Croatia and the European Union: a long delayed journey

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ABSTRACT

The accession talks with the European Union, which Croatia begun in October 2005, have been described as an opportunity for a complete transformation of Croatian society. As of 2000, membership of the EU has been described as being of strategic importance, to be compared only with the 1992 international recognition of Croatia. Membership of the EU is seen as the end of 'second transition' (from nationalism and isolation of the 1990s to a modern, European state) and as an opportunity to increase a level of *de facto* sovereignty of the new state over its domestic affairs. Accordingly, in the last five years, the official narrative has been radically changed, whereas Tudjmanists have been marginalised. In addition, Croatian domestic politics has changed to become co-operative with ethnic minorities. The article analyses this transformation by placing it in the context of the EU-Croatian relations.

Introduction

When on 4 October 2005, the European Union's Council of Ministers agreed to begin accession talks with Croatia, the Croatian media compared this decision with international recognition of Croatia, which the European Union countries granted on 15 January 1992. Both decisions were controversial, and caused serious divisions within the European Union. In 1992, it was Germany's initiative that persuaded the then 12-member EU to recognise Croatia and Slovenia. Thirteen years later, Austria played a similar role when it conditioned its agreement to beginning of negotiations with Turkey with the same status for Croatia.

The Croatian journey to the European Union has been long delayed, due primarily to reasons that were of Croatia's own making. For the whole decade of the 1990s, Croatian politics was characterised by an authoritarian style of governance, promoted by President Franjo Tudjman (1990 – 1999) and his party, the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ). The post-Yugoslav wars of 1991 – 1995 directly affected Croatia, which faced internal conflict with the breakaway region of Krajina (where ethnic

Serbs made up the majority of the population) and external attacks by Serbian and Montenegrin forces. In 1993-94, Croatia intervened unofficially, but no less forcefully, in the conflict between Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and was a long time supporter of the secessionist ambitions of the Croat Republic of Herceg-Bosna. The Dayton peace accord – of which the Croatian president Tudjman was a co-signatory – stopped the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, 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.

While other East Central European states begun their accession to the European Union in the mid-1990s, Croatia was thus still resolving problems inherited from the violent collapse of the Yugoslav federation. In addition to this, however, the form of nationalism developed by Franjo Tudjman in the aftermath of the Dayton peace accord became hostile to the European Union and the idea of Europe. Unlike Slovenia, which moved quickly from its own isolationist type of nationalism of the early 1990s to a much more open liberal Europeanism, Croatia entrapped itself into an ideology that was rather suspicious of all supra-national organisations. Furthermore, Tudjman viewed himself as the winner of the post-Yugoslav wars, and felt secure enough to reject what he saw were the unfair demands that the European Union defined through the Regional Approach policy (as of April 1997). Tudjman criticised Europe for not helping Croatia when it was attacked in the post-Yugoslav wars, and for allegedly never being really supportive of Croatian independence. The Regional Approach, as well as the concept of the 'Western Balkans', were rejected in their entirety, as they were seen as an attempt to re-establish a neo-Yugoslavia. In response to the Regional Approach policies, Croatia under Tudjman amended its Constitution by adding an article that specifically prohibits membership of any association of states that could lead to a renewal of Yugoslavia, or a similar Balkan association of states.

The European Union responded to this by freezing its relationship with Croatia. Croatia ended the decade of the 1990s in unofficial isolation, and with no formal agreements with the European Union. 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 policy saw an ideological and political about-turn with

regard to the idea of Europe. The Croatian journey to the European Union really only began in any meaningful sense in 2000. In the last five years, three governments (two led by Social-Democrat Ivica Račan, in 2000 – 2003, and the current government, which has since December 2003 been led by the leader of the reformed HDZ, Ivo Sanader) have made accession to the European Union their main strategic foreign policy objective. A radical change of foreign policy orientation, as well as the marginalisation of 'Tudjmanists' on the Croatian political scene, has resulted in the emergence of a political consensus between the major parties of both the government and the opposition. Mainstream Croatian politics is now largely defined by this consensus.

This article focuses on this radical change of policy – between Tudjmanist scepticism and hostility towards the concept of Europe, and post-Tudjmanist pro-European narratives. I argue that the prospect of joining the European Union has already radically changed the character of Croatian politics in three major aspects. Firstly, it led to the defeat of isolationist nationalism, which characterised Croatian politics in the second half of the 1990s. Croatia no longer sees itself as a self-sufficient 'regional power' but as an integral part of a larger European project to which it wants to contribute. Secondly, the informal 'grand coalition for Europe' (in which now all major political parties participate) has successfully bridged the gaps between various ideological and ethnic segments of the Croatian population. For the first time since independence, Croatia is governed by a coalition which includes representatives of ethnic minorities, including the ethnic Serbs. At the same time, an unofficial 'coalition for Europe' closed the gap between former ideological adversaries – the reformed communists (SDP) and reformed nationalists (HDZ). Thirdly, the prospect of joining the European Union has fundamentally changed Croatian foreign policy orientation, which is now open to regional co-operation, including with countries such as Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. All of this was unthinkable in the 1990s, when Croatia was engaged in wars with its neighbours and even with its own Serb minority.

These changes in policy orientations were also reflected in personnel changes in the HDZ, in which the Tudjmanist forces have been successfully marginalised, while some of the most prominent politicians of the 1990s have left the party in protest.

Accession to the European Union is the main reason for these radical changes. Isolation from Europe is no longer seen as a viable option but as a road to decay. As explained by Hidajet Biščević, Croatian Deputy Foreign Minister:

'More than ten years have passed since we successfully ended the war. We must be aware that no society can develop if it freezes itself in a certain point in time, regardless of how important this point is for the history of that society. The world around us is changing fast. If we lag behind, we will find ourselves in isolation, and we will decay'.[1]

Even more explicit was Vladimir Drobnjak, the Croatian Chief Negotiator with the EU. Speaking to the Croatian business elite on 17 October 2005, Drobnjak said:

'The point of negotiating with the European Union can be described as – the complete and full transformation of Croatian society. The EU accession means an increased standard of living, a stronger economy, and more opportunities for investment and new jobs being created day by day. By becoming a member of the Union, Croatia will enter the system of collective peace and security, and will participate in the process of decision-making.'[2]

These four objectives (to make society more transparent and open; to strengthen the national economy and improve the standard of living; to enhance the level of security; and to increase political influence in European and in global affairs) have specific importance within the context of the recent history of conflicts in Croatia and its immediate neighbourhood.

