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Nationalism in Croatian Transition to Democracy: Between Structural Conditionality and the Impact of Legacy of History and Political Culture

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Nationalism has marked the democratic transition of many post-communist societies, including Croatia. It showed its liberal character by fostering democratic change and achieving national independence, but it also manifested itself as exclusive ethnocentrism, which considerably slowed down the democratization process and imposed itself as its main characteristic. The author challenges the view that ethnocentrism as inherent characteristic of the so-called Eastern (ethnic) nations, which are consequently undemocratic and prone to ethnic conflicts, while the liberal character is attributed as inherent to nationalism of Western (civic) nations. Besides the explanation of various aspects of nationalism in Croatia, the author draws attention to its primary structural and contextual conditionality, particularly highlighting the framework of political unfreedom and limited modernization during the communist period and specific conditions of democratic transition characterized by process of nation-state establishment and the war of independence. Here nationalism appears as an expression of patriotism and political identification, but also as a response to social, political and value discontinuity and particularly as reaction to external aggression. The author denies its inherency, since it is not some "innate" cultural trait, but a social phenomenon that is dominantly caused by the social and political context. Nationalism in the period of democratic transition in Croatia, despite its undoubtedly ethnocentric manifestations, in essence still was liberal. After the war and renewed processes of democratization there was a significant decline of ethnocentrism and strengthening of liberal features of nationalism.

Key words: nationalism ethnocentrism, democratic transition, nation-state, post-communist societies, Croatia

1. Introduction

The collapse of communism sparked a wave of democratization that was characterized by distinctive development of democracy in post-communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe. Democratization processes in those societies have generated specific problems, including uncertainty regarding the establishment of democracy, its sustainability, and development. Among the others, a characteristic phenomenon that has

characterized many transitional societies is strong nationalism. Moreover, it is often manifested as ethnocentrism (closed, exclusive and intolerant ethnic nationalism), and as such contributed to the deceleration of democratization. On the other hand, nationalism was the driving force of the democratic change, especially in those post-communist countries which for the first time in their history, parallel with the establishment of democracy, gained state independence. Among them was the Croatian society. With many common features

it shares with other post-communist societies, its democratization was marked by some very specific conditions. Those are, primarily, secession from a multinational federation and the establishment of independent and sovereign nation-state, and a defensive war against the Greater Serbian aggression in order to protect newly acquired freedom and independence. These two key factors have essentially determined the dynamics and direction of democratization but also the emergence and manifestations of nationalism, which essentially marked the transition period.

Over the past two decades in many Western political and academic circles, nationalism in Croatia has often been declared as a retrograde phenomenon and a serious obstacle to democratization processes, with a usual emphasis of its ethnocentric features. There it was regularly placed in the so-called Eastern type nationalism, characteristic for unmodernized societies with postponed process of a nation forming, to which the ethnic conflicts are inherent.¹ Although such claims could find a foothold, particularly based on the level of public manifestations of nationalism, basically they do not hold. In fact, nationalism is too complex a phenomenon that it could be unambiguously defined, and even less understood outside a particular social and political context. Just because of that, modernization and democratization processes that characterized the history of established democracies are not entirely comparable with those in transitional societies. Hence, the conclusions about particular phenomena (including nationalism and nation-state building) resulting from such comparisons are often inappropriate.

Therefore, the intention of this paper is to explain the historical and political-cultural aspects of nationalism in Croatia and its recent manifesta-

tions, but primarily to point to its structural conditionality, in which it is almost not different to other nationalisms (including those in most developed Western societies). Also, the intention of the paper is to show that Croatian nationalism in the period of democratic transition, despite uncontested ethnocentric manifestations, essentially was liberal nationalism, seeking to realize statehood ideas that have marked modern national history.

2. Theoretical framework

Considering the phenomenon of nationalism in the context of democratic transition of the Croatian society, it is necessary, at least at a basic level, to analyze the meaning of the term, as well as key concepts that are directly related to it (people, nation, nation-state, liberal democracy). Since there are many controversies among theorists of nationalism about its definition, we will not go further into these disputes. Its meaning will be determined in terms which are largely undisputed, and will serve as a starting point in the discussion in this context.

