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## CROATIA AND THE EUROPEAN IDEA AFTER THE BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA

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### **Abstract:**

On July 1, 2013 Croatia became part of the European Union, but that happened nine years after Slovenia. The Croatian nationalism, flourishing in the 1990s was hostile to the very idea of united Europe. In 1991-1992 when a great part of the Croatian territory was under Serbian control, the Western countries supported and recognized the new state. But this positive image quickly changed after its participation in the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina, and especially after the military operation „Storm” in 1995, when around 300,000 Serbs were forced to leave the country. As a result, European politicians did not invite Croatia in 1997 to start negotiations for accession to the EU. In late 1990s the country was in complete international isolation. Tudjman was against every initiative for regional or European cooperation. Building its own independent state Croats were very suspicious to all mega-national projects and initiatives.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Tudjman, European Union, Croatia, 1990s

On July 1, 2013 Croatia was the second former Yugoslav Republic which became part of the European Union, but that happened 9 years after Slovenia, and 22 years after the breakup of former Yugoslavia. The war for independence, that the country went through in 1991-1992, and the following war conflict in Bosnia and Hercegovina, in which it was directly involved, slowed down its democratic changes and its integration into the European Union.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, from former East European communist countries, beside Slovenia, Croatia was best prepared for transition. Of all republics that made up the

Yugoslav federation, Croatia was, like Slovenia, more integrated into European networks than other republics due to its Hapsburg legacy, geographical location, and trade orientation toward Western markets. But in contrast to Slovenia's fast integration into the European Union, which member it became in 2004 in one group with Central European countries, Croatia was lagging behind. In less than ten years, country's status shifted from first in line to join the EU to one of the last, even behind the economically less advanced states such as Romania and Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>.

For the whole decade of the 1990s, Croatian politics was characterised by an authoritarian style of governance, promoted by President Franjo Tuđman<sup>2</sup> (1990–1999) and his party, the Croatian Democratic Community (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica, or HDZ). While Slovenia experienced a relatively smooth economic and political transition thanks to the the absence of violent conflict with Serbia, and the presence of institutional reforms even before membership talks with the EU, Croatia faced Tuđman's nationalist and isolationist rule, the war both in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the spread of fear and the "dependence" of the media, and, finally, the lack of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). All these factors contributed to country's bad political and economic performance in the 1990s. Its journey towards Europe began only after 2000 when the more EU-friendly Social-Democrats came to power. Nevertheless, problems remained and further economic and institutional reforms were implemented for Croatia to join the EU only in 2013<sup>3</sup>.

The delay was due mainly to nationalism, which dominated on the Croatian political scene in the 1990s and was hostile to the very idea of united Europe. Actually, in the late 1980s, nationalism flourished in all ex-Yugoslav republics. And as a multi-party system began to emerge, a number of nationalist groups and movements appeared. Franjo Tuđman as a leader of HDZ came to power at the first multi-party elections in Croatia in 1990<sup>4</sup>. The top priority issues were relations inside the federation, i.e. the status of the individual republics and the national question.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Vojnić, European Integration Processes - Where is Croatia?, *Ekonomski pregled*, 2003, 54 (1-2), p.159, 166; S. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 1993, p.20.

<sup>2</sup> Former communist and general in Tito's army, later dissident, and historian by profession.

<sup>3</sup> M. Razsa, N. Lindstrom. Balkan Is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tuđman's Croatia, *East European Politics and Societies*, 2004, Vol.18, No.2, p.2; J. Zatezalo, *Croatia's Difficult Political Trajectory after the Disintegration of Yugoslavia*. M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2007, p.10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Tuđman founded the nationalist HDZ party in 1989, largely in response to an upsurge of nationalism in neighboring Serbia. HDZ won absolute majority in the Parliament (Sabor) in the 1990 election (84.5%). See *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1999.

The 1990 election, although not held in a sovereign Croatia, can be deemed as “founding“ of the first non-communist regime of the country after the end of the Second World War. Its programme was based on notions of nation and statehood. It’s aim was to promote an identity that would be maximally differentiated from the Yugoslav identity and other constituent nationalities that made up the former Yugoslavia, most significantly Serbian<sup>5</sup>.

