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Political Development in Croatia 1990-2000: Fast Transition – Postponed Consolidation

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Summary

Regardless of our evaluation of the results and quality of the transition in Croatia, it seems justified to take 1995 as the year when the transition was over. Until then the main democratic institutions were formally crafted and established and the new regime was something quite different from the socialist rule. The new regime emerged as the result of institutionalization of the HDZ movement into political regime, with two distinct characteristics: a) in terms of substance, the regime was an authoritarian regime; b) the regime acquired its legitimacy through reasonably free and fair democratic procedures. Such an authoritarian democracy (in contrast to authoritarian dictatorship) precluded democratic consolidation (either in terms of quality or in terms of duration) almost by definition, which can be additionally shown at the constitutional, behavioural and attitudinal level. Nevertheless, the January elections opened the space for the Croatian democracy to consolidate. Whether consolidation will be successfully crafted is still not clear.

Introduction

Works dealing with political development in Croatia in the last ten years under the theoretical framework of democratization (i.e. democratic transition and consolidation) are rare. This is true for domestic social science as well as for foreign scientists dealing with the case of Croatia (or ex-Yugoslavia), whether as a case study or within cross-national comparative analyses. The reasons for this are primarily in the peculiar processes that took place in the late 80s and at the beginning of the 90s within the then common state of Yugoslavia: the dissolution of the federal state, which happened simultaneously with the demise of the communist regime, and the war between the Yugoslav republics that followed.

As a consequence of these facts foreign observers focused on the problems at federal level or on the relations between the republics more than on the inner development in the constituent republics – the level at which transition(s) actually occurred. Also, under the pressure of actual events, the focus shifted to the variables that are "environmental" to the transitional processes or, at best, "preconditions" for transition to democracy. Thus the scientific agenda has been preoccupied with such issues as the breakdown of the federative state, the independence of constituent republics and its consequences, na-

tionalism and national self-determination, war, history, development of ethnic identities, conflict-resolution and peace, the role of the international community, etc. As a consequence, possible explanations inspired by political science have been overwhelmed by other, usually more deterministic approaches, and the transition to democracy itself (and, consequently, consolidation) has been either taken for granted, or put aside, or explicitly denied, but rarely explored.[1]

Furthermore, scholars who engaged in comparative analyses of democratization found, in the peculiarities of the events in and around Croatia, variables that are not easy to control in comparative empirical research. "Yugoslav exceptionalism" has served not only as a crucial case for the claim that post-communist transitions cannot be compared to the democratic transitions in Southern Europe and Latin America (Bunce, 1995: 987); it has meant exclusion of the former Yugoslav cases from many studies dealing with cases within the universe of post-communist countries, too. (Elster/Offe/Preuss, 1998: 7; Linz/Stepan, 1996: xvii) These scientific reasons, accompanied with the practical effects of the war on the academic enterprise (obstacles to travel, communication, problems of gathering reliable data on the political system of Croatia, etc.) contributed to the fact that the amount of literature on regime transformation in Croatia is not very impressive.[2]

Nevertheless, despite all the limitations, it seems that the concepts of democratic transition and consolidation can be of a valuable interpretative help in addressing the problem of political development in Croatia in the last ten years. In this paper I adhere to the approach that views both concepts in accordance to their "minimalist" definitions. Firstly, both transition and consolidation refer exclusively to the level of political processes, institutions and actors i.e. to what is used to be called the political order. Whatever crucial role changes in the economic, social or cultural sphere could play in transition, they should be considered as variables with the outside effects on transition. Secondly, transition is considered over when basic democratic institutions and procedures are irreversibly settled down, regardless on stability and quality of their functioning. Achievement of quality and stability is a task of consolidation which is, though can be entailed in the very transitional processes, theoretically distinct, structurally different and, in principle, subsequent process. Many authors powerfully showed advantages of such an approach to the problems of democratic transition and consolidation (Przeworski, 1986; Di Palma 1990; O`Donnell 1992; Valenzuela, 1992; Gunther/Diamandouros /Puhle, 1995; Linz/Stepan 1996).

[1] There are, however, a few exceptions. Mirjana Kasapović (1996, 153-178) is the author who uses transitological categories in analyzing political processes in Croatia in the past decade in the strictest way. For other authors see also Pusić, 1999, Grdešić, 1997, and Kasapović/Zakošek, 1997.

[2] I do not take into account the studies which just pretend to talk about Croatian or ex-Yugoslav transition(s) by including the terms like transition, transformation or democratization in their titles, but actually use them as temporal denotation and by no means as a conceptual scheme. This is not uncommon phenomenon, since the very terms gained, among social scientists, much more popularity than the more or less strict methods, concepts and theories hidden behind them.