In that sense, one could argue that people means a community of people which arises under common territorial, economic and cultural factors that have enabled it to connect to people as an ethnic group. It appears in the period when tribal society grows into a broader territorial community, bound by ethnic, linguistic and cultural affinity of its members, different in comparison to other communities. The nation is a people which are constituted as a political community. It grows from the freedom of civil societies (political and civil freedom, free market) which were established after the 18th and 19th century (civil and national) revolutions, shaping the modern civil society and state. In other words, a nation is established as a sovereign political community, i.e. political society (*demos*) based on the people's community (*ethnos*) formed on common history, culture, language and territory.² The nation-state in turn means the realization of the sovereignty of the nation, politically, legally and territorially (including international recognition). The modern nation-state is inseparably linked with (liberal) democracy as a political order. Popular sovereignty implies, on the one hand, the right to self-determination, namely the political, territorial and economic independence of the people,

1 It is a cultural stereotype that one group of (Western) nations should be considered intrinsically democratic, inclined to freedom, and prone to cosmopolitanism, while the other group (Eastern) should be considered non-democratic, prone to autocracy, xenophobia and ethnocentrism, which apparently stems from resentments that arise from suppressed feelings of dependence and the inability to overcome them during their history. This stereotype, without any factual foundation and valid argument, is equated with the division in civic and ethnic nations, which has resulted in a highly simplified and inaccurate image in public opinion in Western societies, but also among some scholars. This image had a great influence on many politicians, especially on their (distorted) perception and (mis)understanding of the process of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars conducted in the region (characterized as "ancient ethnic hatreds" that cannot be stopped in a rational manner), that significantly influenced the incompetence and inefficiency of the international community in crisis mediation and conflict resolution in this region (cf. Matic, 2006: 261-266).

2 "What civil society, as the historical founder of modern society has created, is the political community of free citizens who, at the same time, are free to establish their historically shaped people's community as a national community. People are free to set their internalized ethnic community as a political community, i.e., to establish it as its own nation" (Lerotic, 1984: 9).

and, on the other hand, political power elected by the citizens which represents the general political will of the people and thus derives its legitimacy. The first aspect is a precondition of the nation-state, while the second one is a precondition of a democratic political regime. That way, modern nations, as political communities, establish nation-states as an expression of national and political sovereignty.³ A sense of collective identity and solidarity sprang from the principles of national democracy were shaped, while liberal principles constructed the institutional foundations for free development of individuals.

Nationalism as a term is so often used (in different contexts), yet its meaning is by no means unambiguous, quite the opposite. Therefore, nationalism has at least several defining meanings. First, it is political awareness of ethnic cohesion and affiliation (political identity) and of common (national) interests. Second, it is a political ideology that assumes the nation as the most important and fundamental determinant of society (it is the basis of political movements for national liberation, national equality and the establishment and protection of the nation-state). Third, it means preference and protection of interests (of members) of their own nation to the interests (of members) of other nation(s). Fourth, it means highlighting of own nation's characteristics and underestimation of those of another nation (which causes intolerance towards members of other nations, and in the extreme case ethnic conflicts). Because of all these meanings, nationalism has a very strong value, political and socio-psychological character, both at the individual and social level. Therefrom derives its predominantly (and often ultimately) positive or negative evaluation among various political actors and citizens in various social environments, and different political ideologies and theories.

Following the above mentioned, it could be said that nationalism is generally manifested in two specific ways: first – liberal (civic, inclusive) nationalism, and second – ethnocentric (ethnic, exclusive) nationalism. Liberal nationalism reflects itself in the emancipatory role when nationalism serves national liberation, achievement of independence, equality, freedom and the rights of the people. Such an expression of nationalism denotes openness, striving toward the realization of ethical values and includes the rights of others. In modern societies, this form of nationalism has strong cohesive and integrative functions. Specifically,

the nation means the collective political identity; it provides a sense of belonging, both to the nation as a political community (sovereign nation-state) and to the nation as a people. In fact, most modern states were established as nation-states.