In contrast to the Slovenian case, the Croatian attempt to leave the Yugoslav federation was difficult and painful. The most important for Croats was the national question and the struggle for statehood. But the serious obstacle was seen in the Serbian minority in the country, which constituted about 12 per cent of the population of the country, many of whom lived in compact settlements in areas that comprised the Habsburg military border (from the sixteenth century onwards) and others in large urban settlements<sup>6</sup>. During the Socialist period they were over-represented in police, military, judiciary, state bureaucracy, education and media and were understandably regarded by Croatian nationalists as a potential Serbian ‘fifth column’ or internal ‘threat’ to the republic<sup>7</sup>.

Tudjman’s party was preoccupied with the exclusive protection of the interests of the Croatian ethnic community as a whole, not taking into account individual and minority rights<sup>8</sup>. In December 1990, the Croatian Sabor adopted a new constitution which was designed to create an exclusively Croatian ‘ethnic state’ rather than a civil one. For this reason, Serbs started to be treated as “second class citizens” and became subjected to persistent discrimination and mistreatment. The government began firing Serbs from administration and police throughout Croatia in the name of achieving “ethnic balance” in official employment. It further antagonized the Serb minority by resurrecting symbols used by the Ustasha wartime regime, including the red and white checkerboard of the national flag. Anti-Serb rhetoric became frequently adopted by Tudjman and soon became the essence of his policy<sup>9</sup>. The regime did its best to “preserve” the purity of the

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<sup>5</sup> D. Vidović, D. Pauković. Welfare State in Transition: Political Transformations. The Case of Croatia, In: M. Stambolieva, S. Dehnert (ed.), *Welfare States in Transition. 20 Years after the Yugoslav Welfare Model*, Sofia, 2011, p.93.

<sup>6</sup> The Serbs were the SFRY’s most dispersed nationality, many of whom lived outside of their republic. See R. Bideleux. *The Balkans: a Post-communist History*. London; New York, Routledge, 2007, p.197-198.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.198.

<sup>8</sup> The principle of new nationalist states was to give priority to collective rights over individual ones and to subjugate ethnic minorities to the majority. See I. Ognyanova, Croatian Nationalism and the Breakup of Yugoslavia - *Etudes Balkaniques*, 2005, 1, p.8; R. Bideleux. *The Balkans*, p.5-6.

<sup>9</sup> *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1999.

Croatian language and culture. Everything worked toward the production of an exclusively Croatian nationhood and its state, a project that most European states “achieved” long time ago<sup>10</sup>.

On June 25, 1991 Croatia declared independence at referendum which was largely boycotted by the local Serbs. All that demanded unity against ‘the internal enemy’ (who did not want to live in the new, independent and sovereign Croatian state) and confrontation with the external one (Serbia) which was accused of “threatening the integrity of the state with a presence of its own minority inside its boundaries” and inspiring it to rebel and confront the new government. HDZ transformed into a real national movement and nationalist rhetoric became everyday event. In the ensuing war, both Tudjman and Milosević played the same game: by spreading nationalist sentiments and by instilling a strong fear of the ‘other’, both leaders accumulated and strengthened their political power<sup>11</sup>.

By the summer of 1990, the Croatian Serbs, heavily armed by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), were in a state of insurrection, determined not to live under the Croatian rule. But the new nationalistic government was soon confronted not only by the rebellion of the local Serbs, but also by aggression from Serbia, which sought to change the republican borders. JNA practically transformed into Serbian army (supported frequently by *Chetnik* groups) and its presence on Croatian territory was considered as occupation. In a very short period of time the Serbian groups conquered a significant number of Croatian towns, especially in Krajina (Borderland), Eastern Slavonia and part of Dalmatia, where they predominantly lived<sup>12</sup>.

In turn, Tudjman launched a real military initiative. The war spread, and between July and December of 1991, the well-armed Serbian military groups consolidated their control over almost one-third of Croatian territory. *Republic of Srpska Krajina* was declared<sup>13</sup>. It took four years for the Tudjman government to crush the Serb rebellion and regain control of all of Croatian territory.

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<sup>10</sup> M. Lagerspetz, Postsocialism as a Return: Notes on a Discursive Strategy, *East European Politics and Societies*, 1999, 15, p.377-390; P. Drulák (ed.), *National and European Identities in EU Enlargement: Views from Central and Eastern Europe*, Prague, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> J. Zatezalo, *Croatia's Difficult Political Trajectory*, p.24; I. Ognyanova, Croatian Nationalism, p.16-17.

