

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CROATIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION IN THE BELGRADE WEEKLY *NIN* DURING 1990

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The author analyzes perceptions of the Croatian Democratic Union in the Belgrade-based weekly newsmagazine *NIN* during the course of 1990. The media in Serbia played a major role in preparing the mood leading up to the Serbian aggression against Croatia in 1991. *NIN*, as one of the most influential publications on the Yugoslav media scene, was no exception, so its activities during 1990 are relevant.

Key words: *NIN*, media, perception, Croatian Democratic Union

Introduction

I commenced the analysis of the texts covered in this work with an issue of *NIN* which featured an alternative scheme for the political parties and associations in Croatia, published on 17 December 1989, and concluded it with the issue dated 28 December 1990. The work is divided into thematic units of texts dealing with the Croatian Democratic Union (hereinafter referred to by its better-known Croatian acronym HDZ). I examined all issues published within the period encompassed by this analysis. I should also note that after the party's electoral victory in May of that year, perceptions of the HDZ generally became perceptions of the new democratically elected Croatian authorities and the Croatian state in general, and that during the course of this analysis I could not find any aspect of the HDZ's policies treated positively in this weekly's coverage.

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The Political Crisis in Yugoslavia and the Establishment of Alternative Political Organizations

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereinafter: SFRY) endured a deep political and economic crisis in the 1980s, which culminated at the end of this decade. The Serbian communist leadership headed by Slobodan Milošević had deposed the top officials in the Serbian autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, and in the Socialist Republic of Montenegro. These imposed amendments to the constitution of socialist Serbia in 1989 restricted the political autonomy of both Vojvodina and Kosovo, which effectively overturned the political structure of communist Yugoslavia as established under the Constitution of 1974.¹ These changes were pushed through by means of the so-called “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, a term coined in Serbia to refer to radical Serbian nationalism which expressed itself in mass rallies.²

The Croatian League of Communists stayed on the sidelines during these changes. Only the few protest rallies held in the territory of the then Socialist Republic of Croatia populated by a significant percentage of Serbs provoked a rather half-hearted response.³ These indicators of the political system’s collapse led to the appearance of non-communist political groups, their legal registration, and then the first democratic elections held in Slovenia and Croatia in 1990.⁴

These newly-established democratic institutions included the HDZ. The first meeting of the HDZ initiative group was held in the premises of the Croatian Association of Writers in Zagreb on 28 February 1989. A preliminary platform consisting of fourteen points was adopted at this meeting.⁵ This event did

¹ For more on the last decade of the Yugoslav communist state, see Zdenko Radelić, *Hrvatska u Jugoslaviji 1945.-1991.* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), pp. 489-579. On the dismantling of the Yugoslav constitutional framework by the Serbian communist leadership, see more details in Borisav Jović, *Datum za istoriju: 28 mart. 1989.* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1989).

² For more on these political events and their character, see Olivera Milosavljević, “Antibirokratska revolucija, 1987.-1989.,” Hans-Georg Fleck, Igor Graovac, eds., *Dijalog povjesničara - istoričara* 8, Hans-Georg Fleck, Igor Graovac (Zagreb: Zaklada Friedrich Naumann, 2005), pp. 319.-337.

³ For more on the politics of the Croatian communists during this period, see Zdenko Duka, *Račan: Biografija* (Zagreb: Profil international, 2005), pp. 38-52; Nikica Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj 1990.-1995.* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2005), pp. 42-52.

⁴ On the establishment of alternative associations in Slovenia, see Dimitrij Rupel, *Skrivnost države: spomini na domače i zunanje zadeve 1989.- 1990.* (Ljubljana: Delo Novice, 1992), pp.10-40; Janez Janša, *Premiki: nastajanje in obramba slovenske države 1988.-1992.* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga Ljubljana, 1992), pp. 11.-46.; while for Croatia see Z. Radelić, *Hrvatska u Jugoslaviji 1945.-1991.* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006.), pp. 590-591.

⁵ “Prednacrt programske osnove Hrvatske demokratske zajednice, 28. February 1989.,” photocopy of document in author’s possession.

not go unnoticed in Serbia, and the 12 March 1989 edition of *NIN* carried an article on the establishment of the HDZ under “the leadership of the notorious Franjo Tuđman”. The text included the assertion that an “undeservedly” small amount of space was accorded to this event, while Tuđman himself was portrayed as a “Maspok activist” (a reference to the Croatian national mass movement, *masovni pokret*, that was brutally suppressed by the communist authorities in 1971) and an “ambitious Croatian national socialist”. The remaining members of the initiative to establish the HDZ were also presented, as well as basic outlines of their statements, generally characterized as “militant” and “open attacks on the system in Yugoslavia”. The foreign press, generally “reactionary and confused”, had “welcomed” the establishment of yet another democratic association in Yugoslavia, while Tuđman’s statement that even Serbs could be members of the newly-established association prompted the question of why Serbs would even want to join such an association. Tuđman’s evocation of the teachings of Ante Starčević and Stjepan Radić in his programme was assessed as negative, given that they “suspected” that these were “the greatest and most brilliant heroes of the Croatian nation and Croatian history”.⁶

The HDZ was formally established on 17 June 1989, when the party’s programme declaration was also adopted. The party’s first convention was held in Zagreb on 24-25 February 1990, at which the delegates adopted positions on all vital political issues. The principal positions entailed: the struggle against centralization at the federal level, the enactment of constitutional amendments exclusively by a freely-elected Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*), the introduction of private property in the economy, a halt to allocation of Croatian revenues for the underdeveloped parts of the federal state and the development of Croatia’s economic infrastructure. Franjo Tuđman was elected the party’s chairman, while the HDZ became the leading alternative to communist policy, which was confirmed by its victory in the democratic elections held in spring 1990.⁷

The Weekly *NIN* and the *Politika* News Organization After the Eighth session of the Central Committee of the Serbian League of Communists

The first issue of the weekly newsmagazine *Nedjeljne informativne novine* (hereinafter *NIN*) was published in Belgrade on 25 January 1935. It was banned after 35 issues were printed, and only resumed publication on 7 January 1951.⁸ The weekly was published by the news publishing group Novinska organizacija *Politika* (hereinafter NO *Politika*), which also published two daily newspaper,

⁶ “Vampiri maspoka”, *NIN* (Belgrade), 12 March 1989, pp. 12-13.