In this context, the nation is the expression of political identity (the common sense of belonging among the various social groups in society) and it is the basic precondition for a democratic regime. It is a political framework that provides basic social consensus in a society of diverse and mutually opposed social interests regarding issues of government, shape and choice of political power and definition of national interest. Although civil society (as a set of equal citizens united by the social contract) is a precondition for effective democracy, it does not have sufficient basis for the realization of social consensus, and cannot establish an effective and stable state without political identity. That identity in turn ensures the nation (a feeling of national belonging that integrates a certain society into a political community).

Nationalism has been an expression of libertarian aspirations for many peoples in their struggle for national independence, freedom and sovereignty since 18th and 19th century revolutions, through the anti-colonial movements, until recent exoduses from multinational federations after the collapse of communism. Realization of a sovereign nation-state was their main goal, regardless of the historic period and social-political context. It is evident in examples of post-communist societies that have emerged from the former multinational states (USSR, Yugoslavia) which authoritarian regimes have been restricting political freedom of the people(s) trying to integrate them into a unified political community from above, on ideological basis. Likewise, it is also visible in recent examples of small nations and/or ethnic minorities in the developed democratic countries of the West where civic consensus and democratic political system are not sufficient factors of integration (and consequently the stability) of those political communities (such as Spain, Belgium, UK, Italy, France, Canada). It should be noted also that, despite globalization processes and their tendency to create a global democracy – which, among the others, significantly reduce the sovereignty of the nation states – still remained an open question of political identity (formation of political community) and the problem of legitimacy (making of collectively binding decisions and subjecting to them) which are still dominant at the level of nation states. Consequently, nationalism is not some aberration of democracy, retrograde and anti-modern phenomenon, but rather the opposite.

3 Cf. Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789, Articles 3 and 6; Lerotić, 1984: 9-10; Prpić, Puhovski and Uzelac, 1990: 85-86; Rousseau, 1978: 101-102; Tadić, 1988: 202.

Originally, it is in the basis of the modern nation-state as a political community, an expression of people's sovereignty and political subjectivity of the nation. Its characteristic outward expression, essentially, is patriotism.

Unlike liberal nationalism, ethnocentric nationalism is usually expressed through closed, autarchic and xenophobic attitudes towards (members of) other nations. National affiliation is above all, it is a central social and political value and a main criterion of social evaluation. In its ultimate form, it is based on (implicit or explicit) attitude of superiority of own nation over other nations, on lack of respect for them, and on denial of equal rights to others.⁴ Hence, the inequality, exclusion and uncooperativeness are in the very foundation of ethnocentrism. The nation is perceived as closed and homogenous group opposed to other nations (or their members). At the same time, members of one's own nation are expected to be subjective to collective (national) values, and through their adoption individuals are primarily valued. Individualism and any form of expressing different values, political attitudes and behavior are not accepted, and if it is more pronounced, it is considered as hostile.⁵ In this sense, ethnocentrism is opposed to democracy, which has individualism and political pluralism at its very core.

Socio-psychological factors have substantial prevalence in ethnocentrism. Namely, authoritarianism, conformity and emotions are much stronger than cognitive and rational elements. It is this type of nationalism that is predominantly a phenomenon of individual psychology, which refers more to a set of different ethnocentric attitudes and traditional value orientations rather than political ideology (cf. Šram, 2008: 50-53). Thus ethnocentrism is usually expressed as a set of attitudes ranging from isolation and self-sufficiency, across intolerance and exclusion to intolerance and blaming of other