<sup>12</sup> D. Jović. Croatia and the European Union: a Long Delayed Journey, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 2006, Vol. 8, 1, p.88.

<sup>13</sup> “*Republic of Srpska Krajina*” had attributes of a state but did not have military power and had a status of protected from the UN zone. See S. Ramet, *Balkan Babel. Politics, Culture, and Religion in Yugoslavia*. Boulder, Westview Press, II ed., 1996, p.124.

Around 10,000 people died, others were wounded, and many who lived in Serbian regions were forced out<sup>14</sup>.

In the moment of national euphoria Croats were optimistic that their newfound independence would accomplish two things: Croatia would be recognized as a sovereign independent state for the first time after 1945 and it would “return” to its rightful place in Europe after being held captive in the Yugoslav federation. In this initial phase of seeking recognition for the independent Croatian state (1991–1992), the official propaganda insisted that Croatia was an European country (with fourteen-century old European cultural heritage), which sought emancipation from its “Balkan burden”, and thus it should be a part of the larger European project. Croats presented themselves as more progressive, prosperous, developed, hard working, tolerant, democratic, thus *European* who were ready to leave their primitive, lazy, intolerant, authoritarian, backward, or *Balkan*, neighbors and communist past behind and to join NATO and the EU<sup>15</sup>.

The international community, which until that time was supporting the preservation of Yugoslavia as a guarantee for stability in the region, started portraying Croatia as an emerging European democracy to be defended against Slobodan Miloshević’s aggression. Germany and Austria began to campaign for the immediate international recognition of Croatia’s and Slovenia’s independence, and on January 15, 1992 the European Union (EU) countries granted it to both republics. By April 1992 the EU was followed by the whole international community. Croatia became a ‘proper’ (i.e. ‘sovereign’) state<sup>16</sup>.

But the positive image that the new country got in Europe in 1991 as a victim of Serbian aggression quickly changed after its participation in the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1992–1995. The wars that emerged in Croatia in 1991 and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 were caused by Tudjman and Milosević’s power ambitions. Both nationalist leaders aspired to form a ‘greater’ nation state of their own and in order to achieve that, they agreed to partition Bosnia and

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<sup>14</sup> *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> The propaganda stated that Croats have a “deep consciousness of their belonging to Western civilization” and a commitment to modernization in contrast to Serbia with “its links to fanatical nationalism, its support for preserving the old socialist system, and its inability to enter the information revolution.” See *Vjesnik*, June 12, 1995; J. Zatezalo, *Croatia’s Difficult Political Trajectory*, 2-3, 18-19, 29-30; M. Razsa, N. Lindstrom. *Balkan Is Beautiful*, p.8.

<sup>16</sup> *Hina News Agency*, October 7, 2005.

Herzegovina yet in March 1991<sup>17</sup>. Croatian post-communist nationalism turned into a force towards the creation of a nation-state within the “historical and natural boundaries”, so over the whole Croatian ethnic territory (including parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, since many ethnic Croats lived there). Tudjman, like Milosević, believed in a nationally homogenous state, and so his goal was to gather all Croats in a single nation-state through ‘human transfers’ and exchanges of territory<sup>18</sup>.

HDZ openly campaigned for unification of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in a single sovereign Croatian state. Of course, Croats were only 17,3% of the population of the region<sup>19</sup>, so they needed help from the Croatian state, and also that of the Muslims<sup>20</sup>. After the Serbs created the *Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, proclaiming their plan to become part of Miloshević’s Serbia, in response, having Tudjman’s support, local Croats establish their own state in Western Herzegovina - *Croat Community of Herzeg-Bosnia* in June 1992. Croatian army supported them against the Bosnian Serbs, then against the Muslims<sup>21</sup>.

During the war in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995, Tudjman was viewed in Washington and other western capitals as a strategic counterweight to Milosević and the Serbs. The Clinton administration helped to arm and train the Croatian army, and tacitly encouraged Tudjman to push ahead with a military offensive against the Serbs in the summer of 1995 that paved the way for the Dayton peace agreement (November 1995)<sup>22</sup>.

After the military operations “Flash” (in Western Slavonia) and “Storm” (in Krajina) in May and August 1995, the Croatian army finally retook most of Croatia’s occupied territory. As a result between 200 and 300,000 Croatian Serbs were forced to leave their homeland and to seek shelter in Bosnia and Serbia. These military actions reduced the Serbian population in Croatia

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<sup>17</sup> They both have long registered rivals to “annex” the Muslim community, stating that Muslims are Islamised Serbs, or Croats. See M. Hadžijahić, *Od tradicije do identiteta: Geneza nacionalnog pitanja bosanskih muslimana*. Sarajevo, 1974, p.38.