⁷ *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica: 1989.-1998.* (Zagreb: Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, 1998), pp. 13-15.

⁸ Impressum, *NIN*, 17 December 1989, p. 2.

Politika and *Politika ekspres*. The NO *Politika* publications exerted a significant influence on public opinion in Serbia, and control of this media concern was vital to all governments, so in this regard it was under the control of the Communist Party.⁹ In September 1987, the eighth session of the Central Committee of the Serbian League of Communist (hereinafter: CK SKS) was held, at which Slobodan Milošević secured his dominance in Serbia, while Milošević's former political mentor Ivan Stambolić, as the head of the opposing faction, was quickly forced to step down from his posts.¹⁰

Not even a month after the CK SKS eighth session, Ivan Stojanović, the director of NO *Politika*, was also dismissed. His ouster was initiated by the Socialist Alliance of the Working People (hereinafter SSRN) of Serbia, and he was replaced by Živorad Minović, who was until then the editor-in-chief of the daily *Politika*. The official reason for his replacement was his poor performance, but his actual transgression was that he publicly complained that the daily newspaper *Politika* was toeing the line of Serbian nationalism.¹¹ The change at NO *Politika*'s top post opened the way for further staff changes inside the media concern involving anyone who had not supported Milošević until then. In their interpretation of political events at the time, most of the journalists in *NIN*'s editorial board preferred the options advocated by Stambolić.¹² In early November 1987, *NIN*'s editor-in-chief, Mirko Đekić, whose texts called for a lowering of tensions surrounding the Kosovo problem, responded to the frequent criticism from the City Committee of the Belgrade League of Communists and the CK SKS prompted by their dissatisfaction with his writing in the weekly. Đekić told them that *NIN*'s journalists do not wish to write under orders "as in certain days past". He was dismissed in November 1987, also at the initiative of the Serbian SSRN, with the explanation that his term had expired.¹³

The Serbian communist party's Information Commission held a session in early November to deal with the situation in the Serbian press, and it particularly highlighted the increased level of reporting and a uniformity of views on the problems in Kosovo. Its members ascertained that certain publications were not objectively reporting and that they were putting forth reactionary

⁹ Aleksandar Nenadović, "Politika u nacionalističkoj oluji", Nebojša Popov, ed., *Srpska strana rata: trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju, II deo* (Belgrade: Samizdat B 92, 2002.), pp. 151-177.

¹⁰ For more on Stambolić's dismissal, see Ivan Stambolić, Slobodan Inić, *Put u bespuće: odgovori Ivana Stambolića na pitanja Slobodana Inića / Ivan Stambolić* (Belgrade: Radio B-92, 1995).

¹¹ "Dr. Ivan Stojanović razrešen dužnosti direktora NO *Politika*", *Politika*, 13 October 1987, pp. 1, 5-7, "Smenjivanje direktora *Politike*", *NIN*, 18 October 1987, pp. 17-19.

¹² Slavoljub ĐUKIĆ, *Kako se dogodio vođa, borbe za vlast u Srbiji posle Josipa Broza* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić 1992), p. 123.

¹³ "Značenje reči", 1. November 1987, *NIN*, pp. 9-10; "Mirko Đekić razriješen dužnosti glavnog i odgovornog urednika *NIN*-a", *NIN*, 8. November 1987, p. 8.

positions. After its session, the Commission released a statement in which it stated that some editors in the Serbian media had not been dismissed for political reasons, but rather due to incompetence. The Commission's ultimate conclusion was that "whose battle the press propagates is extremely important".¹⁴ Soon after this session, a new management team for NO Politika was selected. Conclusions on the new operating and editorial policies for the coming period were adopted, and the most important of these was that deviations would be "carefully monitored" through an analysis of texts, while a common policy for all NO Politika publications would be established.¹⁵

At a session of *NIN*'s Publishing Advisory Board held on 26 May 1988, the weekly's editorial policy underwent scrutiny, as were the conflicts inside the editorial board after the Central Committee's eighth session. Journalists in the editorial board had split into supporters and opponents of Serbia's new political leadership. The Advisory Board concluded that of staff of *NIN*'s editorial board needed to be rejuvenated, and in this regard a constructive debate on the weekly's editorial policy was conducted. A task force inside the Serbian party's Central Committee was also formed to deal with this matter, but it drew no conclusions.¹⁶ This outcome signified the beginning of the marginalization of the remaining journalists in the editorial board who wrote critically about Milošević and the direction of his policies.

The changes in the editorial policy soon became evident. In July 1988, an extensive interview with Milošević was published. The interview was conducted by *NIN*'s editor-in-chief, his deputy and the politics section editor.¹⁷ This set of journalists conducting the interview with Milošević demonstrated that the latter had finally placed this weekly under his complete control. Milošević's political victory made it possible for him to appoint loyalists to the new political leadership throughout the system, including the media. Milošević's understanding of the media and his attitude toward them were illustrated by one of his closest associates, Borisav Jović:

"For years he dedicated the most attention to the means of disseminating information, especially television. He personally selected the chief editors in newspapers and news programmes, and particularly the directors of radio and television stations. Perhaps nowhere more than in this field did he maintain a direct line to all editors who 'fed' the public with news, commentary and information in general. He was deeply convinced that citizens formed their views on political matters based on what is served to them, rather than based on their actual financial or political status."¹⁸

¹⁴ "Još odlučnije protiv nacionalizma", *Politika*, 10 November 1987, pp. 5-7.