The Missed Opportunity of Transition

The Croatian transition from authoritarian rule was a rather clear case of transformation in Huntington's terms (Huntington, 1991, 109-142). From the beginning of the liberalization of the communist regime to the first democratic elections the whole process was marked by a decisive role of only one player – the Croatian Communist Party. However, the party was everything but coherent. Decisive transitional battles took place just behind the doors of the party Central Committee. The reformist line within the party only gradually succeeded in neutralizing party hard-liners, which enabled them to take decisive steps toward democratization. There is no doubt that pressures coming from the media, intellectuals and public opinion and later actions of organized opposition parties provided precious support, and often political guidelines, to the reformists during the whole period, but these segments of society were not strong enough to create the need for negotiations between reformists and the opposition. Also, except one public petition organized by the opposition, the masses did not actively and extensively participate in politics in the period prior to the first elections, and violence was virtually unknown.

A decisive pressure for change came from the growing conflict at the level of the federal Communist Party and between the Yugoslav republics. Without initiatives and real power to efficiently oppose the galloping nationalistic and antidemocratic mass movement that had been spreading from Serbia since 1987 (endangering democratization processes in other Yugoslav republics), the decision of the SKH-SDP in December 1989 about the holding of multiparty elections was, for the Croatian communist reformers, an exit from a nasty situation rather than a preferred democratic solution.

Their rather sudden decision had several functions. Firstly, the call for multiparty elections for the Parliament of the Republic Croatia was itself a powerful message to all other republics' leaderships (particularly to Serbian communists) as well as to their own hard-liners about desired direction of the political changes in Yugoslavia. Therefore it is not strange that the very decision was made and announced immediately prior to the 14th congress of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia held in January 1990, the final step in the dissolution of the unified Yugoslav communist organization. Secondly, with such a sudden step, Croatian reformists wanted to seize the still weakly organized domestic party scene and to improve their chances for electoral victory. By winning the election they would, thirdly, acquire much needed democratic legitimacy that, in turn, would enable them to play a greater role in the resolution of the Yugoslav conflict. For these reasons, the communist reformers, confident of their own electoral victory, did not take into consideration any possible negotiations with the opposition on such issues as securing transitional pace, the constitutional form of the new democracy or even the type of electoral system for the first elections. These tasks were left to be settled down after the elections. There was only a tacit agreement among the main parties that the first democratically elected parliament should act as a Constitutional Assembly and that new elections should be called as soon as possible after the adoption of the new constitution.

However, the process went into the opposite direction. The right-wing – and, at the time, the most radical opposition party, HDZ – won the first elections, ensuring thus absolute parliamentary majority and complete control over the second part of the transition

– constitutional making and institutional building. Unlike the first phase, this second phase was marked by growing tensions in Zagreb – Belgrade relations, as well as relations between Serbs and Croats within Croatia. Masses were mobilized by populist and ethnically exclusive appeals of their leaders to various public actions, which often led to violence. Gradually these tensions developed into the war between the Yugoslav Army, local Serbian militia and the regime of Slobodan Miloševic on the one side and the Croatian government, supported by the vast majority of population, on the other.

These briefly depicted developments and circumstances in Croatia from the late eighties to 1993[3] account to a great extent for the nature of the transition. It was a preemptive, fast, and, especially at the beginning, relatively smooth transition in comparison with those in some other communist countries. Indeed, from the foundation of the first non-communist party to the first free multiparty elections it had passed only a year. From the decision on the organization of the first free elections to the adoption of the entirely new constitution by the newly elected Parliament a year had passed, too.[4] Within the next two and a half years all major institutions were established according to new constitutional procedures.[5] If we take the functional establishment of the main democratic institutions and procedures as the end-point of transition, then 1993 or 1995 the latest should be considered as the end of the transition in Croatia.

However, the lightness hides some perils, too. Due to the circumstances that permanently worked in the direction of speeding up transitional decisions as well as to the situations of the dominant-player game (SKH in the first and HDZ in the second stage of the process), the need for arriving at the most important transitional and constitutional choices through consensus was severely neglected. Dominant players in both phases were more concerned with their own calculations and shortsighted interests than with thoughts on the future stability of the democratic regime. As a result, none of the major institutions were established by the consent of other players and without huge divisions in the public.

The election law has been changed prior to every national or local election according to the interests and calculations of the ruling party, due to the fact that electoral law was not a part of the constitution and for its adoption only the absolute majority of all representatives was required. Apart from this, electoral systems regularly produced manufactured parliamentary majorities, while support for proportional representation was prevalent in public and expert debates as a more honest and immanently democratic type of representation. Altogether it deepened disagreements between HDZ and the opposition on the type of electoral system and questioned the legitimacy of the type of democracy that was developing. It also contributed to the development of a dangerous

[3] For a more detailed analyses of the transition in Croatia see Kasapović/Zakošek, 1997 and Grdešić, 1997.