<sup>18</sup> B. Magas, Franjo Tudjman, an Obituary, *The Independent*, December 13, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> In Bosnia-Herzegovina lived 1,3 mln Serbs, 758 000 Croats and 1,6 mln Muslims. See D. Rusinow, Yugoslavia: Balkan Breakup?, *Foreign Policy*, sum.1991, n.83, p.145.

<sup>20</sup> That is why Croatian national propaganda viewed the Muslims as being Croats of the Islam faith in the same way as the Ustashas viewed them half a century ago and therefore Bosnia-Herzegovina was declared as a Croatian national territory. See D. Dyker, I. Vejvoda. *Yugoslavia and After. A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth*. Longman, 1997, p.120.

<sup>21</sup> I. Banac, Political Change and National Diversity, *Daedalus*, 1990, vol.119, 1, p.147; B. Denitch, Tragedy in Former Yugoslavia, *Dissent*, win.1993, p.31.

<sup>22</sup> *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1999; R. Bideleux. *The Balkans*, p.204, 206, 208.

from twelve to four percent and thus the country reached a rare level of national purity, parallel only to that in Slovenia. Tudjman truly believed that national homogeneity, that is, statehood without minorities, could bring political stability and offer the only genuine chance for peace<sup>23</sup>. But that did not stop the government from spreading xenophobic nationalism. It was not before 1998 that the last segments of Croatian territory claimed by the secessionist Croatian Serbs (Eastern Slavonia near the border with Serbia, and Prevlaka on the Croatian border with Montenegro) were returned to Croatian control<sup>24</sup>.

As long as Serbs occupied Croatian territory, Tudjman's HDZ was able to monopolize the whole political power in Croatia, presenting itself as the most serious defender of Croatian national and state interests. The war for Croatian sovereignty, the rebellion of a part of the local Serbs and the difficult state-building forced opposition to support the new Croatian government. This provided a context for corrupt practices among the HDZ political and administrative elite and a chance to persecute all critics of the regime. By the second half of the 1990s it was already obvious that Tudjman imposed authoritarian style of governance – it was not always possible to draw a clear line between HDZ, the state, and Tudjman's as a person. The first elected president of the independent Croatian state by the Sabor (parliament) in 1990, he was re-elected by popular ballot in 1992 (56.7%) and again in 1997 (61.4%) which gave legitimacy to his power<sup>25</sup>.

In 1996, Tudjman refused to recognise the results of local elections in Zagreb and imposed his own appointee as temporary mayor. When he tried to silence a popular urban Radio 101 (Croatia's last independent radio station), he even faced public protests in Zagreb. Many military decrees were introduced which gave exclusive power to the regime. The media practically was controlled by the state. This, led to strong censorships and violations of freedom of speech. All radio and TV programs and news agencies were "controlled" by HDZ leaders and were engaged in nationalist rhetoric and attacks on other nationalities, especially Serbs<sup>26</sup>.

Exactly the Croatia's treatment of its Serb minority led to the deterioration of relations between Zagreb and Washington. "Operation Storm" was the turning point, when the burning and looting of Serbian property by Croatian security forces pushed the first U.S. ambassador in the country Peter Galbraith (1993-1998) to join the fleeing Krajina Serbs on their tractors in a

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<sup>23</sup> R. Bideleux. *The Balkans*, p.183, 203.

<sup>24</sup> D. Jović, *Croatia and the European Union*, p.85.

<sup>25</sup> D. Vidović, D. Pauković. *Welfare State in Transition*, p.94.

symbolic gesture of solidarity. Stung by American criticism, Tudjman accused foreign powers of "trying to impose their will" on Croatia and vowed that he would not permit the West to turn his country into "a colony"<sup>27</sup>.

In response to the European criticisms of the massive expulsion of ethnic Serbs from the Krajina region in 1995, Tudjman became also hostile to Europe. In an interview with editors-in-chiefs of the Croatian media given on 22 October 1996 he said: "Some European states dare to teach us lessons on how to treat minorities. They have forgotten that a democratic France, for example, does not even recognise the existence of minorities on its soil. Or, they urge us that we must return all Serbs who fled Croatia during the war back to the country, but they forget that they could not solve problems like that between Czech Republic and Germany, etc"<sup>28</sup>.