¹⁵ "Neophodna stabilizacija", *Politika*, 13 November 1987, p. 8.

¹⁶ "Sednica Izdavačkog saveta NIN-a", *NIN*, 5 June 1988, p. 14.

¹⁷ "Jugoslavija i socijalizam – istorijske tekovine", *NIN*, 3 July 1988, pp. 8-15.

¹⁸ Borisav Jović, *Knjiga o Miloševiću* (Belgrade: Nikola Pašić, 2001), p. 13.

The HDZ, the Ustasha Movement and Croatian Émigré Communities in *NIN*

The issue cover-dated 17 December 1989 contained a feature from Zagreb on the signing of a civic petition. The holding of extraordinary democratic elections was one of the petition demands, and the article's author did not neglect noting that the signature drive was being conducted by illegal parties and associations. The article further contained an alternative scheme of political parties and associations in the Socialist Republic of Croatia. The HDZ was classified as a right-wing party which saw Yugoslavia as a federation with maximum sovereignty for its constituent republics, or better yet as a confederation. The article went on to note that the Serbian minority in Croatia was guaranteed ethnic and civil rights, while the territorial totality of the Croatian nation in its historical and natural borders was sought. It was noted that the HDZ could be the primary political competitor for the communists in potential democratic elections. The membership of the party was estimated at 60,000, with a great deal of influence among Croatian émigré communities, while in the section dealing with leadership, it was observed that other parties had platforms, while the HDZ "had Franjo Tuđman". It was believed that if the HDZ assumed power, it would become "less radical", while "the greatest threat to the party would be the forcing of cult of personality either by hook or by crook".¹⁹

The 25 February 1990 issue contained texts dealing with the relationship between the HDZ and fascist Independent State of Croatia during World War II (hereinafter: NDH). The first text analyzed Croatia's multiparty scene. Thus, it included reports of sources of financing for Croatian political parties, noting that "some of these parties, first and foremost Tuđman's HDZ, are generally receiving funds from abroad, and even from organizations that are openly Ustasha". It goes on to mention that one of these financiers was "[Ustasha leader Ante] Pavelić's former confidant Srećko Rover", who was "inextricably tied to organized training of Ustasha terrorists in Australia".²⁰

The 4 March 1990 issue once more contained texts on the HDZ. The first was a report on the HDZ's first convention in Zagreb. Tuđman's declaration about the NDH, interpreted by the assertion that it was "stated openly and unambiguously that the Ustasha NDH is a part of the continuity in the exercise of the Croatian historical statehood right" and "that this continuity was not interrupted with the fall of the Ustasha and the NDH". The arrival of a certain number of Croatian émigrés to the HDZ's convention was this time described as "not illegal, with arms, coming from some old or new Janko Puszt [a training centre for Ustasha émigrés in Hungary during the 1930s – *author's note*], by rather in a genuine airborne landing by commercial flight", while the placing

¹⁹ "Sveće i Hrvatska – ponovno Maspok", *NIN*, 17 December 1989, pp. 10-14.

²⁰ "Nacional-po(d)mirenje", *NIN*, 25 February 1990, pp. 16-17.

of wreaths at the tomb of Cardinal Stepinac by an HDZ delegation purportedly indicated “a new paradigm of behaviour” in Croatia.²¹ The following text included the assessment that Partisan general and historian Franjo Tuđman had uttered “the first post-war public defence of the NDH in socialist Yugoslavia”. There was also a critique of an observation made by a reporter for the Zagreb daily *Vjesnik*, who said the HDZ convention “simultaneously brought euphoria and trepidation, but these are legitimate components of democracy”. In this vein, it was suggested to this reporter from Zagreb how even “greater trepidation” than that produced by Tuđman could be generated, by “making official the ‘Root Orthography’, using this new speech to formulate the ‘Law on the Defence of the People and State’ or to rewrite Pavelić’s old law of the same content” and by “issuing the ‘Law on the Protection of the Aryan Blood and Honour of the Croatian Nation’ or to rewrite Pavelić’s old law”. The text closes with a question posed to the Zagreb reporter as to whether he was “fond” of the HDZ’s political positions, given his “uncritical” stance on this party.²²

This is followed by an analysis of Tuđman’s biography. One of his polemics from 1969 is cited, with the observation that already “then one could discern Tuđman’s view of Ante Pavelić with different eyes”, as well as “Tuđman’s re-orientation to a new vocabulary predominated by antiquated Croatian words which the Ustasha excavated from antiquity”. The text also discusses Tuđman’s claims about “the exaggeration of the number of victims of the Jasenovac camp” and his stance “on the alleged massacre of captive Ustasha at Bleiburg”.²³ The final text on this topic contained another retrospective on the HDZ general convention, with the observation that this gathering, “with its messages and symbols, restored the aroma of times past when the Independent State of Croatia was being formed”. Thus, there were allegations of “the concern of some citizens” over the HDZ convention in Zagreb, so that one citizen asked “whether our authorities are aware of how many Ustasha entered Yugoslavia for the occasion”, while another asked whether Tuđman was “preparing a reprisal of the Frankist struggle to create the NDH with new protagonists and in another guise”. The conclusion was that even the Croatian communists “could not stand aside” after these outbursts by the HDZ, as evidenced by the warning made by Croatian communist leader Ivica Račan that the HDZ was “a party of dangerous intentions”.²⁴

The issue published on 11 March 1990 featured a report from the rally of Serbs on a mountain called Petrova Gora in Croatia. The view was expressed that the call by Yugoslav Army General Pekić to have Tuđman arrested based on effective Yugoslav law should not be treated by the Croatian media as “an attack by the Serbs on the Croats.” One of the participants in the rally alleged

²¹ “HDZ i NDH”, *NIN*, 4 March 1990, p. 9.