nations' members for specific problems of their own (individual) and social (national) life. Social crises, social turmoil causing anxiety, uncertainty and frustration are an extremely favorable social and political environment for the development of ethnocentrism, while the widespread authoritarianism is its characteristic socio-psychological background. Prevalence of authoritarianism as a socio-psychological disposition exceptionally favors collectivistic homogenization (cf. Šiber, 1989; Šiber, 1998b; Županov, 1993; Bulat and Štrelov, 1995b; Katunarić, 1995). Periods of social crisis are characterized by fear, uncertainty and emphasized need for security and belonging. This need is usually met by identification with a social group (family, nation, class, race, religious group), and with this group's sociocultural characteristics and collective psychological symbols. That is why authoritarian individuals (because of their vulnerability, passivity and conformism) are suitable objects of national homogenization, because of immersion into masses where personal identity is lost and being guided by the nation as a symbol of collective identity. Therefore, ethnocentrism is usually associated with populist political mobilization led by political authorities or populist movements.

Such a dual nature of nationalism is also reflected through the distinction between liberal (or civic) and ethnic nationalism and between the notions of a civic and an ethnic nation, respectively. Thus, the civic nation, basically, means community of citizens which are entitled to citizenship based on their birth in the state (or naturalization), i.e. they are full citizens of a certain state. By creating a civic nation, members of ethnic groups (the majority, but also minority) are legally and politically equal. This means that they have equal civil and political rights and obligations, regardless of all their secondary features and affiliation (such as ethnic, racial, sexual, religious, social, economic, etc.) which are retained and freely expressed. Consent to the same or similar political values, principles and social norms, and consensus on basic political institutions and procedures – are the basis of constitution of the nation. Hence, a civic nation establishes itself on the political awareness of its members, which is the origin of collective (national) identity and basis of unity. National solidarity is based primarily on civil status and social communication. Belonging to a nation is eminently politically determined and liberal nationalism is not exclusive to other nations (or ethnic groups). Liberal (or civic) nationalism is based on the ideals of political liberalism, which are reflected in aspirations for freedom, civil rights, establishment of a national economy, limiting of the state and overall

4 Such nationalism is unfair because of the exclusivity and imposing of own interests to others, putting them in an unfair or unequal position (cf. Šiber, 1998a: 72-73). Also, it restricts freedom and obeys the members of their own nation by imposing the proper forms of manifesting (national) identity and expression of loyalty (to political power). Understood in the context of negative sign, nationalism means the loss of own identity and submitting to collective identity. Also, it is marked by suppression of rational deliberation and emotional dominance (which is why the prejudices and stereotypes are integral part of nationalism), closure and collectively oppose to other groups (cf. Šiber, 1984: 7-11).

5 "Nationalism shows up as the most powerful 'secular religion' in the twentieth century, especially in nations with a dominant pre-modern mentality. In such communities, the individual can function as a member of the tribe, in which any attempt of individualization is seen as heresy and is severely punishable (Blažević, 1995: 56)".

progress (much more than preservation of tradition, therefore it is more tolerant to individual differences). Therefore, it is usually directed towards establishing and/or protecting national sovereignty and political community (nation-state). Throughout history, this type of nationalism was the basis of political programs of almost all movements for national liberation.

The concept of an ethnic nation in turn means a community of people affiliated by common origin, language, religion and history. Ethnic origin, traditional values, habits and social norms, in a word – authentic culture, are the primary sources of social cohesion and basis of national awareness. Ethnic nationalism therefore lies on a nation based on ethnicity. It is focused on members of their own people (inside and outside the political community) and it is exclusive because it promotes the welfare of their members while excluding the others. In multiethnic political communities it acts toward disintegration, promoting intolerance and inequality, and reduces the possibility of consensus. In ethnically homogeneous political communities, it is often immersed in pre-modern ethnic symbolism and forms of social organization, and acts autarchic and xenophobic. Ethnic nationalism reflects its anti-liberal dimension in insistence on ethnic identity rather than on universal citizenship as well as in emphasizing (imposing) of collective values and the nation over the interests of the individual and society as a whole.⁶

These two aspects of a modern nation are difficult to separate in real life because they are always mixed (no modern nation is exclusively civic or ethnic). Nevertheless, significant differences between them are evident. So, the first one is determined eminently politically, while the second one has very sociocultural attributes. This distinction in turn reflects two general and mutually opposed theoretical approaches where the first, in explaining these phenomena, understood the nation as a social form created at a certain point of the historical development of a society or as a product (and prerequisite) of social modernization, while the second one assumes the nation as natural and primordial property of a given community and its members. It is a well-known division between so-called Western and Eastern nationalism(s).