In the specific Croatian context, membership of the European Union is seen as the ultimate recognition that Croatia no longer represents an exception, but is a normal European state, equal in status and character to others. This is why membership of the European Union is now seen as a 'second recognition', and is compared to official

[1] 'Put u EU je put ka napretku Hrvatske', interview with Hidajet Biščević, Vjesnik, 15 October 2005.
[2] 'Drobnjak: pristupanje EU je hrvatski strateški cilj', Croatian Radio Television News, 17 October 2005. Accessible on 19 October 2005, at: http://vijesti.hrt.hr/ShowArticles.aspx?ArticleId=1357 .

recognition of independence in January 1992.[3] While the first recognition was a formal acceptance of the fact that the Croatian state exists in terms of international law and international relations, this second recognition is seen as a confirmation of its democratic credentials. The Croatian political elite now accepts that in the context of liberal democratic Europe, only states with recognised democratic credentials are to be accepted as equal and trusted.

Membership of the European Union is not only a matter of economic prospects and a guarantee of the enhanced level of security – it is the end of the transition period in which Croatia has been observed, advised and supervised – including through formal instruments and mechanisms, such as UN peace-keeping, OSCE election-observation, and the ICTY fact-discovering missions.[4] Through membership of the European Union, Croatia hopes it will finally gain trust – at least to the degree other EU states are now trusted – after a long decade and a half in which it has often been treated with some suspicion. Its membership of the European Union will thus end the initial phase of, often largely, only nominal sovereignty. Thus, through membership of the EU Croatia aims to become a 'proper' (i.e. 'sovereign') state.[5] The enthusiasm of Croatian political elites for Europe – and the transformation of former nationalists to pro-Europeanists – is based on the expectation that membership in the Union will significantly enhance the level of actual sovereignty.

This article will first describe the main elements of the Tudjmanist narrative on Europe in the second half of the 1990s. It will then focus on the new, post-Tudjmanist narrative and the dynamics of political change that followed parliamentary and presidential elections in 2000. The post-Tudjmanist period has had two distinctive

[3] This was explicitly stated by Hidajet Biščević, in his interview in Vjesnik, ibid. See also a statement by Vladimir Šeks, the President of Croatian Parliament as quoted by Hina News Agency, 7 October 2005.

[4] Since 1991, the following UN missions were hosted by Croatia: UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), UN Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO), UN Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES), UN Police Support Group (UNPSG) and UN Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP). At the beginning of the war in 1991, the EU sent its European Community Monitor Mission (ECMM). The ICTY missions have been frequent since 1995. For the role of these missions, as well as for Croatian policy towards them, see Mario Nobilo: 'Hrvatski Feniks', Globus, Zagreb, 2000.

[5] For similar link between 'restitution of state independence, democracy and freedom' and 'full involvement in the European political and economic system, as well as the system of security and legislation', see the Višegrad Declaration of 15 February 1991, signed by the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Poland and Hungary. Accessible online on 1 November 2005, at www.visegradgroup.org.

phases: in the first the original enthusiasm of Ivica Račan's government faced obstacles as early as in 2001, when two Croatian Army generals (Ante Gotovina and Janko Bobetko) were indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The opposition to these indictments provided the focal point for Tudjmanist forces to gather in order to stop the process of abandoning of Tudjmanist policies. In the second phase (following the 2003 elections), the Tudjmanist forces were undermined from within by the reformist strategies of the new HDZ leader, Ivo Sanader. This was a very significant step, as it deprived the Tudjmanists of their 'natural home', leaving them without influence in the strongest political party in the country. The European Union responded in kind, recognising Croatia's candidate status in June 2004, and opening accession talks in October 2005.

Tudjman's views on Europe in the second half of the 1990s

The powerful incentive of transforming what was largely nominal sovereignty into a more substantive sovereignty remains an important reason why many former supporters of Croatian independence now support membership of the European Union. Although Tudjman secured independence in nominal terms, and achieved the territorial integrity of the new Croatian state, his nationalism in the second half of the 1990s led Croatia into isolation in which the important elements of sovereignty had been *de facto* lost. In domestic politics, Croatian sovereignty was challenged by the existence of the ICTY, which indicted several members of Tudjman's military elite, and even confirmed that it investigated Tudjman in the last years of his life.[6] The obligation to co-operate with the ICTY forced Croatia to make an exception with regard to the constitutional ban on the extradition of Croatian nationals to any courts outside the country.[7] This Croatian foreign policy position was weak, and in the second half of the 1990s the country was under undeclared (silent) sanctions. The EU-Croatian relationship worsened 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

[6] For this see Novi List, 28 June 2002, accessible online on 23 October 2005 at www.novilist.hr

former Yugoslav neighbours and Albania, rather than with East Central European states, which had begun accession talks with the EU. Tudjman's radical nationalism led Croatia from Yugoslavia, but it now threatened to take it back to the 'Western Balkans', and not – as initially promised – to the European Union. Tudjman angrily responded to the concept of Western Balkans, seeing it as evidence of Europe's hostility towards Croatia. Even those once close to him now began to question the future of Croatian independence if it was to remain forever linked with the politics of the Balkans. In response to what he saw as a threat to Croatian sovereignty, the Croatian President initiated an amendment to 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 could lead to restoration of Yugoslav state community or any new Balkan state union in any form."

In the initial phase of seeking recognition for the independent Croatian state (in 1991-1992), the official Croatian narrative insisted that Croatia was a European country, and thus a part of the larger European project. However, by the mid-1990s Tudjman had turned hostile towards Europe and criticised its failure to assist Croatia on its road from 'the Balkans' to 'Europe'. In the years when other East and Central European countries were negotiating conditions for accession to European Union, Tudjman accused Europe of not being supportive of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and of being vindictive towards Croatia, in effect punishing it for the role it played in destruction of Yugoslavia. 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 far 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. In one of his most controversial speeches, on 6 December 1996, Tudjman said:

'All international factors – from London, Paris and Rome to Bonn and Washington, and, of course, Moscow – favoured, cost what it may, the maintenance of the former

[7] This was done through a separate Constitutional Law on Co-operation with the ICTY, which was

Yugoslavia as the cornerstone of the *Versailles order* in this part of Europe. When all the political-diplomatic efforts to keep up Yugoslavia failed, the very same circles considered that independent Croatia could not survive, jeopardized as it was by the organized revolt of the Serb population in Croatia and the immense military supremacy of the Yugocommunist army. All the European powers, together with the entire European Community and America and the United Nations, not only impassively watched the Yugocommunist and Serbian forces barbarically destroy 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.'[8]

According to Tudjman's interpretation, Croatia politically defeated Europe by surviving the war as an independent state. Croatia therefore represents a 'an untidy area in the European conscience', one that Europe is reluctant to face. In Tudjman's words, this was the essence of Croatia's problems with Europe, and of Europe's with Croatia. In addition, Croatia was the main reason for the failure of European policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995. It was only because of the close links and co-operation between Croatia and the United States that the American concept (as formulated by the Dayton Peace Accord) prevailed – a fact that Europeans would never forget.[9] In Tudjman's interpretation, the proposal for regional co-operation within the 'Western Balkans' (the concept which Croatian officials always used in inverted commas, or with words 'so called' in front) was Europe's angry response to this alliance between the US and Croatia. The purpose of it was – to take Croatia (and other former Yugoslav states, with the possible exception of Slovenia) back to the Balkan framework from which it had just escaped. Europe forgets, Tudjman argued, that in historical terms the 'Balkan episode' was just a very short one, when compared to Croatia's belonging to the West (i.e. Austro-Hungarian/Central European cultural and

enacted on 19 April 1996.