All these were the reasons why Croatia was put significantly behind Slovenia and several other East Central European front-runners on their way to EU membership. Though Tudjman did achieve sovereignty for Croatia, he also politically isolated it from the rest of the world with his anti-western, nationalist and autocratic style of leadership in the second half of the 1990s. That resulted in country's exclusion from NATO's Partnership for Peace, and loss of access to economic and technical aid from the EU PHARE program<sup>29</sup>.

Croatia was not invited to the 1997 meeting of the presidents of eight Central European states, which sent a message that the country did not belong to that geopolitical space, although Tudjman repeatedly declared the opposite. Croatia turned out to be in deep international isolation<sup>30</sup>. While other East Central European countries - including the neighbouring Slovenia and Hungary - were now officially applying for membership in the EU, the Union decided in 1997 not to invite Croatia to start membership talks. Refugee return, full cooperation with the ICTY, and

<sup>26</sup> R. Bideleux. *The Balkans*, p.210.

<sup>27</sup> *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.predsjednik.hr/iv-2210.htm>, November 19, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> PHARE programme was created in 1989 as a western economic and financial help for the Central and Eastern Europe. See S. Knezović. Postkonfliktni okviri regionalne sigurnosti i suradnje u jugoistočnoj Europi – inicijative Europske Unije, *Politička misao*, 2006, Vol. XLIII, br. 2, p.83-84.

<sup>30</sup> In an article titled "Croatia Excluded from the Central European Milieu," Croatian Social Liberal Party candidate for president Vlado Gotovac wrote, "The absence of the Croatian chief of state from that kind of a gathering not only sends a message that Croatia does not belong to the Central European geopolitical space. It is also clear proof that Dr. Franjo Tudjman himself, as the key protagonist of Balkan, anti-European politics, does not have access to the company of eight Central European leaders. This is a clear warning that our Republic with Tudjman and his nomenclature has mired us in deep isolation, leaving us hopelessly anchored to the Balkan". See *Novi List*, 6 June 1997.

commitment to regional cooperation were very serious issues which Tudjman was not ready to deal with<sup>31</sup>.

Croatia's reputation shifted from being a promising emerging democracy, that European and U.S. leaders pledged to support and protect in the early 1990s, to a small, marginal, authoritarian country with a disturbing human rights record in the second half of the decade. It looked more similar to Serbia than to the new democracies in its neighbourhood. Many Western leaders viewed Croatia as another autocratic and expansionist Balkan regime. Croats sought, but ultimately failed, to be recognized by Western leaders as authentically European<sup>32</sup>.

The EU-Croatian relationship worsened even more after April 1997, when the EU introduced the Regional Approach policy for countries of the Western Balkans. The very concept of the 'Western Balkans' was unacceptable to Croatia, as it linked the country with its former Yugoslav neighbours and Albania, rather than with the East Central European states, which had begun accession talks with the EU. Croatia was destined to remain with Serbia in one group of applicant states<sup>33</sup>.

The European Union and the United States also initiated the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) in 1997 to promote economic exchange within the region (including all the former Yugoslavia states, Albania, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria). But at that time Croatia competed with Serbia for 'spheres of interest' in Bosnia and Herzegovina and even declared itself as having a 'historical role' of 'Europeanizing' its south-eastern neighbours. The country saw itself as a self-sufficient 'regional power' in military, political and economic terms. The regional cooperation, including with its neighbours - Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with which Croatia was engaged in recent war conflicts, was still unthinkable in the 1990s<sup>34</sup>.

The Regional Approach, as well as the concept of the 'Western Balkans' were seen by Tudjman as evidence of Europe's hostility towards Croatia and rejected as an attempt by the West

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<sup>31</sup> These were the conditions for Croatia to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, which the country finally did in October 2001. Вж. R. Bideleux. *The Balkans*, p.212.

<sup>32</sup> During a 1997 conference in Zagreb, the U.S. *charge d'affaires* of the U.S. embassy in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated: "In the Balkans . . . and when I say Balkans I mean here in Croatia." Clearly aware of Croatian pretensions to join the EU, the U.S. official let the assembled Croatian elites know that their inclusion in the "prestigious club" was currently unfeasible. See. M. Razsa, N. Lindstrom. *Balkan Is Beautiful*, p.7; D. Jović, Croatia and the European Union, p.93.