[4] This, in a democratic sense, fairly correct text was among the first entirely new constitutions among the post-communist countries and, with some symbolic and linguistic changes from 1997, it was in use until recently.

[5] The last one was the establishment of the second Chamber of Parliament (the House of Counties) and the whole system of local representative and executive bodies through the elections held in February 1993.

perception among the public that elections have little to do with democracy since they are only a powerful tool serving incumbents in keeping power.[6]

A similar dispute has been existing with regard to the constitutionally defined semi-presidential system. It was adopted in December 1990 as part of the Constitution and until the last elections represented the main object of criticism coming from the opposition parties, part of the public and experts. The changing of the existing type of legislative-executive relation toward a purer parliamentary system of government has been a constant point in the electoral and party platforms of almost all opposition parties in Croatia during nineties. However, this heavy criticism can not be fully attributed to the fact that the initial agreement on semi-presidentialism was never reached.[7] It developed especially after it became obvious what the consequences of such a system of government for the quality of democratic life are. As in the case of the electoral law, initial disagreement was enforced by later evaluations that, in turn, were based on initial disagreements. And unlike other combinations, the combination of initial non-agreement and divergent interpretations of outcomes of institutional choices are very likely to further deepen the existing conflict.[8] According to Di Palma, democratic consolidation can be crafted almost entirely in the transitional phase if the main players achieve a sufficiently strong consensus on the basic rules of the game (Di Palma, 1990, 137-155). Croatian parties simply failed to do that.

Yet, the primary lack of consensus refers in the case of Croatia to the basic dispute of which political community the Serbian national minority belongs to, where are the frontiers of the new state and what should be the constitutive principles of the new political community (Croatia). The dispute developed very soon into a sharp political division along ethnic lines (Grdešić et al., 1991), with a pronounced role of the mass mobilization. A part of the Serbian national minority, together with the main political parties representing the Serbs in Croatia, from 1990, and particularly from 1991, refused to express loyalty to Croatia as a sovereign and independent state. Thus the lack of the basic legitimacy of the newly formed state among the Serbian ethnic community was the main reason for their resistance to recognize the new Croatian legal system over the territories in which Serbs constituted a majority of the population. The situation in which

[6] The electoral law for the 2000 parliamentary elections was actually the first electoral system adopted by the consent of all the relevant players. This development was mostly due to small electoral chances of the HDZ to win again.

[7] Grdešić's impression was "… that the new Constitution came into being through political cooperation and respect for political parties" and that "… some important compromises among the opposition, the President and the experts were struck", out of which "… the most important one modified the presidential system of government…". (Grdešić, 1997, 114). However, my impression is that none of the main opposition parties actually accepted semi-presidentialism from the beginning. The Constitution making involved a lot of bargaining and the consent to vote for the new Constitution by the opposition parties should not be interpreted as their acceptance of the proposed solutions. Simply, compromise does not yet entail consensus.

[8] We should distinguish between the type of the chosen institutions and the mode of arriving at the choice. There is no place here to discuss advantages and disadvantages of concrete institutional choices for the consolidation of new democracies and thus I am concerned only with the question of consensual institution building.

the Croatian state authorities, despite international recognition, were not able to exercise real power over roughly one third of Croatia's territory lasted during the whole war – until summer 1995, when the Croatian Army in military action reunified most of the previously lost territories.

Institutionalizing Authoritarian Democracy

Like in the other countries that at that time started their transitions to democracy, the Croatian early transition was marked by the emergence of new, alternative movements that questioned the legitimacy of the old order. The anticommunist movement in Croatia had two organizational forms: the HDZ on one hand and several smaller parties that at the first elections joined into the KNS coalition on the other. The KNS broke apart already between the first and the second round of the 1990 elections, out of which later only HSLS and the newly created HNS survived as significant political parties. In this respect, the Croatian case only partly followed the pattern of other East-Central European countries, where political parties emerged after initial anticommunist movements fell apart.

However, the HDZ movement seems to be a distinct Croatian phenomenon that could be compared perhaps only to Meciar's HZDS in Slovakia, and even then only in some aspects.[9] The crucial feature of the HDZ movement was that it neither split into several political parties, nor disappeared, nor, speaking from a political scientist's point of view, transformed into a political party proper. Instead, after winning the first elections the movement made a powerful attempt *to institutionalize in a form of political regime*. This fairly, but not completely, successful institutionalization of the movement into the regime is often omitted when the political development in Croatia is analyzed. Most interpretations stop at the insight that the HDZ did not transform into a political party suitable to act within democratic institutions. This is undoubtedly a correct observation, but it fails to detect decisive changes that happened with the movement after the HDZ won the founding elections.