[8] See: 'Topical issues related to the development of Croatia in given international circumstances'. Available on 9 December 1996 at the Official Website of the President of the Republic of Croatia at: http://www.predsjednik.hr/speechdz.htm.

[9] This point was made in several speeches and press conferences in 1996 and 1997. See, for example, Tudjman's interview with the editors-in-chief of Croatian media on 22 October 1996. www.predsjednik.hr/iv-2210.html (available on 19 November 1996).

political structure) for centuries.[10] With the end of any chance for Yugoslavia to be re-established, Croatia ended its 'Balkan episode' – but is now not allowed to join Europe. This is not only unfair – but, Tudjman argued, hypocritical. In response to European criticisms of the massive expulsion of ethnic Serbs from the region of Krajina in 1995, Tudjman became hostile to Europe and to some of its leading nations:

'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 Croatia, but they forget that they could not solve problems like that between Czech Republic and Germany, etc.'[11]

By being unfair, acting from a position of might, not principles, the EU – Tudjman argued - often treated Croatia as a 'small nation', an unimportant factor in international politics, which could be commanded at the will of the great powers. Tudjman's rhetoric against Europe now became increasingly similar to the one he used to use against the former Yugoslavia, i.e. 'Belgrade'. In the official dictionary of Croatian politics of the second half of the 1990s, 'Europe' replaced 'Yugoslavia', while 'Brussels' replaced 'Belgrade' as the Unprincipled Other, the one that cannot come to terms with the existence and sovereignty of the Croatian state. Europe was now a new 'artificial creation', a project based on the unrealistic idealism of its visionaries, on unworkable principles of multi-national 'federations' – and not on the ethnic unity of its population and shared memories. The areas of conflict in this new Europe are to be more-or-less the same as those in the former Yugoslavia: consensus vs. 'majoritarisation', nation-state vs. loose union of sovereign states, confederalism vs. federalism, right to opt out vs. compulsory subordination to a distant centre of power. In addition to this, Tudjman argued, Europe is based on an illusion that a new

[10] Detailed analysis of Tudjman's political discourses is offered in: Gordana Uzelac (1997): 'Franjo Tudjman's nationalist ideology', *East European quarterly*, Vol 31, No 4, pp. 449-72. See also: Alex Bellamy (2003): 'The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A centuries-old dream?', Manchester: Manchester University Press.

[11] 'Interview Predsjednika Republike dr Franje Tudjmana glavnim i odgovornim urednicima hrvatskih javnih glasila, 22 listopada 1996 u Predsjedničkim dvorima' (an Interview to editors-in-chiefs of the Croatian media), available at the Official Site of the President of the Republic of Croatia, on 19 November 1996. Http://www.predsjednik.hr/iv-2210.htm.

European culture will emerge and that it will successfully replace the existing small identities. This will not happen – the historical, religious and recent ideological differences were here to stay. The bloody collapse of Yugoslavia (which was united by a much more coherent ideology and more ethno-historical similarities than the new Europe) should teach us a lesson – that these differences should not be neglected. They will ultimately, Tudjmanists believed, make any new federal Europe as unlikely as it was the case with a federal Yugoslavia.[12]

In general, such 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 indeed failed to prevent or stop the conflict was widespread – not only in Croatia but elsewhere too. Europe's hesitant interventions cast a shadow of deep doubt over its ability and/or willingness to act. Secondly, the war further radicalised those who participated in it – Croats and Serbs alike. Nationalism – being originally less than strong in the last years of Yugoslavia[13] – emerged quickly and grew more extreme with each day of the conflict. 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. This narrative offered a new Other, when in the immediate aftermath of the 1995 victories of the Croatian Army against the breakaway Krajina region the old Other (Yugoslavia, Serbs, Belgrade) ceased to be seen as serious threat. Finally, Croatian nationalism needed constitutive myths – and the 'Homeland War' (as Tudjman called the conflicts of the first half of the 1990s) was now to be transformed into one of them. Tudjman's interpretation of Croatia fighting the mighty neighbours and defying Europe at the same time made grounds for a new *myth of martyrium*.[14] Croatia survived the war, despite being left 'barehanded, helpless at the mercy of the

[12] For details on Tudjman's predictions of the future failure of Europe, see his book: 'Nacionalno pitanje u suvremenoj Europi' (National Question in Contemporary Europe) (1989, reprinted 1996), Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske.

[13] In this I agree with recent analysis by V.P. Gagnon Jr., offered in his (2004) book: 'The Myth of Ethnic War', Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. See also my own (2003) analysis in: 'Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla' (Yugoslavia – a State that Withered Away), published in Zagreb and Belgrade by Prometej and Samizdat B92 respectively.

