croatia. In September

1995. the first Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Croatia in the United States was established in Minnesota. The office was located at Cortec's headquarters in White Bear Lake. Consulate worked to promote all aspects of Croatia, from travel and cultural activities to trade and investment opportunities.

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Prvi posjet generala Andreottija i časnika Minnesota  
National Guarda Hrvatskoj, 1996.