²² “Aplauz u Zagrebu”, *NIN*, 4 March 1990, p. 12.

²³ “Metamorfoze jednog generala”, *NIN*, 4 March 1990, pp. 13-14.

²⁴ “Stranka opasnih namera”, *NIN*, 4 March 1990, pp. 14-15.

that “Franjo Tuđman is restoring Pavelić’s fifty year-old idea on an ethnically pure Croatia and genocide of the Serbs”, but that “this time Tuđman does not, like Pavelić back then, have Hitler and Mussolini backing him”. The text concludes with a criticism of the communist authorities, accompanied by the question as to whether “it was necessary to wait for the appearance of Franjo Tuđman with his hysterical ideas of a fascist troglodyte and indications of a new genocide against the remaining Serbs in Croatia”.²⁵ The issue published on 15 April 1990 analyzed the Croatian party scene on the eve of democratic elections. Tuđman and the HDZ were placed in the “right wing” of Croatian politics. The end of the text included a response from certain Croatian communists that Tuđman’s statement about the NDH meant that “the belief in the genocidal nature of the Croatian people obtained a new advocate”, so that in this regard the ultimate conclusion was that many Croats, “regardless of the assessments coming from the HDZ’s central leadership, do not want to ‘poke the hornet’s nest’ by voting for the HDZ”.²⁶

The 3 June 1990 issue featured a report from the first ceremonial session of the multi-party Parliament in Zagreb, and began with statements from witnesses about the mood in Zagreb on that day. They claimed that “there was not even this much adulation when German troops, stepping over flowers, marched into Zagreb”. This was followed by a description of the course of the ceremonial parliamentary session, the guests in attendance, and the content of the letter from Jovan Rašković on the reasons why deputies from the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) did not attend. The conclusion was that “nothing should be expected” from the Croatian opposition because of the HDZ’s absolute parliamentary majority.²⁷

A text published in the issue dated 6 July analyzed the HDZ’s political priorities after their electoral victory. According to the analysis, there was no disputing that after the proposed constitutional amendments Croatia would “lose its socialist features”, but it was clear “that the Serbs certainly do not want a flag with that coat-of-arms which irresistibly recalls that used by the Ustasha”. The piece also announced the preparation of a document by SDS deputies on the Serbian casualties of the Ustasha regime in Croatia, which would be sent to the United Nations.²⁸

The 3 August 1990 issue contained a text in which it was claimed that anyone in Croatia questioned only a few months before would have denied “that the flag under which the Ustasha perpetrated crimes during World War II could have become the official flag of the new Croatia”. The HDZ was criticized because under its patronage in Croatia, “everything became national” and that

²⁵ “Kordun i sabor”, *NIN*, 11 March 1990, p. 9.

²⁶ “Hoće li Hrvatska udesno?”, *NIN*, 15 April 1990, pp. 13-14.

²⁷ “Dan oslobođenja”, *NIN*, 3 June 1990, pp. 13-14.

²⁸ “Ruši li HDZ Hrvatsku”, *NIN*, 6 July 1990., pp.18-20.

their “idea of national reconciliation of the Croatian people had not thus far existed within the borders of the SFRY”. It was also alleged that the HDZ had created the view “that during the Second World War a civil war was waged in Croatia in which the communists and Serbs toppled the democratic NDH”, and that “the Croatian communists also had their vision of Croatia, but the conflicts between these visions had led to conflicts within the Croatian nation”. Račan’s initiative for a joint visit, together with Tuđman and Rašković, to the site of the Ustasha massacre in the town of Glina and then the Partisan killing ground at Jazovka was assessed as “theft of the HDZ’s idea of reconciliation”. It was claimed that former Partisan movement member Franjo Tuđman did not oppose the announced conferral of pensions to Ustasha and Home Guardists, because “there is an obligation” to the organizations which financed the HDZ’s campaign, in whose premises there were “many photographs of a certain other doctor” [a reference to Ante Pavelić, who was a doctor of laws – *author’s note*].²⁹

In the issue published on 31 August 1990, the topic was the Serbian revolt, as well as an analysis of the social and economic problems in this area. In interviews with the local Serbian population, many stated that the Serbs “did not benefit much” from the many years of aid to Croatia’s underdeveloped areas. The Yugoslav People’s Army was praised for preventing “civil war” by stopping the Croatian police from establishing its constitutional authority. The text closed with the conclusion that interethnic hatred would have been less intense had there been among the Croatian people during the post-war period “a person who would have begged the Serbs for forgiveness for Ustasha crimes”.³⁰

In the following text in this same issue, the Serbian revolt in Croatia was justified as a “normal move” because of the “aggressive intent of Croatia to secede from Yugoslavia”. The causes of the revolt were seen also in “the HDZ’s constitutional changes and discriminatory provisions, extreme Croatocentrism verging on an open Ustashism”, and the policy of “national reconciliation of Croats which rehabilitates the NDH and in which the stakes for this reconciliation are the over one million Serbian bodies felled in genocide”. The text ended with an statement from SDS chairman Jovan Rašković that with these actions the Serbs “have defeated Ustashism and the Ustasha movement”.³¹

The text published in the 21 September 1990 issue dealt with the problem of Ustasha crimes and present-day Croatia. The claim was made that the then current HDZ government had “in record time managed to create a situation in which its non-Croat inhabitants” have “an abundance of reasons for anxiety and uncertainty”. As an example, the return of the “Ustasha writer” Vinko Nikolić is mentioned, and his biography and current positions were analyzed. The public was also informed that the journal *Response*, published by Simon

²⁹ “Potezi koji ne iznenaduju”, *NIN*, 3 August 1990, pp. 18-20.

