

Independence Day Remarks

The Residence

2 July 2015

Madam President, Ministers, Mr. Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Mayor, Dear Friends,
Thanks for coming tonight to celebrate the 239th anniversary of United States independence.

I think we misled everyone a here a little bit tonight. The invitation I sent out says to celebrate the “signing of the Declaration of Independence.” But that appears to be wrong! I learned from the internet yesterday that July 4, 1776 was not the day that the Continental Congress decided to declare independence. Nor was it -- as we said in our invitation -- the date it was signed -- that was August 2, 1776. July 4th wasn't the day we started the War of Independence either (that had happened back in April 1775). Nor was it the date on which the Declaration was delivered to Great Britain (that didn't happen until November 1776). Interestingly, the date Continental Congress decided to declare independence was in fact 239 years ago tonight, July 2, 1776. So that's what we're celebrating tonight.

So what happened on the 4th, the day we always celebrate? That was the day the Continental Congress approved the final wording of the Declaration of Independence. They'd been working on it for a couple of days after the draft was submitted on July 2nd and finally agreed on all of the edits and changes.

But enough of the history lesson.

This is our family's last official Independence Day celebration in Croatia. And the last of six in a row that Susan and I have had the honor to host, the first three being in Haiti. So what I really want to do is say thank you.

First, thank you Madam President for doing us the honor of being here tonight. I can't tell you how much your presence means to us.

Thank you of course to our sponsors for your faithful and generous support. This event would not be possible without you.

Thank you to the Croatian Military Orchestra! You've been with us for the last three years!

I'd like to thank Croatian governments – past and present -- for ensuring that Croatia is such a good ally and strategic partner of the United States. So many of our goals are shared ones, and many of the successes we have had wouldn't have been possible without your outstanding partnership, particularly in the military field.

Thank you to the Croatian people for receiving me and my family so warmly from Čilipi to Umag to Ilok and everywhere in between, and particularly in Zagreb.

Thank you to the Staff here at the Residence and all my colleagues at the Embassy for all their hard work and support. I particularly want to acknowledge our locally-hired colleagues who are truly the backbone of every diplomatic mission overseas. And a special thank you to the Marines here tonight. You always make us proud.

When one enters the diplomatic service one never quite knows where one will end up and what will happen. For us it has been an eventful six years in Haiti and Croatia. Our first year in Haiti and my first as an Ambassador, we survived a devastating earthquake, a six month evacuation when my wife and daughters had to live in a Washington hotel and Sophie the dog and I slept for six weeks in my office in the Embassy. Later that year we worked through a hurricane, a cholera outbreak, and serious election unrest. Eventually things calmed down and the work I did in Haiti brought us to Croatia.

In Croatia, we have greatly enjoyed the beauty and peacefulness we have found. You have a magnificent country, incredible islands, and a well-educated and talented workforce. We enjoyed celebrating with you your entry into the European Union two years ago. And we were especially excited to be here for the election of your first woman President. As a father of two daughters, I am hopeful that one day the United States will have a female President, too!

So finally, I'd like to take a moment if I may to say thank you to my wife Susan and our two daughters. It has been a great run, and an honor and a privilege to represent the United States of America. But at times, it has also been a very difficult task. If it weren't for the flexibility and wonderful sense of humor of these three women, who always supported me along the way, I would not be here talking to you today.

Lastly, just a few words about my three years in Croatia. Shortly after I arrived, Secretary Hillary Clinton visited Zagreb. This was before your entry into the EU, but I remember one of her key talking points: Croatia is a success story. That's true and it bears repeating from time to time. If you read the newspapers here you could easily form a different opinion. You have achieved a lot in a little over 20 years: Independence, NATO membership, EU membership, and much more. You are active and good world citizens. Yes, you have challenges, but every country does.

If I could have a wish for Croatia it would be that you keep your eyes focused firmly on the future – which I am confident will be bright. Of course you should remember your past, and work today to resolve the challenges you face. But I am convinced there are great things ahead of you as an independent Croatia that is an EU member and a NATO ally. To get to that bright future, I know you will continue to work on the economic reforms necessary to make Croatia more competitive in today's global economy. Continued steps to open up to – and actively attract – investment, while taking care of the investors that are already here, are key to getting to that bright future. We at the Embassy have worked hard to bring American firms to Croatia and we are excited that some U.S. firms will be participating in off-shore gas and oil exploration in the near future. No country can be successful without investment – that's true for the United States and it's true for Croatia. I look forward to hearing about the steps you will take to bring that investment to Croatia – where it belongs.

In the coming weeks Susan and I will be preparing our return to Washington after six years away from home. I will be going back to be a Deputy Assistant Secretary in our Americas bureau. I've spent my career split evenly between Western Europe, the Caribbean, and the Secretary of State's staff. So who knows? Perhaps I'll be working with my Croatian friends again someday? So let's not say good-bye, let's say *vidimo se*.

Thank you.

And now I have the great honor to introduce the President of the Republic of Croatia, President Grabar-Kitarovic. Madam President , the floor is yours.