<sup>33</sup> D. Jović, Croatia and the European Union, p.88-89.

to re-establish Yugoslavia. In 1997 all the media and propaganda were talking of the “immanent danger” of a world conspiracy to force the country “back to the Balkans” from where it had just escaped<sup>35</sup>. Europe forgot, Tudjman argued, that in historical terms the ‘Balkan episode’ (between 1918 and 1990) was just a short one, when compared to Croatia’s long-centuries belonging to the West (i.e. Austro-Hungarian/Central European cultural and political space). Croats were sure that by its geopolitical position, by all of its history, religion and culture, their country belongs to Central Europe and the Mediterranean<sup>36</sup>. Tudjman pursued an aggressive lobbying campaign at home and abroad to promote Croatia’s Europeaness and to resist being identified as Balkan by European leaders. “Tudjman, not the Balkans” was the slogan on which he based his successful 1997 presidential campaign<sup>37</sup>. Actually Balkan/European differentiation masks Croatian ethnic preoccupation with the Serbs. Among many Croats, the last were seen as a symbol of a Balkan people. But although Croatia defined itself as more European vis-à-vis Serbia, its destiny was to remain with Serbia in the European Union’s “Western Balkans” group of applicant states for the foreseeable future<sup>38</sup>.

In response to what he saw as a threat to Croatian sovereignty, the Croatian President pushed the Parliament to pass a declaration on March 8, 1999, objecting to the EU’s “regional approach” and rejecting “all attempts for Croatia to be included in some sort of regional integration of South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans”. He initiated an amendment to the Croatian Constitution, which now included the new article (141), stating: “It is prohibited to initiate any process of association of the Republic of Croatia with other states, if such an association would or

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<sup>34</sup> S. Knezović. Postkonfliktni okviri regionalne sigurnosti, p.4, 95.

<sup>35</sup> In his official addresses to the Sabor in January 1997, and again in January 1999, Tudjman declared: “It should be noted that certain, influential European and American circles insist on a program of regional Balkan integration. That would actually mean the revival of the former Yugoslavia without Slovenia and with Albania, and that goal should be opposed at all costs and by using all available means.” See [www.urpr.hr](http://www.urpr.hr), Address of the President of the Republic of Croatia Dr. Franjo Tudjman at the Joint Session of Both Chambers of the Croatian National Parliament, 20 January 1997 and 21 January 1999.

<sup>36</sup> “The world would like to push us into some kind of Balkan hole but we will not allow them. We want to be everything - Central European, Mediterranean, Transcarpathian - and not just a Balkan country. The West is constantly inventing some kind of initiative to push us where we do not belong”. See *Novi List*, October 6, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> M. Razsa, N. Lindstrom. *Balkan Is Beautiful*, p.12, 17.

<sup>38</sup> M. Razsa, N. Lindstrom. *Balkan Is Beautiful*, p.21; G. Uzelac, Franjo Tudjman’s Nationalist Ideology, *East European Quarterly*, 1997, vol.31, 4, p. 449–472.

could lead to restoration of Yugoslav state community or any new Balkan state union in any form”<sup>39</sup>.

In the years when other East and Central European countries were negotiating conditions for accession to the EU, Tudjman accused Europe of not helping Croatia in the post-Yugoslav wars, and for never being really supportive of its independence<sup>40</sup>. The EU - Tudjman argued - often treated Croatia as a ‘small nation’, an unimportant factor in international politics, which could be commanded by the great powers. That is why the HDZ leader was seen by many nationalists not only as a protector of Croatia from the Serbian threat; but also from the “Great Powers” that “threaten” the national interests of the country. Tudjman’s rhetoric against Europe now became increasingly similar to the one he used against the former Yugoslavia. In the official dictionary of Croatian politics of the second half of the 1990s, ‘Europe’ replaced ‘Yugoslavia’, while ‘Brussels’ replaced ‘Belgrade’, the one that cannot come to terms with the existence and sovereignty of the Croatian state. Europe turned out to be a new ‘artificial creation’, unworkable project of multi-national ‘federation’. Croats believed that the conflicts in this new Europe are to be more or less the same as those in former Yugoslavia (nation-states vs. loose union of sovereign states). In addition to this, Tudjman argued, Europe is based on an illusion that a new European culture will emerge and that it will successfully replace the existing national identities. According to Croatian nationalists this would not happen, because the historical, cultural and ideological differences were substantial. The bloody collapse of Yugoslavia should teach EU a lesson - that these differences should not be neglected. They will ultimately, Tudjman believed, make any new federal Europe as unlikely as it was the case with a federal Yugoslavia<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Croatian Foreign Press Bureau’s *Daily Bulletin* 36/99, 8 March 1999; D. Jović, Croatia and the European Union, p.85-86.