The HDZ entered the Croatian political scene in 1989 as a formally registered political party, but its beginnings were marked by several features that allow us to talk about a populist movement rather than a party. Firstly, instead of a clear party program, the HDZ offered a fuzzy platform for democratic transition dominated by only one issue – sovereignty of the Croatian state. In the situation of the growing political conflict between Croatia and the Federation, this type of a simple national appeal to voters showed its major advantage in securing a wide popular support. Secondly, the leader of the movement, Franjo Tuđman, very soon became "untouchable" charismatic leader with almost messianic meaning for his followers, rather than a party leader. And thirdly, this highly emotional, nationalistic and historically oriented populism functioned as a strong incentive for considerable part of population to find in the movement much more than

[9] The HDZ and HZDS shared very much the same substantive features (like rhetoric, nationalistic policies, etc.), but the environment within which they developed and their position within the power constellations structurally differed. On democratic development in Slovakia see Szomolányi, 1997, 9-33.

one could demand from a political party – psychological security of collectivism in the times of rapid social changes and a promise for national and individual prosperity that, according to their beliefs, had been precluded to them during the communist Yugoslavia. Another interesting fact was that at the very beginning the HDZ, because of the fear from the still unpredictable regime, preserved in its activities the image of a half-illegal organization, although other opposition parties emerged at the political scene in a far more open manner.[10]

After the HDZ won the 1990 elections, its gradual institutionalization started. Due to authoritarian nature of the movement, the type of transition (which in Croatian case entailed simultaneously the process of state building) and the impact of the war, the movement transferred much of its values, vocabulary and interpretations of reality into the common symbolic and institutional patterns that were spread out on a large segment of the Croatian society. This was obvious in many domains: from an exclusive ethnic definition of the state and society, across dubious historical reinterpretations and rigid interpretations of the war for independence and national sovereignty to the cultivation of charismatic sentiments and authoritarian practice. These symbolic patterns, transmitted into formal and informal norms and rules, determined activities, behavior and expectations of many, not only political but also social, institutions and actors in such a comprehensive way that it is possible to talk about the regime institutionalization. The main condition for this transfer was the war, during which one particularistic movement was, in a great measure, misinterpreted for an encompassing national struggle for independence.

However, the process of institutionalization of the movement into the political regime, gradually changed the original mechanisms by which the movement sustained its support among the citizens. Firstly, many prominent figures that were incumbents of the early movement in 1989 and 1990 in the later years stopped pursuing their political carriers or withdrew to politically marginal positions. Also, in order to fill in numerous new positions in the national and local government the movement had to open to many new politicians who originally were not members. The same phenomenon happened at the levels of voters between 1990 and 1992.[11] After 1992 or 1993, the regime has sustained its stability, but with decisive differences from the movement in 1990 even in the terms of individual actors.

Secondly, as institutionalization of the nationalistic discourse was progressing and Croatian sovereignty becoming secure, nationalistic type of ideological appeals less and less served as incentives by which the regime could maintain support and loyalty. At the level of elite and party members, ideological incentives have been replaced by material incentives, and clientelism became a more reliable method of keeping on loyalty to the regime. This created strong ties among state institutions, the party and economy, which

[10] The famous slogan of the HDZ at the 1990 elections – "everybody knows" shows best the nature of the party. This certainly the most efficient slogan in the short democratic history of Croatia, was spreading at the same time both a feeling of belonging and a feeling of conspiracy.

[11] Although this fact is hard to observe at the aggregate level, figures generated from the individual level of analysis (public opinion polls) showed that in that period the party exchanged roughly a half of its voters from 1990, in contrast to the following electoral periods marked by a considerably larger portion of the party standpatters (Čular, forthcoming).

resulted in creation of a powerful network of the leading segments of politics and economy. These informal rules have penetrated and dominated formal state and economic institutions. Although ideology continued playing a considerable role in the mobilization of voters, even at this level the regime had to strengthen its efforts by pursuing policies of economic populism.

Thirdly, the charisma of the leader of the HDZ movement was additionally backed by introducing the constitutional design of semi-presidentialism. In this way, the charismatic nature of the movement was efficiently transmitted to the state organization and society as a whole, since an already existing charismatic person got also institutional support. Apart from wide prerogatives by which the semi-presidential system supplied the President, this institutional legitimization of the personal charisma helped Franjo Tuđman to exercise a full control over both the state and the party. The result was an extreme concentration of political power in the hands of one man. He used his power extensively in decision-making in the parliament, government, party, but indirectly also in daily local, educational or sport matters. Simply, the autocratic way of ruling was not only a feature of a party or a segment of government; it became an institution underlying a wide range of political and social activities.