[14] See Pal Kolsto's classification of constitutive myths, in the introductory chapter in his edited volume 'Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe', London: Hurst and Company, 2005, pp 1-34.

superiority of the Yugoslav Army, then considered to be one of the strongest military powers in Europe', he said on 6 November 1996 – it has survived because it has 'mustered amazing stamina and maturity with which it has alone, by virtue of its own strength and only with God's help – won its place in the international order' – it will therefore be able to survive on its own in future too. [15]

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.[16] Tudjman's Titoist background (in years before 1967) only helped him to style himself as a 'new Tito'[17], the one who can secure the stability and well-being of his country by playing the great powers against each other. The balance he attempted to create between US, EU and Russia's influence in the Balkans (and even in Croatia) reminded many of Titoist foreign policy of 'No' to Soviets and 'No' to Americans.[18] His message to the outer world in one of his last interviews, on 1 July 1999, indeed sounded very Titoist, at least in its second half:

'We do not want to join any type of Balkan integration process and we refuse to be anyone's puppets!'[19]

However, while Tito's Yugoslavia indeed was a strong international factor and the 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 new institutions and ideas. While Tito favoured multi-ethnic federation of semi-autonomous nation-states, Tudjman was a believer in the Croatian nation-state, which would be dominated by ethnic Croats, with little place for minorities. When all this is

[15] See Tudjman's speech of 6 November 1996: 'Topical issues related to the development of Croatia in given international circumstances'. Available on 9 December 1996 at the Official Website of the President of the Republic of Croatia at: http://www.predsjednik.hr/speechdz.htm.
[16] For Tudjman's very positive assessment of Tito's historical role and achievements, see Ivica Radoš (2005): 'Tudjman izbliza', Zagreb: Profil.
[17] Slobodan Milošević had the same perception of himself back in 1986-1989. See Slavoljub Đukić (2001): 'Milošević and Marković: A Lust for Power', Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press', and Lenard Cohen (2001): 'Serpent in the Bosom: the rise and fall of Slobodan Milošević', Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
[18] For Tudjman's attempts to make alliances with Russia and China during the second half of the 1990s, see Mario Nobilo (ibid),

added to his lack of understanding of cultural and political diversities in modern societies, it was not surprising that by the end of his period 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 Tudjmanist policy that ultimately distanced Croatia from Europe and placed it firmly back in the 'Balkans', in a political sense.

Post-Tudjmanist discourses

Tudjmanist discourse dictated Croatia's domestic and foreign policy throughout the 1990s. In the second half of the decade it led to isolation from others, especially from the European Union. Even more significantly – at least for Tudjman's own supporters – this isolation led to increasing outside intrusion in the domestic affairs of the new Croatian state. For example, the Council of Europe imposed no less than 22 conditions for Croatian membership before finally admitting Croatia to its membership on 6 November 1996 (almost five years after the international recognition). From the point of view of official Croatia even more painful was the ambition of the ICTY (which was formed in 1995) to claim jurisdiction over the Croatian military – related to police actions 'Flash' and 'Storm' in Krajina. Tudjman refused to co-operate with the Tribunal over these actions, which were now becoming the core elements of the state-built myth of the 'Homeland War'. By 1999, the ICTY lost patience, and officially requested that the UN Security Council impose sanctions on Croatia for non-compliance with the Tribunal.[20] It was only when Croatia extradited the first of the accused (Mladen Naletilić Tuta) that the threat of sanctions was removed – but the anymosity between Tudjman and the ICTY was far from over.

At the same time, the discontent with Tudjman's increasingly autocratic style of governance was growing in Croatia too – especially in urban centres, including the capital Zagreb. In 1996, President Tudjman refused to recognise the results of local elections in Zagreb and imposed his own appointee as temporary mayor. When he

[19] Interview with *Croatia Weekly*, as quoted in William Bartlett (2002): 'Croatia: Between Europe and the Balkans', London: Routledge, p.63.
[20] Bartlett, ibid., p 80.

tried to silence a popular urban Radio 101, he faced massive public protests in Zagreb – not unlike those in Belgrade against Slobodan Milošević throughout the decade. While other East Central European countries – including the neighbouring Slovenia and Hungary – were now officially applying for membership in the European Union, Croatia looked more similar to Serbia than to the new democracies in its neighbourghood. Tudjman personally was still popular, but this was largely due to respect for his role during the first half of the 1990s, in which he led the country towards independence and stood at its helm during the war. By 1997 it was already obvious that he suffered from terminal illness – which in fact only further discouraged the opposition forces from attacking his policies. Rather than taking risks by openly challenging his policy, they decided to prepare for the post-Tudjmanist era.

On 3 January 2000, only three weeks after Tudjman's death, his party lost parliamentary elections to a coalition of anti-Tudjmanist forces, which consisted of six parties and was led by the Social-Democrats (SDP) and Social-Liberals (HSLS).[21] The coalition won convincingly: it controlled a majority of 95 seats to HDZ's 46. Even more directly, the HDZ's candidate Mate Granić came only third in the first round of presidential elections on 24 January 2000, having won only 22 per cent of the votes. The elections were won by Stjepan Mesić, the former Prime Minister and Croatia's representative in Presidency of the Yugoslav Federation (1990-1991), who in 1994 left the HDZ in protest against Tudjman's autocracy and Croatian involvement in the war against Bosnian government forces. The anti-Tudjmanist coalition (and even more so the new President) had a very different vision of Europe than that of their predecessors.

The new narrative was based on the notion that isolation was neither desirable nor viable in the long-term. In order to survive as a state, Croatia must join European institutions. If it remained outside, it could risk economic, cultural, and political regression, which would then, ultimately, lead to a permanent sense of insecurity,

[21] The 'Coalition of Six' was an anti-Tudjmanist coalition, in which participated: the Social-Democratic party of Croatia (SDP), Croatian Social-Liberal Party (HSLS), Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), Croatian People's Party (HNS), Liberal Party (LS) and Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS). In 2001, the IDS decided to withdraw from the Coalition, although it continued to support it in Parliament. In July 2002, the HSLS withdrew from the government, and joined the HDZ-led opposition, thus reducing the coalition to its four 'core' members. SDP, HSS, HNS and LS.

including the fear of being defenceless. Serbia was a great example of what was likely to happen to a state which refused to accept that there were limits to its power. Isolation and even worse was the price that was paid for this illusion of self-sufficiency, which was based on an unrealistic perception of Serbia's greatness. Croatia – which Tudjman had turned into the 'twin sister' of Milošević's Serbia – had by then learnt a lesson. NATO bombs, aimed at targets in Belgrade during the Kosovo operation in Spring and early Summer of 1999 - hit Croatian political scene too.

The new discourse was pro-European, and much more realistic with respect to the place of Croatia within structures of the enlarged European Union and (eventually) of the enlarged NATO. Instead of competing with Belgrade over Bosnia-Herzegovina and for domination in the region, Croatia re-directed its foreign policy interests towards the West. For the first time since independence, Croatia made it clear that it wanted to play a constructive role in its own region – and has changed radically its policy towards neighbouring countries. In Bosnia, Croatia began to follow the European line of action, by supporting international institutions, rather than ethnic Croats and their nationalist party, the HDZ of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Zagreb also supported democratic changes in Serbia, following the demise of Slobodan Milošević from power on 5 October 2000. Relations between two countries quickly improved, and visas were suspended on both sides in 2002. Under the umbrella of preparation for NATO-membership, Croatia co-operated with Macedonia and Albania. The new narrative was no longer hostile to Southeast Europe, and Croatia publicly supports the prospective accession of all countries in the region to the European Union.