³⁰ “Uža Hrvatska”, *NIN*, 31 August 1990, pp. 10-16.

³¹ “Udara nije ni bilo”, *NIN*, 31 August 1990, p. 17.

Wiesenthal, published an analysis of Tuđman's works on Jasenovac, in which Tuđman and the HDZ were accused of "reviving the Ustasha ideology and minimizing Jewish casualties in the NDH".³²

The link between the HDZ and the NDH was also the topic of texts carried in the 5 October 1990 issue. The first text began with the assertion that nobody should be surprised by the "fascistoid brutality and Ustashoid pogrom of the Serbian people in Croatia by the Croatian authorities", and once more recalled Tuđman's statement about the NDH from the HDZ convention. It further claimed that after the HDZ's electoral victory, the Croatian Parliament had become a "place of totalitarian policy and revocation of the rights of the Serbian people", while in "Croatia columns of Serbs are fleeing as in 1941". The text ended by calling on all sides to "resolve the problem through referendums with all possible demarcations", because the prevailing state of affairs could bring "consequences similar to 1941" for the Serbian people.³³

The HDZ, the Roman Catholic Church and the Ustasha Movement in *NIN*

The 1 May issue of the weekly analyzed the attitude of the Vatican and the Catholic Church on the HDZ's electoral victory. The conclusion was that "exultation characterized the Vatican's response to the electoral outcome in Croatia", for the Catholic Church in Croatia provided "logistical support" to the HDZ in these elections. The message from Radio Vatican on the Church's assistance to the birth of democracy in Croatia was interpreted as meaning that in certain "outbursts of nationalism" the Church had equated itself with the HDZ, so that it was uncertain as to who came to whom first, "the cross to Tuđman, or Tuđman to the cross". It was also alleged that many of the faithful, at the behest of Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, "forsook" Pope John Paul II's pastoral visit to Bratislava in order to "pay homage" to the HDZ in the elections. These events in Croatia were portrayed and assessed as a component of the creation of "Catholic conformism" after so many others in the past, among them that of the "Habsburgs, and then Hitler's, Mussolini's and Stalin's".³⁴

The next text on this topic was actually an interview with Simon Wiesenthal, conducted in his office in Vienna, which appeared in an issue published in October. Wiesenthal explained his views of the NDH. He considered the change in the name of Victims of Fascism Square in Zagreb a mistake made by the HDZ's government, and noted that he had sent a telegram to the Croatian authorities protesting the move. He also said his people had disrupted

³² "Vizental protiv Tuđmana", *NIN*, 21 September 1990, pp. 12-14.

³³ "Ponovno ustaše", *NIN*, 5 October 1990, pp. 8-9.

³⁴ "Vatikan i izbori u Hrvatskoj", 6 May 1990, pp. 11.

Tuđman's press conference in Washington, DC, while his office was monitoring the activities of the new Croatian authorities after Tuđman's statement on the NDH. To the question of "the ties between the Catholic Church and the Ustaša movement", he pointed out the case of the priest Krunoslav Draganović, while when asked if he was concerned over "the legitimated appearance of Ustaša symbols, Wiesenthal responded that he had already answered this with well-grounded arguments in his journal *Response*.³⁵

A text published in the 12 October issue analyzed the message from Zagreb Cardinal Franjo Kuharić. He was called out because he had allegedly "accused the Serbs of preparing to kill Croats", and this was concluded on the basis of the cardinal's message in which he warned about "the forces attempting to imperil Croatia's young democracy". All of these messages from "the highest Croatian clero-nationalist leader", it was claimed, "benefited" the HDZ, while even "darker forces than they themselves" stood behind them. The priest Luka Vincetić was praised because he had criticized the HDZ. According to him, the HDZ had begun "to exploit church celebrations" to disseminate political messages, and Vincetić's statements were the foundation for the assessment of "the picture of Croatian clero-nationalism", which was "a symbiosis of Tuđmanism and Kuharićism".³⁶

The HDZ and the Croatian Serbs in *NIN*

A report from Baranja was published in the 4 February 1990 issue. The individuals interviewed for the report were generally members of the Croatian League of Communists of Serbian ethnicity, who commented on the abrupt end of the fourteenth Congress of the Yugoslav League of Communists (SKJ). Besides these thoughts, those interviewed also made the observation that Baranja had "always belonged to Vojvodina, but that it was attached to Croatia by political decree". One interlocutor, by vocation a history teacher, claimed that political ideas in Croatia "have their roots as far back as the Frankists and Ustaša", and the feature concludes with an announcement of the arrival of "Šeksists" and "Tuđmanists" at the founding assembly of the HDZ in Duboševica in Baranja.³⁷ The same issue featured an interview with Zvonimir Marković, the head of the Split branch of HDZ. When asked if a Serb could be a member of the HDZ, he answered affirmatively, because the HDZ was "a broad and democratic" organization.³⁸

³⁵ "Hrvatski kampf", *NIN*, 5 October 1990, pp. 15-17.

³⁶ "Kardinal-huškač", *NIN*, 12 October 1990, pp. 16-17.

³⁷ "U Baranji bez Račana", *NIN*, 4 February 1990, pp. 16-17; on the discontinued fourteenth party congress, see Jović, *Knjiga o Miloševiću*, pp. 52-58.

³⁸ "U Evropu posebno", *NIN*, 4 February 1990, p. 26.