The previous regime came into existence as the result of the institutionalization of the HDZ populist movement into a form of political regime. It is quite clear that the main prerequisite for it was political power that the HDZ seized at the 1990 elections. The fact that the party succeeded in maintaining the electoral support at all later elections and has stayed in control of the government for another nine years allow us to interpret the above sketched changes not only as temporary patterns, but also as the process of institutionalization of a regime that, in the terms of its substance, shares a lot of features with an authoritarian regime. However, the regime did not manage to ensure sufficient support that would enable it to discard the basic democratic procedures and institutions. Although fragile, often facing the conflicting practices and sometimes misused by the ruling party, these institutional constraints have precluded full institutionalization of the authoritarian dictatorship and forced the incumbent party to test its legitimacy at regularly held elections. The abolishment of the existing democratic game would therefore have been a prerequisite for the authoritarian order to become fully institutionalized. It seems that the most suitable term for the existing type of the regime between 1990 and 1999 would be *authoritarian democracy*.[12]

An authoritarian democracy is an unconsolidated democracy almost by definition since the type of politics that develops within such a regime lacks a possibility to reach the basic quality of the democratic game. Moreover, authoritarian democracy in Croatia has precluded the process of democratic consolidation itself. It became the subject and the object at the same time of a sharp political divide that evolved around the question

[12] Every attempt at classifying the past regime within one of the existing democratic types would yield inconsistencies. In my opinion, *authoritarian democracy* (as opposed to *authoritarian dictatorship* or *authoritarianism* on one hand and to *liberal democracy* on the other) would be a more suitable and less contradictory title than, for instance, *dictatorship with democratic legitimacy* as suggested by Pusić (1999, 75-80). In any case, what is important is that the functioning of regime in Croatia was much closer to "delegative democracy" (O`Donnell, 1994) than to "liberal democracy".

of the democratic legitimacy of the existing regime, the nature of the Croatian democracy and meaningfulness of the democratic game. However, if a polity is divided by such a fundamental clash that involves so different interpretations of the existing regime ranging from "one of the most democratic states in Europe" to the labels such as "dictatorship" or "totalitarianism", and if this is reflected in the political field of party competition, it is clear that crucial implication of this type of the politics is stagnation in terms of democratic quality.[13]

Another feature of the regime that has evolved from a wide populist movement is that it naturally tends to jeopardize crafted democratic institutions and procedures, which makes the democratic game uncertain also with regard to its durability. This is embodied in the very logic of institutionalization of the authoritarian democracy, since the democratic game creates an obstacle to its final stage of institutionalization – authoritarian dictatorship. But even if the regime does not make an open step towards abolishment of the democratic procedures, the fragility of democracy is still present in the regime's attempt to use democratic procedures for the aims that conflict with the very sense contained in those procedures. Finally, unpredictability is a permanent and inherent characteristic of authoritarian democracies, even then when all rules of the game are fully respected.

The Problems of Democratic Consolidation

The obstacles to democratic consolidation, created by a particular type of democracy developing in Croatia, made that democracy was not "the only game in town" (Linz/Stepan, 1996, 15). Apart from the lack of the basic consensus at the constitutional level, this can be shown also at the behavioural and attitudinal level of analysis.

At the behavioural level consolidated democracy means that there is no political force with significant support – particularly a political party – whose loyalty to democracy is questionable (Gunther/Diamandouros/Puhle, 1995, 1-32). The most transparent case of such a political force are anti-system parties, which openly express their antidemocratic attitudes, present political programs advocating an antidemocratic alternative and spend significant material resources to overthrow democracy. In most democracies these forces are usually extreme, left-revolutionary or neo-fascist, parties.

However, anti-system forces do not need to be so transparent and organized in the form of a political party. They can operate as groups within democratically established institutions, particularly the military, the police, and intelligence services – the institutions built up on the mechanisms of physical coercion over society. Rather than openly expressing their anti-system attitudes, these groups or group networks can de facto obtain wide autonomy within the system, making decisions of the elected political authorities dependent on or limited by their consent. Such a, de facto, created "reserved

[13] The best example of how a need to oppose to the regime can undermine the meaningfulness of competition is the electoral coalition of the opposition parties at the 1995 local elections in Zagreb. As the aim was to prevent the HDZ from winning majority, the coalition consisted of seven parties that were spread from the left to the far right (Kasapović, 1998). In a similar vein parties competed in the 2000 elections.

domain of power" undermines the logic of the constitutionally guaranteed democratic order, makes every change of government at elections troublesome and uncertain and acts as a threatening force every time when its out-of-the-system-position is openly put into question.