The first one emphasizes the nation as the political constitution of the demos on liberal principles and therefore it is inherently pro-demo-

cratic (a model of a “state” nation, built on the French Revolution legacy). The second one is anti-democratic; because it highlights the *ethnos* as an integrative and constitutional principle that excludes the liberal principle of formation of the nation as a political community (the model of a “cultural” nation emerged as a product of Romanticism and national revivals of Central and Eastern Europe, which had postulated unity of culture and language).⁷ However, the analysis and qualification of nationalism(s) on this basis cannot give a valid insight into its nature since the elements of the Eastern type of nationalism are clearly evident in present Western societies and vice versa. Political and ethnic identification must be analyzed within a certain political context and historical circumstances.

3. Historical, political and structural aspects of Croatian nationalism

In order to properly understand recent nationalism in the Croatian society, its main causes and manifestations, we have to at least give a brief overview of particular periods of modern political history. Different social and political conditions in certain periods of Croatian nation and state development have significantly influenced its contemporary main characteristics and manifestations.

Croatian statehood and national independence have been an unattainable goal for a long period.

7 Thus Kohn (1955) argues that Western nationalism is result of a process in which state precedes the creation of the nation. By creating a state, there were created the social, economic and political conditions for the transformation of people into a nation. This process is based on the ideas of liberal democracy (citizens, equal rights, individual choice, sovereignty, the rule of law, institutionalized power, general political will, and shared values), which shaped the civic, liberal type of nationalism. Eastern nationalism in turn derives from the conditions where there is no state and it usually appears as a resistance against the existing state in which certain nation is often in a subordinate position. Eastern nationalism is based on ethnicity (cultural identity, origin) and has integrative tendencies (trying to create a nation-state as a political community of its own members). In this context, it is necessary to mention the influential representatives of the modernist conception of nation. So, the authors such as E. Gellner, E. Kedourie and E. Hobsbawm consider the nation as a social construct, a product of modernity, modern artifact without natural foundation, the doctrine of the early 19th century created on the tradition of the Enlightenment and cultural populism, an imaginary community with elements of social engineering, stressing the nation primarily as a political community, while denying its cultural foundation (cf. Gellner, 1991; Kedourie, 1993; Hobsbawm, 1993). Their views, though not always consistent, and therefore disputed, in many ways has influenced the consolidation of stereotype which on such basis qualifying nationalism in certain societies as a pro-democratic or anti-democratic.

6 Cf. Smith, 1987: 135-138, 149-152; Smith, 2003: 21-24, 127-130, 214-217; Ipperciel, 2007: 396-397; Hobsbawm, 1993: 184-185; Massey, Hodson and Sekulić, 2004: 227-229, 237; Kymlicka, 2001: 243; Matić, 2006: 274; Ramet, 2006: 11-19; Calhoun, 1993: 394-396, 404-408; Vujčić, 1998: 29-30.

The historical Croatian kingdom (as the point of origin of Croatian statehood) had been long reflected in the minds of the Croatian elite and citizens only as a myth, and had no actual political meaning. At the same time, the political reality of creation of the Croatian nation and state was arduous and long-term. Throughout the history and during the period of shaping of modern European nations, the Croatian people were a part of various state arrangements, under foreign government, with limited political rights and without the possibility of realization of national sovereignty. Despite such unfavorable conditions, Croats have still managed to obtain and preserve the recognition of national identity, i.e. the Croatian name and certain political privileges (the so-called municipal rights). It was the manifestation of the continuity of Croatian sovereign rights according to which they, as an individual political entity, had the right to political autonomy, and as such were a constitutive element of state unities they were in. That way, Croats were politically shaped, which provided the basis to creation of the modern Croatian nation.