A text carried in the 18 February 1990 issue is actually a response from HDZ member Šime Đodan from Šibenik. Đodan stated that the “Croatian Serbs are essentially Croats from Herzegovina who were converted to Orthodoxy by deception”. After this, it was asserted that “this is the last step in the evolutionary journey of the Serbian body in Croatia”, and that “the Serbian question in Croatia should be considered settled”. Finally he concluded that after such statements, “it should not surprise anyone” if “soon demands” for Serbian territorial autonomy in Croatia emerge.³⁹

A report from Croatia published in the 29 April 1990 analyzed the results of the first round of the multiparty elections. The HDZ’s victory was not surprising, since it was “the most Croatian among the parties” in the elections. It was assessed that a major contribution to the HDZ’s victory was made by the Croatian communists, whose principal opponent was Milošević and the Yugoslav League of Communists Central Committee rather than the HDZ. Since the HDZ did not conceal its confederalist, or – as *NIN*’s reporter called it – “separatist” orientation, the future political organization of Yugoslavia came into question. All of this led to concern over the fate of the Serbian people, for it was claimed that certain “statements by some distinguished representatives of the HDZ on this matter give cause for worry”.⁴⁰

The 20 May 1990 issue featured an extensive interview with Serbian Democratic Party leader Jovan Rašković. Rašković believed that the new Croatian government formed by the HDZ “could reduce the level of Serbophobia” in Croatian society, but that Tuđman had won the elections running on Croatocentrism. In its election campaign, he said, the HDZ “dealt the least” with the Serbian political scene and Milošević, but it still trounced the remaining Croatian parties which built their campaigns on these issues. According to Rašković, this new political reality, meaning the victory of Croatocentrism and the HDZ, will “awaken” the Serbian people, even though he noted that the HDZ was “not the most rightward Croatian party, but rather the most militant”. He shared parts of his conversation with Tuđman, as well as his offer for the SDS to cooperate with the HDZ in Parliament. He claimed that the “SDS hawks are not dangerous” like those of the HDZ, because they “do not control the government”. The HDZ’s concept of “the sovereignty of the majority people” was not a problem for the Serbian people, insofar as the future Croatian constitution “validates their sovereignty” in the national body. When asked if he had been too lenient toward the HDZ’s policies, he responded that “I have even asked myself if my positions had given a pass to the Serbophobia” from the HDZ’s ranks. He also deemed that the “plebiscitary” support of the Croatian people for the HDZ was an opportunity to build a state in which the “Serbian people would be institutionally established”. Tuđman, in his view, had “played” with an open hand from the start, and there was “no ideological fog”

³⁹ “Buđenje srpskih Hrvata”, *NIN*, 18 February 1990, pp. 20.-21.

⁴⁰ “Zašto pobjeđuje Tuđman”, *NIN*, 29 April 1990, pp. 9-11.

in his positions, so in this regard it was “the responsibility” of the HDZ to grant the Serbian people rights and freedoms. He announced to Tuđman a spiritual parliament of the Serbs in Croatia, to which he was told that the HDZ does not oppose this, and that he was also given support for his initiative to include the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina in this. In the end, Rašković concluded that the cultural ties between the Serbian people from the two republics did not trouble Tuđman, for they facilitated his political interests concerning Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴¹

Considerable support for the beginning of the Serbian revolt in Knin was expressed in the issue published on 24 August 1990. The Croatian police force operating in the area of Benkovac and Obrovac were actually, according to the weekly, “special armed units of the HDZ” that had been “successfully thwarted”, while the entire Knin region was preparing to defend itself from “state terror”. The text closed with a conservation with an attorney of Croat ethnicity from Zadar who came to Knin to offer “support to the Serbian people” in their struggle. He claimed that all Croatian state institutions had become “helpmates of the HDZ”, and predicted the outcome of these events by saying that “the Serbs hold the situation in their hands, not them. If the HDZ drags its feet in resolving the Serbian question, the Serbs will raise an uprising and the army will have to take control”.⁴² This issue also featured an interview with Serbian historian Vasilije Krestić. He provided a chronology of the Serbian people’s history in Croatia from the end of the nineteenth century. He characterized the HDZ’s policies as “retrograde”, because it had returned to “Frankist postulates”. He also warned the Croatian leadership to “refrain from carelessly playing with a fire that may burn them”, and that this path to potential war will involve “all Serbs, regardless of their ideological or party preferences”.⁴³

The 14 September 1990 issue contained an interview with Milan Babić, the chairman of the Municipal Assembly of Knin and a member of the top leadership of the SDS. He shared certain details from a meeting with Croatian officials Josip Boljkovac and Slavko Degoricija held in Donji Lapac. Babić claimed that the HDZ was “not concealing” its intent to remove Croatia from Yugoslavia. He added that the SDS was also not concealing its own intentions, as it demanded “cultural autonomy” for the Serbs if the federation remained intact, and “territorial autonomy with the right to self-determination” in case of formation of a confederation or the break-up of Yugoslavia. He believed that “most Croats still support Yugoslavia” and that the then upcoming referendum in Croatia should demonstrate this, while stressing in particular that the Serbs in Croatia were “never a minority and never will be”. When informed that

⁴¹ “Srbi i hrvatski plebisciti”, *NIN*, 20 May 1990, pp. 16-20.

⁴² “Glasine i glasanje”, *NIN*, 24 August 1990, pp. 10-12.