At the same time, Croatia no longer aspires to be the 'regional power'. It does not compete with Serbia for 'spheres of interest' in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It no longer declares itself as having a 'historical role' to bring Bosnia-Herzegovina to Europe, and of 'Europeanizing' its south-eastern neighbours. It no longer thinks of itself in terms of military, political and economic self-sufficiency. The idea that Croatia could remain at an equal distance between the West and the (non-existing) East – which was kept alive by Tudjman's contacts with the USSR/Russia in his years of power - have now been replaced by a clearly pro-European policy, in which Russia plays no major role. Croatia wants to be a 'normal country', and not an exception to the general trend of Europeanisation in the former Eastern Europe.

This change affects not only Croatian foreign policy, but it also influences the core definition of political identity of the new Croatian state. While this identity was in the Tudjman period structured primarily in opposition to Others (Serbia, Yugoslavia, Bosnian Muslims, Europe, local Serbs, former Communists, et al.) it is now more than ever created around its own 'positive' definition. Looking inward, towards itself, rather than to 'hostile Others' in its neighbourhood, post-Tudjmanist Croatia discovered that it is, indeed, a small state. Subsequently, Croatia also discovered that in order to safeguard its existence, it must integrate with global and regional military and political structures. There is a new awareness that the Tudjmanist narrative of 'regional power' had in fact placed Croatia in a much less favourable situation than any other Central European state. Co-operation, and not conflict, with others became the priority objective of Croatian foreign policy. After the elections in 2000, Croatia gave the impression that it wanted to move quickly – in order to compensate for the time lost during the long decade of the 1990s.

EU and NATO initially responded with enthusiasm, welcoming political changes that they believed would contribute to lasting stability in South Eastern Europe. On 25 May 2000 Croatia became a member of the Partnership for Peace initiative, with a view to joining the NATO at a later stage. At the same time, the European Union warmly welcomed political changes in Zagreb, not least because it hoped that changes in Zagreb would further strengthen the anti-Milošević opposition in Belgrade. On the eve of becoming a member of the Partnership for Peace, the Secretary General of NATO, George Robertson, said that this membership was a signal 'to the people of Serbia… that Croatia is proof that a country does not have to remain a victim of history'.[22] The European Union's foreign and defence policy chief, Javier Solana, noted the 'outstanding significance of Croatia's political changes and their positive impact on Bosnia-Herzegovina's prospects'.[23] These changes were now seen as a break-through success in the EU's policy towards the Western Balkans, which as of June 1999 was structured around the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe initiative. It

[22] Patrick FitzPatrick: 'News from Croatia', Central European Review, accessible online on 21 October 2005, at: www.ce-review.org.
[23] Patrick FitzPatrick, ibid.

was now time for further pressure against Milošević. This pressure from inside and from abroad resulted in his removal on 5 October 2000.

However, with the end of the Milošević regime in Belgrade the issue of regional co-operation within the Western Balkans resurfaced. The new Croatian government was much more receptive to the idea of regional co-operation, but there still existed strong opposition to this idea. The new Prime Minister, Ivica Račan, explained the difficulties in implementing his new policy in the face of this opposition:

'For me personally, and for the government, there are no problems regarding regional co-operation. However, the other thing is that we still have to explain certain issues and we still have to take into account the fears which are based on our experience of being a part of some other associations up until recently, and which have not ended happily. I have in mind our recent history. But – as I said – my government fully understands that it has to accept European criteria if it wants to be a part of Europe. And European criteria – that means: co-operation with neighbours, with the region. I cannot imagine a stable Croatia without stability of our neighbours.'[24]

Based on this new policy, Croatia hosted the Zagreb Summit of EU heads of state and government with their counterparts in five states of the Western Balkans on 24 November 2000, and signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU on 29 October 2001. The Tudjmanist opposition, together with various groups of veterans of the 'Homeland War' strongly objected to both the Summit and the Agreement, arguing that this was clear evidence of Croatia's 'return to the Balkans'. Opposition to the new course of Croatian foreign policy continued to find a voice through some parts of the media, and also within the HDZ until the parliamentary elections in November 2003. Most significantly, important segments of the administration – such as the intelligence services, police, judiciary and even the Army – remained largely unreformed in these first three years since the policy change. Although they could not stop the new policy, the Tudjmanists significantly slowed down its implementation. This was especially the case with regard to return of the ethnic Serb refugees to areas where they lived before 1995, and to co-operation with

the ICTY, which remained slow and incomplete. The difficulties that confronted the new government were further intensified owing to the emergence of the first disagreements within the anti-Tudjmanist coalition. Differences over the issue of co-operation with the ICTY, as well as over the relationship with Slovenia, resulted in the resignation of the first Račan cabinet in July 2002. The crisis was provoked by the second-largest coalition partner, the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLS) which moved further towards a neo-Tudjmanist position as part of a strategy to attract the votes of the disillusioned former supporters of the HDZ. The second Račan government was a coalition of four parties – without the HSLS. But the disputes over the speed of reforms continued – this time largely between Račan's SDP and the more conservative Croatian Peasant Party (HSS).

However, the most serious challenge for the new government and President Mesić came however in form of the indictment of two former generals of the Croatian Army – Ante Gotovina (indicted on 8 June 2001) and Janko Bobetko (indicted on 23 August 2002). Soon after the indictments were made public, these two cases became a focal point for unification of all Tudjmanist forces (including the strongest party in opposition, the HDZ). These generals were key figures in the 'Homeland War' – Bobetko as the Chief-of-Staff of the Croatian Army, and Gotovina as the Commander of the Split Military District, directly responsible for operations in and around Knin. Prior to the indictment, Bobetko was retired, while Gotovina was dismissed by President Mesić (on 29 October 2000) along with eleven other generals who had actively opposed political changes following the January 2000 elections.

Faced with massive public protests and blocked by internal divisions between coalition partners, the government failed to act quickly, and thus enabled both generals to avoid extradition. It was reported that Gotovina had gone into hiding on 14 July 2001.[25] In November 2001, the Croatian government officially informed the ICTY that they were not in a position to arrest him.[26] The ICTY immediately accused the Račan cabinet of allowing Gotovina to escape arrest. In her statement of 27 July 2001, Florence Hartman, the ICTY spokesperson, said that the Croatian government

[24] Ivica Račan, interview to RFE, 19 December 2000, accessible online on 21 October 2005, at : www.danas.org.
[25] Vjesnik, 14 July 2001.

received the indictment on 12 June 2001, but failed to arrest the general immediately. For the ICTY, 'the government was responsible for failing to arrest Gotovina.'