It should be noted that the Croatian national movement in the development of the national idea, ever since the beginning of the 19th century, was pronouncedly liberal. For Croatian nationalism of the 19th and early 20th century, the nation was primarily a political and only secondarily an ethnical concept. Ethnic characteristics were not regarded as sufficient for a nation. Ever since the first concepts of the Croatian nation as the bearer of sovereignty in the area of the kingdoms of Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia, formed upon a basis of tradition of historical municipal rights (as they were represented by *Narodna stranka* and *Stranka prava*, the main Croatian political parties of that time), continuing with the stands represented by the leading political and cultural representatives of the Croatian national resurgence (Lj. Gaj, J. J. Strossmayer, P. Preradović, I. Mažuranić, Lj. Vukotinović, I. K. Sakcinski and others), and then M. Pavlinović and A. Starčević – the nation was comprehended as a political association consisting of various ethnical and social groups which are in political sense constitutive and equal elements of the Croatian nation (which, among others, is visible even in the Illyrian name, which was taken for everyone speaking the Croatian language in the area of the Triune Kingdom because the Croatian name at the time referred only to northern Croatia), and in the early 20th century S. Radić, the leader of HSS, who in his political program connected the ideas of liberalism and social justice, and thought of liberal democratic institutions as a prerequisite to development of the Croatian nation and state.

The autocratic regime in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Serbian repression over the other nations generated resistance and strengthened nationalism and anti-Serbian spirit. Those relations yielded the Ustashe, an extreme nationalist group which established a Nazi puppet-regime during World War II in Croatia which, however, did not enjoy a wide support of the people. Due to the crimes committed by that regime, it is arguably the darkest part of Croatian history. At the same time, it marked a radical deviation from the course set by the leading ideologists of the Croatian national movement.⁸

After the defeat of Fascism and Nazism and end of World War II, the regime established by the communists was based on war victory and antifascism, and subsequently on politics of independence and equidistance, which supported its internal and international legitimacy, in spite of its pronounced anti-democratic character (cf. Bilandžić, 1985: 158-178; Sekulić, 2004: 27-31). The communists then completely suppressed political parties which were supporting a civil democratic option of the Croatian national question solution (dominant in the pre-war period) and offered a federal organization of the new Yugoslavia (six republics and two autonomous provinces) which was supposed to enable national equality and sovereignty to its constitutive nations, including Croatia. However, they abolished the multiparty system and introduced an authoritarian undemocratic regime based on the ideology of Marxist socialism, with a power monopoly by their party. That meant a substantial reduction of civil rights and political freedoms (including the national ones) and open confrontation with political opponents. Emphasis of national interests outside the official ideological and political discourse gained a quite negative connotation, and nationalists were persecuted as enemies of the regime. Moreover, the sole stressing of ethnicity was systematically suppressed due to the pressure of an ideologically promoted socialistic internationalism and under the excuse of maintaining balance and prevention of ethnical conflicts in the multiethnic federation. At the same time, there was a strong encouragement of national unity⁹ as a form of ideological integration from above, instead of accepting the national individuality and differences as facts and basis upon which a multinational community

8 Cf. Matić, 2006: 275-281; Horvat, 1989: 50-73; Gross and Szabo, 1992: 529-531, 565-573; Milardović, Cipek and Šišak, 1995: 67-73, 102-190.

9 It was about the concept of "brotherhood and unity", under which tendencies of Yugoslavian unitarism were often hidden.

may integrate organically, from below, on a civil base. In that context, many (especially in Croatia) reckoned that the former Serbian hegemony and the king's dictatorship at the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had been replaced by Yugoslavian unitarism and communist dictatorship.