<sup>40</sup> “Yugoslavia”, Tudjman argued, “was the ‘darling of the West’, and ‘a promising project’ in the eyes of many in Europe. Europe wanted to save it for too long - and thus it imposed sanctions against all Yugoslav republics, including Croatia when it was attacked, hoping that the Yugoslav Army would have crushed it. When all diplomatic efforts to keep up Yugoslavia failed, the very same circles considered that independent Croatia could not survive, because of the organized revolt of the Serb population in Croatia and the immense military supremacy of the Yugocommunist army. All the European powers, and America not only passively watched how Serbian forces destroyed Vukovar and other Croatian cities in the autumn of 1991, but even enacted the arms embargo in the Security Council. This meant nothing else but leaving barehanded, helpless Croatia at the mercy of the superiority of the Yugoslav Army, then considered to be one of the strongest military powers in Europe”. See <http://www.predsjednik.hr/speechdz.htm>, 9 December 1996; D. Jović, Croatia and the European Union, p.89.

<sup>41</sup> For details on Tudjman’s predictions of the future failure of Europe, see his book: *Nacionalno pitanje u suvremenoj Europi* Zagreb, 1989 (reprinted 1996).

By the mid-1990s the form of nationalism developed by Tudjman in Croatia became hostile to the EU and the European idea. Unlike Slovenia, which moved quickly from its isolationist type of nationalism of the early 1990s to a much more open liberal Europeanism, Croatia, building its own independent national state in conflict with Serbia was very suspicious to all mega-national organizations and projects. Tudjman did not want his country to integrate with any global and regional military and political structures, so it had very far-away perspectives for accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures<sup>42</sup>.

This rhetoric of self-sufficiency, reminded many of Josip Broz Tito and his years of balancing ‘on his own’, between East and West in the cold war years<sup>43</sup>. Tudjman’s Titoist background (in the years before 1967) only helped him to style himself as a ‘new Tito’<sup>44</sup> - the one who can secure the stability and well-being of his country by playing the great powers against each other. His message to the outer world in one of his last interviews, on July 1, 1999, sounded very Titoist indeed: “We do not want to join any type of Balkan integration process and we refuse to be anyone’s puppets!”<sup>45</sup>.

However, while Tito’s Yugoslavia was a strong international factor and a key country of the Balkans for more than 40 years, Tudjman’s Croatia was in a very different position. While Tito created international institutions (such as the non-aligned association of states in 1961), Tudjman was deeply distrustful of any kind of alliances. While Tito favoured multi-ethnic federation, Tudjman was a believer in the Croatian nation-state, dominated by ethnic Croats, with little place for minorities. So, it was not surprising that by the end of his rule Tudjman presided over an increasingly isolated country, which was more often compared to Serbia than with its Central European neighbours. Paradoxically, it was in fact nationalism that ultimately distanced Croatia from Europe, and threatened to take it back to the ‘Balkans’, and not - as initially promised - to the EU<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> M. Razsa, N. Lindstrom. *Balkan Is Beautiful*, p.13.

<sup>43</sup> For Tudjman’s positive assessment of Tito’s historical role and achievements, see I. Rados, *Tudjman izbliza*, Zagreb, 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Slobodan Milosević had the same perception of himself back in 1986–1989. See S. Đukic’, *Milosević and Marković: A Lust for Power*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal and London, 2001; L. Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milosević*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in W. Bartlett, *Croatia: Between Europe and the Balkans*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 63.

<sup>46</sup> D. Jović, *Croatia and the European Union*, p.92.