In addition, the case of General Bobetko led to further doubts surrounding the readiness (and perhaps even willingness) of the Račan cabinet to co-operate with the ICTY. Bobetko had been the most senior military person in the country, a veteran Partisan fighter during the Second World War, and was the founder of the Croatian Army in 1991. Both Prime Minister Račan and the HSS leader Zlatko Tomčić praised Bobetko for his role in the war, and had promised that he would not be extradited.[27] The Croatian government actually contested the indictment as unlawful, but the ICTY rejected the appeal on 29 November 2002.[28] President Mesić insisted on full co-operation with the ICTY, including in the Bobetko case. His statement of 26 September 2002 made him the target of organised Tudjmanist opposition, which for the first time threatened the use of violence in its protest against the new course in Croatian policy. However, in the new, post-Tudjmanist Croatia the role of the President was reduced to a near-ceremonial one, with no real decision-making power in this type of issue. The difference between the government and the President further encouraged the Tudjmanists, some of whom armed themselves claiming they would use weapons to protect Bobetko.[29] With the ICTY indictment of Gotovina and Bobetko, Croatia faced the most delicate moment since the end of the war in 1995.

The initial hesitation of the Croatian government shown by the failure to arrest these two generals was in sharp contrast with the quick and decisive extradition of Slobodan Milošević by the government of Serbia on 28 June 2001. All of this contributed to suspicions again being voiced, and a questioning of whether Croatian politics had really changed. This was reflected in the immediate reactions of the US and the EU. Already in October 2002, the US suspended financial assistance for judicial reforms to Croatia, while on 15 October 2002 the UK suspended ratification of the

[26] B 92 News, 27 July 2001, accessible online on 21 October 2005 at www.b92.net.
[27] B 92 News,21 and 23 September 2002, ibid.
[28] B 92 News, 29 November 2002 , ibid.
[29] For rumours that a coup d'etat was planned in these days see Politika, 25 September 2002. As the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister, Zoran Đinđić, in March 2003, illustrated, the use of violence against reformers was a real possibility which could not be easily dismissed as an empty threat.

Stabilisation and Association Agreement on the grounds of Croatia's failure to extradite general Bobetko.[30]

Bobetko died in his home in Zagreb (without ever being extradited) in May 2003, but the Gotovina case remained one of the main obstacles to Croatia's accession to the European Union and NATO until his arrest in Spain on 8 December 2005. This case caused a long delay in ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement that Croatia signed on 29 October 2001, and which entered into force only on 1 February 2005, after the ongoing refusal of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to ratify it in their respective parliaments. It also caused a delay to Croatian prospects of becoming a member of NATO. Ever since 2001, US officials have continued to state firmly that only when general Gotovina is arrested and extradited could Croatia be considered for membership of NATO.[31] The Gotovina case is important not only because of Ante Gotovina, but as a test for the level of de-Tudjmanisation in Croatia. A failure to act quickly in 2001 – and even more the protection of general Bobetko in 2002 – were taken as signs that Croatia had not yet completed 'the full transformation of society' from its Tudjmanist recent past.

The first three years since the change of regime were, in this respect, a mixture of successes and failures. Račan's government and (even more) President Mesić changed the official rhetoric and the direction of Croatian domestic and foreign policy. But soon after the elections they were seen as somewhat hesitant, weak and divided. The ICTY indictment of Gotovina came perhaps too soon, and it did not help to consolidate the new government. President Mesić was much more determined to act, but his powers were reduced to near-ceremonial by constitutional changes enacted by the new Parliament. In addition, as the indictments were seen as pressure from abroad, the Tudjmanists were quick to point out that President Tudjman had firmly stood his ground against such pressures. Tudjmanists were indeed gaining strength from a situation that they interpreted as an example of disrespect for Croatian sovereignty. The reformers were not helped by the fact that the accused were two generals – their

[30] Beta News, 15 October 2001, accessible online on 21 October 2005 at www.b92.net.
[31] Before the arrest of Ante Gotovina, this was the US official position, as expressed by the US Assistant Secretary of State, Nicholas Burns, on 7 October 2005. See Hina News Agency, 7 October 2005, accessible online at: www.hina.hr.

arrest carried the potential of antagonising the Army and possibly also the Police – still largely made up of Tudjmanists.

The internal disputes, differences with President Mesić, further stalemate on issue of EU and NATO membership, and the dissapointment with results achieved in almost four years of Račan's two governments significantly contributed to HDZ's victory in the November 2003 elections.

Croatia after the 2003 elections

The election victory of the HDZ was originally viewed by many as a serious setback for the Croatian pro-European policy. The Račan government officially applied for full membership of the European Union on 21 February 2003, and in June 2003 it submitted responses to standard EU accession questionnaire. This took place in a situation where the Stabilization and Association Agreement had not yet been ratified by the Netherlands and the UK. In these circumstances, the victory of the political party which openly opposed the ICTY indictments of Gotovina and Bobetko was seen as a further problem.

But, to the surprise of many in Croatia, and in the international community, the new Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, moved quickly to affirm his commitment to full cooperation with the ICTY. In addition, he confirmed that EU membership continues to be the priority objective of Croatian policy under his government. In his first interview with the foreign press following the elections, he said:

'We are now a reformed, democratic, centre-right party. We are no longer a Tudjmanist party, although we are grateful to the former head of state for what he did for Croatian independence'.[32]

[32] Interview to Der Spiegel, as quoted by Tanjug News Agency on 30 November 2003. Accessible online on 21 October 2005 at www.b92.net.

By making reference only to Tudjman's success in achieving independence for Croatia – and by avoiding praise for achievements in the decade of his rule since – Sanader presented himself as a reformer from within the HDZ. This was confirmed by his choice of coalition partners. Instead of relying on the far-right Croatian Party of Rights (HSP), he chose to make a coalition with the HSLS (a former partner in Račan's first government) and – more significantly – with the representatives of ethnic minorities in Croatian parliament, including the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS). This was a radical departure from the Tudjmanist policy of marginalising and discriminating against minorities, particularly the ethnic Serbs. In fact, it was also an improvement on policy of the Račan governments, which had not included ethnic minority representatives, perhaps fearing that this would only encourage Tudjmanist opposition who would interpret it as further evidence of a 'return to Yugoslavia'. Another possible reason for Račan's lack of interest in ethnic Serb parties can be seen in the competing electoral strategies of the parties in the Croatian party system. Račan's SDP was in direct competition with the SDSS for the votes of ethnic Serbs.