⁴³ “Retrogradnost hrvatske zvanične politike”, *NIN*, 24 August 1990, pp. 14-16.

the Croatian draft treaty for a confederal Yugoslavia had been completed, he responded that “Serbian autonomy in Croatia is also a *fait accompli*”.⁴⁴

A text published in the 29 October 1990 issue contained an analysis of the changes in the Croatian media after the establishment of the HDZ’s government. The resignation of the editor-in-chief of the news desk at Zagreb Television was noted, with the observation that she had not “left voluntarily”, and that none of the other chief editors in this television station’s other departments would leave “voluntarily” either. According to this analysis, not even the director general of TV Zagreb, Veljko Knežević, could remain at his post, as he was dismissed for being a “Serb and a communist”, while the push for his replacement was led by Antun Vrdoljak, a member of Croatia’s then still collective presidency. The conclusion of this analysis was that “the HDZ’s dismissal of these journalists is incomprehensible”, since the party received their “enormous logistical support” during the election campaign. The reporters working at TV Zagreb were also criticized for “creating an anti-Serb mood” in their reporting during the preceding years from the rallies of the so-called “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, and that they should not be “surprised” now because they were “responsible for the HDZ’s political success”. The article further noted the dismissal of the editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Vjesnik*, also an ethnic Serb, and that he had allegedly been dismissed while hospitalized. The text ended with a reminder that in his campaign, Tuđman extolled press freedom as one of the fundamental tenets of a democratic society, but recalled that this had also been asserted by Oliver Cromwell and Lenin, who very quickly “introduced censorship of the press after assuming power”.⁴⁵

A text carried in the 20 December 1990 examined the Croatian political situation on the eve of enactment of the new democratic Constitution. Croatia’s new territorial organization was outlined, with the observation that the main problem confronting Croatia’s constitution-writers was the “possible creation” of an autonomous district called Krajina, which could “grow” into a federal unit of Yugoslavia after a time. The charter of the autonomous district was presented to the public by Babić, and he announced the formal ratification of this document prior to the promulgation of the Croatian constitution. This document foresaw the unification of this district and municipalities in Bosnia-Herzegovina with majority Serb populations in case of disintegration of Yugoslavia. The text concluded that Babić and Rašković “share the same vision of the right” to self-determination as Tuđman and Veselica, but that the Croatian duo “negates the rights of the Serbian people in Croatia”.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “Red poteza u cajtnotu”, *NIN*, 14 September 1990, 16; for similar views, see “Nećemo da budemo naivni”, *NIN*, 5 October 1990, pp. 10-13.

⁴⁵ “Šahiranje novinarske udružbe”, *NIN*, 29 June 1990, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁶ “Povratak Krajine”, *NIN*, 20 December 1990, pp. 12-14.

A text published in the 28 December 1990 issue carried reporting on the enactment of the new Croatian constitution. It was noted that the new Croatian constitution had been promulgated on 22 December, on Yugoslav People's Army Day, and that Tuđman stated that the new constitution may serve as an example to many European constitution-writers. The text also stressed that the new constitution had "relegated the Croatian Serbs to minority status", while the official language became Croatia, and Cyrillic was only an official second script in certain parts of Croatia. It was also noted that MPs of Serb ethnicity from the Croatian League of Communists/Party of Democratic Change (SKH-SDP) had attempted at the beginning to influence some changes that they believed would have been in everybody's interest, but that an address by their member Sime Rajić, apparently proclaimed "a handy Serb", was met with catcalls. One of the ethnic Serb members of the SKH-SDP "complained" that he did not want to stay for promulgation of the constitution, but that he "remained due to concern" over his job. When asked why Croatia did not proclaim its independence immediately, Tuđman responded that a negative response to this move by the Serbs in Croatia and a majority in the Yugoslav People's Army was possible. The report continued by noting that a day earlier the Serbian Autonomous District of Krajina (best known as 'SAO Krajina') had been proclaimed in Knin, while the Yugoslav and Serbian flags were raised on the Knin fortress. The text ended with the assertion that "even Tuđman, the most reasonable among Croatian politicians, is still not aware that Croatia has forever lost the territories, municipalities in which the Serbs form the majority of the population".⁴⁷

This same issue featured an open letter from Jovan Rašković that the Zagreb-based weekly *Danas* had earlier refused to print. The letter contained an interpretation of Croatian-Serbian relations going back 160 years, with particular emphasis on the ideology of Ante Starčević. He listed the Ustasha crimes which Croatian historians had "attempted to minimize", and which Croatian intellectuals had "never condemned". According to Rašković, Tuđman was a "minor, unknown historian" whose "primary preoccupation" was to reduce the number of Serbian casualties. The Croatian Parliament, like all other Croatian institutions, was "a place of tyranny against the Serbian people", while the Croatian Serbs were "exposed to aggression as no other people in Europe". He denied that Serbia and Milošević had anything to do with the "Serbian resistance" in Croatia, while the Croatian Serbs were not "pleased with the attitude" of the new Croatian authorities toward Yugoslavia, but that they were open to negotiations with "fulfilment of the Serbian people's demand for autonomy".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ "Jesmo li ga donijeli?", *NIN*, 28 December 1990, pp. 11-13.

⁴⁸ "Šta *Danas* ne sme da objavi", *NIN*, 28 December 1990, pp. 28-29.

The HDZ and Vuk Drašković as a Representative of the Serbian Opposition in *NIN*

The 21 January 1990 issue contained an analysis of the HDZ assembly in Split. The speakers there stressed that Yugoslavia as it then existed was useless to everyone, so that the question arose as to “how and when the Yugoslav state in Croatia became an unresolved South Slav question”. Some of the HDZ’s demands were characterised as “similar to the political proclamations” of Serbian opposition politician Vuk Drašković.⁴⁹ The 4 February 1990 issue featured an interview with Zvonimir Marković, the chairman of the HDZ’s Split branch. When asked on the comparison between the HDZ and Vuk Drašković’s political platform, he responded that he did “not see anywhere” any similarities, nor did he agree with the claim that if “there were no Tuđman on one side and Drašković on the other, the country would be at peace”.⁵⁰