Finally, sometimes a party falls in between and it is hard to judge whether it is a loyal or disloyal actor within democratic polity. Such parties usually express ambiguous, occasional and rather weak support to democracy or they are sharply divided into two or more factions each of them showing different behaviour with regard to democratic norms. Also, a characteristic of semi-loyal actors is that there are significant discrepancies in their rhetoric and their behaviour.[14]

The most open anti-system party in Croatia was SDS, acting from 1990 to 1992 as the main political representative of the Serbian national minority. The party openly opposed the constitution of the state, withdrew from Parliament and, as the leading force, engaged in the violent ethnic rebellion of part of the Serbs living in Croatia. The party was banned by the decision of the Constitutional Court in 1992 on the base of the Constitutional Article that protects territorial integrity and political order of the state. After military defeat of the Serbian state proclaimed by this party, its activity ceased.

Another case of disloyal opposition could refer to HSP, the ultra-nationalist neo-fascist Croatian party. The party entered Parliament after the 1992 elections with 7% of the votes and 5 out of 138 seats in the House of Representatives. In 1995 its electoral support decreased to 5% and 4 parliamentary mandates. However, its relatively weak electoral support and the fact that party leadership peacefully participated within the democratic institutions turned gradually this party from organizer of military units at the beginning of the war into an actor willing to make compromises in order to protect its political position. This development was obvious especially after the HSP changed its leadership in 1993.[15] Yet, the party's radical right-wing position, aggressive rhetoric and mobilization potential should not be underestimated as possible threat to the democratic process in the future.

The biggest problem for Croatian democracy came from the behaviour of the ruling party HDZ and its leader, the President of the Republic Franjo Tuđman. Encouraged by the majority support that both the party and the President have obtained at every national election until 2000, the party exhibited all the features of a semi-loyal political actor. From the very beginning the ruling party had been expressing its ambiguous and selective attitude with regards to the acceptance of democratic norms and rules.[16] Also, it has tended to misrepresent their often sectarian policies for unquestionable national interest and to accuse other parties as anti-system or anti-state elements every time

[14] The concepts of loyalty, disloyalty and semi-loyalty to democracy are originally developed in Linz, 1991, 27-38.

[15] Two prominent party activists were killed during this period, which is the fact that should not be omitted in judging the changing political role of the HSP.

[16] In a very symbolic manner that happened at the ceremony of taking the president's oath of office after the 1992 elections, when President Tuđman supplemented the legally worded oath with his own words.

when the opposition has tried to criticise governmental policies. The dominance of the Presidential Office over Parliament and other state institutions has represented a special problem. It occurred not only as a result of the constitutionally defined broad presidential prerogatives within the semi-presidential system, but also by the establishment of several presidential bodies that have been endangering the constitutionally proclaimed separation of power and centralized decision-making process in a constitutionally problematic way.

Furthermore, a decisive element of a consolidated democracy – unreserved acceptance of the electoral outcomes – has been at times lacking on the side of HDZ.[17] Other evidence of the HDZ's semi-loyalty could be its secret negotiations with the HSP, which ended in a kind of informal coalition between the two parties in the 1997 elections for the House of Counties and local councils. If we add here the general governmental unwillingness to protect human rights (especially when they are violated by the state administration), its arrogance towards the role and decisions of the Constitutional Court, or simply its threatening political rhetoric unsuitable to peaceful democratic processes, it is not hard to see that democracy in Croatia was not fully respected by the very same party who formed the majority and exercised executive power.

Yet, the semi-loyal behaviour of the President and the ruling party was only a consequence of an attempt to balance among several informal factions acting within the party, out of which some behaved as proper disloyal groups and the others showed more respect for the established democratic norms and procedures. These divisions became quite obvious after Spring 1994 when a faction split from the HDZ and formed its own party, accusing at the same time the right wing of the party for antidemocratic tendencies and the President for tolerating such a state. Since this rift it has become clear that a right-wing group of highly positioned partisans with solid ties within the military, police, intelligence and several civil organizations (e.g. associations for war veterans, refugee associations, trade unions) actually represents a strong anti-system force. President Tuđman never showed sufficient will and power to eliminate the sources of such tendencies. He has rather used the existing constellations to make balance within the party, hoping that in such a way he secured his full control over the party.