Thus, it was to the surprise of many when, on 19 December 2003, the SDSS signed a coalition agreement with the HDZ. Sanader's government promised to facilitate return of Serb refugees, and the restitution of their property, including the once state-owned flats in which they had the right of permanent tenancy. The SDSS was offered several senior posts in the administration, although it refused the HDZ's offer of one or two ministerial positions. Subsequent to this agreement, Ivo Sanader invited all refugees to return to Croatia, stating that the Serbs had no reason to fear the new, HDZ-led government. In one of his first public functions following the elections, the new Prime Minister attended the Orthodox Christmas reception party in the premises of the Serb National Council in Zagreb, where he said that 'the Serb minority, just as any other minority, enriches Croatia and thus should be treasured'.[33] This symbolic gesture – followed by Sanader's visit to the site of the Second World War Jasenovac

[33] See reports by Tanjug News Agency, 25 December 2003, Srna News Agency, 4 January 2004, and by B 92, 6 January 2004. Ibid.

concentration camp in which tens of thousands of Serbs were murdered[34] - was welcomed by ethnic Serbs in Croatia, but it was also well received in Serbia.

The new government continued to promote regional co-operation as a key Croatian foreign policy objective. Serb-Croat political co-operation in Croatia facilitated further rapprochement between the governments of Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro (as the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been known as of March 2003). The bilateral relationship intensified in 2004, with first official visit to Zagreb of Svetozar Marović, the president of Serbia and Montenegro (25 May 2004), and the first visit by the Croatian Prime Minister to Belgrade after the war (15 November 2004). Sanader said that 'full stabilization in Southeast Europe' is one of the main objectives of his government.[35] In November 2004 the two states signed a bilateral agreement covering the protection of minorities.[36] In August 2004, one of the leaders of the Serb minority in Croatia, Milorad Pupovac, said that the Croatian government 'on the whole fulfils its promises given to Serbs', although certain problems continued.[37] These problems however have never seriously endangered the support of the SDSS to Sanader's government.

Marginalisation of the Tudjmanists within the HDZ, coalition with the Serbs, an improving relationship with Serbia and Montenegro – as well as co-operation with the international community in its policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina – erased the initial scepticism of the European Union about the new government. Croatia's application for EU membership was further supported by the conclusions of the Thessaloniki summit of the European Council in June 2003, which confirmed that all countries of the Western Balkans – including Croatia – could look forward to the prospect of accession. The European Partnership with Croatia was the direct result of the Thessaloniki Agenda, and Croatia (then still under the Račan government) participated enthusiastically. But once the initial scepticism about the Sanader government was replaced with support, the EU Commission issued its Opinion on

[34] This visit was of special importance also because Franjo Tudjman built his nationalist credentials through arguing against the 'Jasenovac myth', and through arguing that the actual scale of atrocities had been deliberately exaggerated by Serb nationalists as a means of proving the 'genocidal tendencies' of the Croats.
[35] B 92 News, 25 May 2004, accessible online on 21 October 2005, at www.b92.net.
[36] B 92 News, 15 November 2004, ibid.
[37] Beta News Agency, 3 August 2004, ibid.

Croatia's Application for Membership of the EU.[38] The Opinion concluded that Croatia was 'a functioning democracy, with stable institutions, guaranteeing the rule of law and no major problems regarding the respect of fundamental rights'. It also confirmed that Croatia was 'a functioning market economy'. The Opinion saw 'no major difficulties in applying the acquis' in the fields of: economic and monetary union, statistics, industrial policy, small and medium sized enterprises, science and research, education and training, culture and audio-visual policy, external relations, common foreign and security policy, and financial and budgetary provisions. Further efforts were encouraged in the fields of free movement of capital, company law, fisheries, transport, energy, consumer and health protection, customs union and financial control. According to the Opinion, 'considerable and sustained efforts' were needed in areas of: free movement of goods, free movement of persons, freedom to provide services, competition, agriculture, taxation, social policy and employment, telecommunications and information technology, regional policy and justice and home affairs'. The only area where 'very significant efforts' were needed, was environment.

Although the European Council decided in June 2004 that Croatia should be accorded the status of candidate country, it was pointed out that 'Croatia needed to maintain full cooperation with ICTY and to take all necessary steps to ensure that the remaining indictee [i.e. general Gotovina, op.aut.] was located and transferred to The Hague'.[39] This requirement proved to be the most difficult, although public support for general Gotovina was now significantly lower than in 2001. Sanader's government faced no serious threat from possible public protests, and – as events following the arrest of the general in December 2005 confirmed - no violence was likely to be used in the case that the general was arrested and extradited. However, the government claimed that it simply had no idea of his whereabouts. In Spring 2004, the Croatian government accepted the presence of foreign intelligence services in Croatia – including the British – whose objective was to locate Ante Gotovina. A special Action Plan was co-

[38] For full text of this document see http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/croatia/eu-relations.htm, accessible online on 23 October 2005.

[39] It is worth noting that the Opinion stopped short of requesting that Croatia actually arrest general Gotovina. It asked only for full co-operation and for 'all necessary steps' to be taken. On these grounds, once the ICTY Prosecutor confirmed that Croatia had taken all necessary steps, it was possible for the Council of Ministers to decide in favour of accession talks starting with Croatia even in a situation in which Gotovina had not been arrested.

ordinated with the ICTY and the EU, aimed at detecting and breaking a net of support for the general among the former Tudjmanists. However, several documents from these secretive operations were soon leaked to national press, in a clear manifestation that Tudjmanists were still present (if no longer influential) in the state apparatus. In March 2005, Carla Del Ponte, the ICTY Chief Prosecutor, concluded that Croatia still needed to improve its co-operation with the ICTY. As a consequence, the European Council postponed the date of the accession talks with Croatia, until this requirement was met. However, a special three-member commission (*Troika*) was established to monitor further progress, in response to Croatian complaints that the ICTY should not determine the EU's policy towards Croatia. In somewhat controversial context of the stalemate on Turkey's accession talks in October 2005, Del Ponte unexpectedly confirmed that Croatia was 'as of last couple of weeks fully co-operating with the ICTY'. This effectively removed the last barrier to the beginning of accession talks. The decision of the Council to begin accession talks with Croatia followed immediately.