An interview with Borislav Mikelić, the chairman of the Gravrilović meat-packing company’s operating board and a member of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav League of Communists, was published in the 18 March 1990. Mikelić claimed that the crisis in the communist system over many years had created the conditions of the processes under way at the time. Thus, he said that “Tuđman, Šeks, Đodan and others most clearly [...] illustrate these processes. Their admiration of the Quisling NDH, without any repercussions, throws a shadow of doubt on judicial organs as well, above all the public prosecution”. When asked about the fact that Serbia banned the work of Drašković’s Serbian Renewal Movement (SNO), while Croatia did not do the same for the HDZ, he responded that was “an adherent of policies that would have various Tuđmans and Draškovićs eliminated as any other creators on the political scene”, because he claimed that the “demolition of Yugoslavia also implies the demolition of Croatia, rather than its expansion as Tuđman believes”. He assessed the prospect of the HDZ’s victory in the elections as “a catastrophe for Croatia, and even for them, because they would not be able to remain in power”.⁵¹

The 2 November 1990 issue considered Drašković’s visit to Jasenovac, and the question was posed as to how he obtained “permission from the Croatian authorities”. His arrival followed on the heels of the prohibition of a similar visit by Radovan Karadžić, the head of the SDS in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbian writer Brane Crnčević. The first conclusion was that the Croatian authorities had altered their strategy, for it had introduced a logic proclaimed “retreating to victory” applied in the territory of the Knin region. The second conclusion was that Drašković had “received the logistical aid of the HDZ” as Milošević’s primary political opponent in Serbia, because they believed that

⁴⁹ “Tuđman i samopredjeljenje”, *NIN*, 21 January 1990, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁰ “U Evropu posebno”, *NIN*, 4 February 1990, p. 26.

⁵¹ “Gore od maspoka”, *NIN*, 18 March 1990, pp. 12-15.

it would be “easier to deal with the Serbian Renewal Movement than with the socialists of Serbia”. The text closed with a part of Drašković’s speech in which he “included Catholic brothers as victims at Jasenovac”, and this was pointed out as a possible motive for allowing Drašković’s visit.⁵²

Conclusion

The most frequent perception of the HDZ in the texts carried in *NIN* during 1990 were as a party associated with the Ustasha movement and Croatian political émigrés, so that after its victory in elections the very state in which it rose to power became the restored “Ustasha Independent State of Croatia”. All of this was tied to the perception of the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church as an organization which upheld a party linked to the “Ustasha movement”, and which was “renewing a new Ustasha state”. All of this was reflected in relations between the HDZ and the Croatian Serbs, who had to be “defended” from this “new threat and policy” conducted by the HDZ. This was followed by the perception of the HDZ as the “wrecker” of Yugoslavia, so that its policies were compared to those of the Serbian opposition leader Vuk Drašković, which was also in the interest of the Serbian communist authorities of the time, as elections in Serbia were approaching. During the analysis of these texts, I did not come across any aspect of the HDZ’s policies that received positive treatment in this weekly, so that I concluded that the weekly engaged in an unobjective and uncritical campaign against the HDZ. This fact is not surprising, since at that time the management bodies of this weekly were under the complete control of the Serbian authorities, whose interests from both the ideological and national standpoint were diametrically opposed to the HDZ’s political objectives. This media campaign in *NIN* contributed significantly to the creation of the atmosphere for the beginning of the revolt of the Croatian Serbs, and the subsequent aggression against Croatia. This methodology of portraying any aspect of Croatian politics or components of Croatian society advocating Croatian interests as linked to the Ustasha movement has a long tradition in the Yugoslav communist state, so that the strategy of creating perceptions of the HDZ in this weekly should be viewed in this light. It should be noted that this strategy had a counterproductive aspect, for the campaign waged by the Serbian media, which included this weekly, contributed to the strengthening of the HDZ on the Croatian political scene, which was borne out by further political events in Croatia.

⁵² “Tuđman i Drašković”, *NIN*, 2 November 1990, p. 20.

Die Perzeption der Kroatischen demokratischen Gemeinschaft in Belgrader Wochenzeitschrift *NIN* in 1990

Zusammenfassung

Der Autor analysiert die Perzeption der Kroatischen demokratischen Gemeinschaft (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ) in Belgrader Wochenzeitschrift *NIN* im Jahre 1990. Medien in Serbien übten eine bedeutende Rolle in Vorbereitung der geistigen Atmosphäre in serbischer Öffentlichkeit vor serbischem Angriff auf Kroatien in 1991 aus. Keine Ausnahme in dieser Hinsicht stellte auch die Belgrader Wochenzeitschrift *NIN* dar, als ein der bedeutendsten Druckwerke auf der Medienszene Jugoslawiens. Diese Zeitschrift führte eine unobjektive und unkritische Campagne gegen die HDZ. Diese Partei wurde auf den Seiten dieser Zeitschrift als Nachfolger von Ustascha-Bewegung und Kroatien mit HDZ an der Macht als eine Wiederherstellung des „Unabhängigen Staates Kroatien“ repräsentiert. Das soll nicht bewundern, weil damals die *NIN*-Leitungsbehörden von der serbischen politischen Elite kontrolliert wurden, deren politische Interessen in ideologischer und nationaler Hinsicht denen von HDZ genau entgegengesetzt waren. Solche Darstellung aller Aspekte kroatischer Politik oder Gesellschaft, die kroatische Interessen befürworteten, als Neigung zur Ustascha-Bewegung, hatte eine lange Tradition im jugoslawischen kommunistischen Staate. Die Gestaltung der Perzeption von HDZ in der Zeitschrift *NIN* soll auch in diesem Sinne interpretiert werden. Diese von serbischen Medien geführte Campagne wirkte aber kontraproduktiv, weil sie zur Stärkung der HDZ auf der kroatischen politischen Szene beitrug.