On the other hand the left-wing opposition parties and their leaders have not engaged in any kind of anti-system actions. Their opposition and pressures on the government have been strictly carried out within the established institutions and procedures and only exceptionally included such measures as withdrawal from Parliament or parliamentary committees. They have not been particularly prone to engage in the street demonstrations or any kind of mass actions either. Notwithstanding this, due to frequent public accusations from HDZ leaders for anti-system and anti-state behaviour, a considerable part of the public considered the opposition parties as the main threat to full development of national interests. This has made the overall political atmosphere impregnated with deep mutual distrust, uncertainty and public diversion on who is and who is

[17] The most obvious case was the so called "Zagreb crisis". After it had won the 1995 local elections for the Zagreb City Assembly, the coalition of opposition parties was hindered by the President to form the local government. Although his decision was founded in the positive law, his public statement said enough: "We can not allow an 'oppositional situation' in the capital".

not a loyal democratic actor. Therefore, it is not strange that the trust of Croatian citizens in the central democratic institution – elections – in 1995 was very close to, or even less than, their trust in the founding 1990 elections held under control of the communist reformers, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Perceptions of the Fairness of Elections

(%)	1990	1992	1995	2000
Yes, fully	13	12	15	11
Yes, mainly	39	38	38	40
No	10	16	16	10
Don't Know	38	35	32	40

Note: The question was framed as follows: "Will the forthcoming elections be fair?"
Source: FPS 1990, 1992, 1995, 2000.

This is a suitable moment to turn to the third level of consolidation – the attitudinal one. In a consolidated democracy, democracy acquires widespread legitimacy. However, one should understand the term legitimacy in its modest meaning – as a general commitment of citizens to democracy, shown by the fact that the overwhelming majority of citizens consider democracy as the only legitimate system or prefer it over other, non-democratic, forms of government.[18]

In this respect consolidation does not necessarily require wide citizens' support to the particular established type of democracy; disagreements on specific institutions and their constitutionally designed roles and relations are possible as long as citizens on the whole consider the procedures by which the rules are decided upon as legitimate. Nor should legitimacy be equaled with deep internalization of advanced democratic political culture including a better popular understanding of the political process, rationality in political behaviour and high political participation. While certainly desirable for the quality of democratic life, neither represents a task of democratic consolidation.

Judging from Table 2, the majority of citizens prefer democracy to the rule of a "strong leader". However, there is an impression that the combined figures in the second and third row ("authoritarian" and undecided respondents) are still extremely high for a democracy to be successfully consolidated. Moreover, it seems that the achieved level of popular support to democracy changes very slightly or not at all over time. In order to talk about consolidated democracy at the level of mass attitudes at least 70%

[18] After David Easton this concept of legitimacy is commonly named "diffuse legitimacy" or "diffuse system support". For argumentation why such general support for democracy can survive notwithstanding widespread public dissatisfaction with the outcomes (due to economic crisis, bad government performance or low efficacy and effectiveness of the system) and even low trust in political institutions see Morlino/Montero, 1995; Linz, 1991, 16-23;and particularly Weil, 1989, 682-706.

citizens of a democratic polity should express clear and undoubted preference to democracy.[19]

Table 2: Democratic Legitimacy in Croatia

(%)	1995	2000
Democracy is always the best	52	53
We need a strong leader	27	23
Don't know	22	24

Note: The question was framed as follows: "Democracy sometimes does not function smoothly. Some people think that what we need is a strong leader who will "resolve things". Others think that democracy is still the best solution, even if it does not function smoothly. What is your opinion?"
Source: FPS 1995, 2000.

Finally, there is the question of how strong anti-system behaviour is supported at the mass level, since it is not the same if anti-democratic attitudes are spread among the supporters of all the parties equally or some parties gain support overwhelmingly by the authoritarian voters. While the former situation still leaves room for the party elites and party organizations to successfully control undesirable developments at the mass level, the latter usually shows that a disloyal or semi-loyal elite can easily mobilize its electorate to threaten democracy, which poses additional problems to the democratic consolidation. As it can be seen from Table 3, the Croatian case is closer to the latter situation.

As the difference between the percentage of "democrats" and "authoritarians" for the whole sample were +25 and +30 in 1995 and 2000 respectively, HDZ and HSP are, beside HSS in 2000, the only parties who attract authoritarian voters above the national average, and these are, as we have seen, also the parties whose commitment to democracy at the behavioural level is the most questionable. Also, HDZ in both years and HSP in 2000 were the only parties that attracted "authoritarian" more than "democratic" voters. On the whole, it is possible to distinguish among parties whose electorate did not change so much its profile with regard to acceptance of democratic values (HDZ, HNS, IDS) and parties that experienced rather visible changes in this respect (HSP, HSLS, SDP). While among the HSP and HSLS supporters the portion of authoritarian voters has undoubtedly increased between 1995 and 2000, SDP has been improving its democratic image along with broadening its electoral support. As a result, in 2000 parties could be grouped in several groups: parties which embrace a high percentage of "democrats" (HNS, LS and SDP), parties with somewhat lower portion of "democrats" (HSLS, IDS) and parties among whose supporters prevail "authoritarians" (HSP, HDZ). HSS voters belong somewhere in between with a rather balanced relationship between

[19] For a comprehensive data on democratic legitimacy in the "third wave democracies" during eighties and nineties see Diamond, 1998, 174-184. Unfortunately, due to entirely different wording of survey questions, non of these figures can be directly compared to Croatia.