This decision, however, was not only the result of a more direct co-operation with the ICTY, but also of Croatia's successful lobbying within the EU, which was helped by a convenient set of circumstances. Since its independence in 1992, Croatian foreign policy aimed at building support among three different (although often overlapping) informal groups of European states. Firstly, Croatia relied on the support of Germany and – since Jacques Chirac became the President – France. Germany was the decisive force behind the recognition of Croatian independence back in December 1991. France became the principal supporter of further enlargement at the Zagreb meeting in 2001, which was held during the French presidency. But by October 2005, both Germany and France faced domestic crises – Germany was in the process of forming a new government following elections, while France's position in Europe was weakened by the outcome of the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty. However, both countries supported the beginning of negotiations with Croatia, not least because Croatia refused to participate in the 'coalition of the willing' and it was critical of the war against Iraq. Croatia was also relying on support by a group of small states in Central Europe. The new, post-Tudjmanist Croatia accepted that it was a small state, not a 'regional power'. As such, it successfully sought support from other Central European small nations – for example Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, and

even the Czech Republic (despite occasional disagreements between Prague and Zagreb), and the three Baltic States: Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.[40] Finally, Croatia successfully lobbied in the Vatican, through which it influenced a number of important predominantly Catholic countries in Europe – for example, Poland, Italy and Ireland. The importance of the Catholic church and its support in the process of EU accession was acknowledged by the Prime Minister Sanader who thanked Cardinal Bozanić, the Archibishop of Zagreb, saying that 'without the support of the Catholic church, this decision (on beginning of accession talks) would not have happened'.[41] Major political parties – both on the left (SDP) and the right (HDZ) lobbied for support through European political party associations, with significant success.[42] The SDSS sent several letters to EU and individual governments (including to Tony Blair, on 1 September 2005) encouraging them to support Croatia.

Unlike Tudjman's foreign policy – which in the second half of the 1990s became increasingly isolationist, leaving Croatia with no friends in Europe – the new orientation helped Croatia to built links within the Europe. The Austrian *quid pro quo* position meant that Austria would agree to beginning accession talks with Turkey only if and when Croatia was promised the same.[43] It worked.

Conclusion

Croatian public opinion reacted with great enthusiasm to the announcement that there would finally be accession talks. Opinion polls conducted in the immediate aftermath of 4 October 2005 showed that support for Croatian membership in the European Union increased by almost 17 percent – from a very low point of 33 percent in

[40] Four states belonging to this informal group – Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia and Hungary - issued a joint statement in support of Croatia on 18 July 2005. See Hina News Agency, accessible online at www.hina.hr.
[41] See IKA News Agency, 14 October 2005, accessible online at www.ika.hr, on 23 October 2005.
[42] For example, the European People's Party – European Democrats group in European Parliament supported Croatia. The eight Prime Ministers of EU states who are leaders of parties belonging to this group sent a letter to Tony Blair on 26 August, in which it supported Croatia. The group included Prime Ministers of Italy, Slovakia, Malta, Slovenia, Luxembourg, Latvia, Greece and Austria. See Hina News Agency, 1 September 2005, accessible on www.hina.hr.
[43] For Austrian position see Wolfgang Schuessell's interview with The Financial Times, 29 September 2005, as accessible online on 23 October 2005, at www.ft.com.

September[44] to 49.6 per cent on 5 October[45]. This is not surprising. In the aftermath of 4 October, the EU was no longer seen as unfair towards Croatia, and no longer the supervisor, tutor and punisher. This might yet change once the talks are under way, especially if the conditions were to be seen as too restrictive. But, it is unlikely that the public would turn anti-European now when no major political party remains to organise anti-European politics. In addition, the more open the Union becomes towards Croatia, the more enthusiastic will Croats be about joining the Union.

Croatian politicians now emphasise that the good relationship they have with countries that entered the Union in 2004 would certainly help, as they were willing to help with their own experience in negotiations. The Chief negotiator, Vladimir Drobnjak, stated that the Slovakian experience would be particularly helpful, as this country went through negotiations rather quickly, having joined the accession talks at a later stage, due to political reasons.[46] Croatia will try to take advantage of its smallness in terms of territory and population and will argue that it should be easy to 'absorb' in the European Union as it has a fairly advanced economy and it is a sound and stable democracy.[47] Politicians hope that the accession talks could be completed within the next two or three years. It would be nice, they say, if Croatian citizens could participate in the elections to the European parliament in 2009.

This will, however, depend not only on Croatia – which is now seen as fully co-operative with the ICTY - but also on circumstances beyond its (or perhaps anybody else's) control. In particular, two of them will be very significant. Firstly, Croatian membership in the European Union depends on general state of the Union, which has not yet found a solution for the constitutional stalemate, and which also lacks unity with regard to further enlargements. Secondly, further progress will depend on resolving certain bilateral problems that Croatia has with two of its EU neighbours –

[44] According to a survey conducted by GfK, quoted by Novi List on 27 September 2005, only 33 percent of Croatians supported membership of the EU, while 56 percent opposed it. Support for the EU was at its peak in June 2003, when 82 percent of respondents supported it. Accessible online on 23 October 2005 at www.novilist.hr.

[45] In the first ad hoc survey conducted in the immediate aftermath of decision on opening of the accession talks, only 25 percent were against the EU, with 24 per cent undecided. Večernji List, 5 October, accessible online on 23 October 2005 at www.vecernji-list.hr.

[46] Interview with Vladimir Drobnjak, Slobodna Dalmacija, 17 October 2005.

Italy and Slovenia. This concerns compensations and status of the *esuli*, ethnic Italians from Istria and Dalmatia who were forced to leave their homes in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The open issues with Slovenia are potentially more damaging, as they involve dispute over the maritime border in the Bay of Piran, and compensation for savings of Croatian nationals that were frozen by the *Ljubljanska Banka* during the break-up of former Yugoslavia. As all members of the European Union will have to consent to Croatia's membership, these issues will have to be resolved during the accession talks.[48]

But, the accession talks are now already transforming Croatia into a 'normal', democratic European country, taking it away from the authoritarianism and nationalism of the 1990s. Membership of the Union, if and when it happens, will be the final act of this 'complete transformation of society', the ultimate recognition that the second transition is over. Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro (whether as one state or two), and Bosnia and Herzegovina are likely to follow.

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[47] Interview with Vladimir Drobnjak, ibid. This statement indicates that Croatia does not want to be treated as a part of a 'package' with Turkey, nor as a part of a 'regional approach', i.e. in the same block with other countries of the 'Western Balkans'.

[48] In October 2005, Croatia proposed that the border dispute with Slovenia is dealt with via international arbitration, but Slovenia refused, and proposed that these issues should become part of the accession talks. Slovenia hopes that as a member-state of the Union it might be in an advantageous position if the talks are held within the framework of accession. In addition, the Slovenian Foreign Minister, Dimitrij Rupel, confirmed that a Slovenian referendum on Croatian membership was a possibility, if no solution for the Bay of Piran was achieved.