Furthermore, Tudjman viewed himself as the winner of the post-Yugoslav wars, and felt secure enough to reject what he saw were the “unfair” EU requirements and demands, such as regional cooperation, right of the expelled minorities to return to their homeland, etc. In general, anti-European rhetoric was not unpopular in Croatia, as was evident from electoral successes of Tudjman’s HDZ at all parliamentary elections in the 1990s. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, Croatia was a new state, which for the first four years of its existence suffered severe internal and inter-state military conflicts on its own territory. A belief that Europe had failed to prevent or stop the wars was widespread - not only in Croatia but elsewhere too<sup>47</sup>. Tudjman’s rhetoric against the ‘arrogant Europe’, in defence of a small, newly independent Croatian state, became rather popular with Croatian nationalists and many others. Secondly, the war further radicalised those who participated in it – both Croats and Serbs. Nationalism emerged quickly and grew more extreme with each day of the conflict<sup>48</sup>.

In the second half of the 1990s Tudjman’s policy led to a complete isolation from the EU. Even more significantly - it brought an increasing outside intrusion in the domestic affairs of the new Croatian state. For example, the Council of Europe imposed 22 conditions for Croatian membership before finally admitting the country on November 6, 1996 (almost five years after the international recognition). From the point of view of official Croatian propaganda even more painful was the ambition of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to claim jurisdiction over the Croatian military elite, responsible for the operations ‘Flash’ and ‘Storm’ in Slavonia and Krajina. In domestic politics, it was seen as a challenge to Croatian sovereignty. The government refused to cooperate with the Tribunal, imposing a ban on the extradition of Croatian nationals to courts outside the country<sup>49</sup>.

Tudjman built a disturbing human rights record, tragically intervened in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and refused to cooperate with the international community. The human and material losses, as well as a variety of social and economic problems that followed, only aggravated the complex process of transition after the war. The long „war decade” of Tudjman delayed

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<sup>47</sup> Europe’s hesitant interventions cast a shadow of deep doubt over its ability and/or willingness to act.

<sup>48</sup> V. P. Gagnon Jr., *The Myth of Ethnic War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2004; D. Jović, *Jugoslavija—država koja je odumrla*, Prometej and Samizdat B92, Zagreb and Belgrade, 2003; P. Kolsto, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, Hurst, London, 2005.

democratization and economic liberalization and disposed the country in line for integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Post-Tudjman's Croatia was a state with serious economic problems, bad reputation for respecting the human and minority rights, undeveloped democratic institutions and corruption<sup>50</sup>. This was a heavy legacy for the Croatian society, which it partially managed to overcome only in the first decade of the 21st century.

Croatia ended the decade of the 1990s with no formal agreement with the EU. It was only after the death of Franjo Tudjman (in December 1999) and once his party lost parliamentary and presidential elections in early 2000, that Croatian society made an ideological and political turn-about with regard to the idea of Europe<sup>51</sup>. The anti-Tudjmanist coalition that came to power in January 2000, had a very different vision of Europe. That led to a radical change of foreign policy orientation, as well as the marginalisation of 'Tudjmanists' on the Croatian political scene. The new discourse was pro-European, and much more realistic. It was no longer hostile to Southeast Europe, and the regional cooperation, (including with Serbia) became one of the priorities in the foreign policy of the new government<sup>52</sup>. Croatia's journey to the EU was delayed and slowed down by many factors, but thanks to the efforts of the whole Croatian society, it finally finalized the accession procedure on July 1, 2013 when the country became an EU member.

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<sup>49</sup> That became the core elements of the state-built myth of the "Homeland War". According to it the Croats could not have committed war crimes because they had only waged a defensive war. See *Novi List*, June 28, 2002; D. Jović, *Croatia and the European Union*, p.93; S. Knezović. *Postkonfliktni okviri regionalne sigurnosti*, p.95.

<sup>50</sup> In late January 1999 an OSCE report on Croatia highlighted the restrictive government control of the media (including 90 per cent of television), 'distrust and hostility' towards the ICTY, weak rule of law, lack of respect for human rights and mistreatment of minorities, especially ethnic Serbs. See R. Bideleux. *The Balkans*, p.212; J. Zatezalo, *Croatia's Difficult Political Trajectory*, p.17.

<sup>51</sup> The first US ambassador Peter Galbraith summarised about Tudjman: "He had two dreams, one for an independent Croatia with all of its territory; the second for the new Croatia to be accepted as part of Europe. He achieved the first dream. His death may pave the way for achievement of the second goal." See *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1999.

<sup>52</sup> R. Bideleux. *The Balkans*, p.213; D. Jović, *Croatia and the European Union*, p.94