"democrats" and "authoritarians". If we take into consideration the actual electoral strength of the parties, the voters not committed to the democratic game who in 1995 overwhelmingly supported HDZ, in 2000 are more dispersed to other political parties. This development could be conducive to the process of spreading democratic legitimacy in the future. However, in the measure in which "authoritarians" turned away from any political party in 2000, it could posit new problems to democratic consolidation.[20]

Table 3: Democratic Legitimacy and Party Preference (horizontal percentage)

Party Preference	1995				2000			
	Democrats	*Authoritarians*	*Undecided*	*Dem. - Auth.*	*Democrats*	*Authoritarians*	*Undecided*	*Dem. - Auth.*
HDZ	40	45	15	-5	38	45	17	-7
HNS*	71	10	19	+61	79	12	9	+67
HSLS	72	11	17	+61	66	21	13	+45
HSS*	50	24	26	+26	39	26	35	+13
HSP	56	34	10	+22	33	46	22	- 13
IDS*	65	14	22	+51	58	11	32	+47
LS	-	-	-	-	72	3	25	+69
SDP	59	25	16	+34	72	9	20	+63
Cramer's V	.24**				.29**			

Note: For the formulation of the question, see Table 2.

* the 1995 figures refer to the party identifiers and not party voters
** $p < .01$

Source: FPS 1995, 2000.

Consolidation and the Basic Quality of Democratic Game

In conclusion, we have seen that the established democracy in Croatia is still a fragile one in which the rules of the democratic game have not yet been widely accepted by citizens, acknowledged by political parties and generally taken as a habitual part of the political process. Moreover, some minor improvements notwithstanding, we cannot state that the process of consolidation ever started at all, since considerable obstacles to such a process to take place existed until 2000. These obstacles, however, are only in a smaller part inherited from the socialist past (I primarily take into account the lack of significant democratic political culture and traditions); they have been created during Croatian transition and after, due to the type of transition, the war and nature of the ruling party. This only on the surface stands in sharp contrast to a rather fast process of transition and establishment of the main political institutions. Much of the Croatian postponed consolidation phase can be accounted for exactly by the principle result of the transition in Croatia – though not complete, in a great part successful, institutionalization of authoritarian democracy. That is why the lack of consensus on the formal type

[20] Although it is hard to catch sufficient portion of abstinents in public polls to make reliable conclusions, there is a serious impression that exactly this happened in the 2000 election in Croatia.

of political system, behavior of the main political actors, and public attitudes to democracy are not only just separate dimensions that seek to be successfully kept on the consolidation track; they were coupled together in the form of an intense regime divide that underlined the whole political life in contemporary Croatia and determined the logic of party competition, coalition strategies and voters' electoral choices.

Although these traces in a great part continue to exist in Croatian political life also after the January-February elections, these elections were a cut-point from which it is possible to start a careful crafting of the process of democratic consolidation. Successful consolidation of democracy in Croatia means step-by-step strategy for isolation or/and incorporation of anti-system opposition parties, adapting the basic rules of the game in such a way to secure a wider consensus among both elites and the masses and strengthening democratic legitimacy. The pace and nature of gradual dissolution of the institutionalized patterns of political behaviour (primarily with regard to institutionalized group interests) which has to be undertaken by the winning coalition on the one hand and the behaviour of the former semi-loyal ruling party elite on the other are variables that will most directly determine the success of the consolidation process. In this respect, the way in which the new ruling coalition and the President led and completed the process of the constitutional changes do not promise much.

The situation in which Croatian democracy for a long time was not (and still is not) "the only game in town", but rather "a game with reserves" ruins not so much the chances for democratic survival, but rather for improvements of the basic quality of the democratic game. One should not aim so high to include in the term efficient and effective economic and social policies, even less the general quality of life of the population. The basic quality of the democratic game refers simply to the point from which gradual, but comprehensive, improvements in the political inputs of democracy are allowed: more transparent competition, better representation, responsiveness and accountability, more effective participation, more rational electoral choices, etc. In the case of an unconsolidated democracy such as Croatia, regardless of how such a democracy survived and how long it continues to survive, that point can not be easily reached.

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