Although the equality of all peoples and the federal organization of the Yugoslav state were one of the foundations upon which the communist government's legitimacy stood, the authoritarian communist regime generated nationalism, mostly by repression and/or suppression the freedom of national expression whenever it crossed certain boundaries. Those boundaries were in turn defined by the limits set by the authoritarian government, primarily by the postulates of the ruling communist ideology and the imperative of maintaining the multinational federation, and the power monopoly of the communist party (the only one retaining the right to interpret national interests).

In such conditions, nationalism in Croatian society was latent, but in some crisis periods even very open. It was similar in other parts of the former multinational state, although in Croatia, given its relatively greater economic development (and thus more funding to the federal budget) and the population size, it was slightly more pronounced. Since the late 1960s, the efforts of Croatian communist leadership were directed towards liberalization of the political system, i.e. towards economic reform and greater economic and political independence of Croatia within the federation. Especially emphasized were the demands for reduction of control of federal authorities, particularly over the redistribution of material goods by which Croatia was systematically economically exploited in favor of other, less developed republics, including Serbia (demand for "clean bills"). They were also associated with demands for the freedom of expression and autonomous articulation of national interests (political, economic, and cultural). Those demands were backed by a significant portion of Croatian public, and they culminated in mass protests 1971 when numerous citizens have publicly displayed dissatisfaction with the status quo. They gave strong and open support to Croatian pro-democratic political leadership and emphasized demands for greater independence of Croatia (a movement known as "Croatian spring"). However, the Croatian national-democratic movement was declared nationalistic and contra-revolutionary, brutally quelled, and its leadership and numerous participants were politically stigmatized and subjected to repression. Although those events directly influenced the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974, in which the republics gained a considerably

higher level of autonomy and a formal statehood, and despite the proclamation of national equality and solidarity as basic values ("brotherhood and unity") – the fact of substantially limited freedom of national expression (and political freedoms in general) remained. The communist regime could not effectively articulate them without democratization, which would in turn bring into question the monopoly of the Communist Party, and hence its survival on power.

After the death of J. B. Tito, there was no more such an authority to be the arbiter between the federal and the republics' party leaders and guarantee the preservation of the state unity, so the political processes of decentralization in Yugoslavia grew stronger. However, they did not take place in a democratic manner, but instead bureaucratically and on a political level – by deals and agreements between leaders of republic branches of the Communist Party (known as "negotiable" economy and policy). Meanwhile, the urgently needed reforms (economic reform on free market basis, liberalization and democratization of the political system) which had the potential to organically reconnect the republics on brand new foundations, while keeping (even strengthening) their political and economic independence – failed to occur. This in turn led to increasingly larger conflicts between the advocates of federalism, decentralization and greater republic rights, and their opponents – supporters of a tighter federation, larger degree of centralization and strengthening the authority of the federal state.¹⁰ Those processes did not lead to stabilization, but instead to increasingly bigger inner instability (amplified by the deepening economic crisis) and, finally, the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation.

At the end of that period, at a time when communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe begin to collapse, and nationalism(s) in the country are getting stronger, it was clear that Yugoslavia could not survive in the existing form. In such a situation political authority in Croatia (then already reformed communists) leaves the federal Communist Party (at its famous 14th Congress in 1990), liberalizes political space and organizes free multiparty democratic elections. Although they were significantly fostered by the pressure

10 Political power of the once unified Communist Party in leading political and social development of the state rapidly declined by its increasingly intense disintegration in republic branches of the Communist Party. It happened because of shifting the emphasis from "working-class" to "national", which republics as federal entities has established as states. It in turn undermined collectiveness of Yugoslavia and unity of the Party (cf. Bilandžić, 1985: 512-534, 1986: 165-167).

of threatening nationalism and hegemonism from Serbia, and by growing inner pressures for democratization and national independence (accusation for “Croatian silence”, i.e. for their long hesitation to react) – it was genuinely democratic act. Even more, their strategies, as well as the strategies of the new democratically elected government, were directed towards association of Croatia with the united Europe.¹¹ The other republic governments (except the Slovenian one) were indecisive about it, wanting to (each for its own reasons) keep the Yugoslav federation alive. The motivation of the Serbian government was its instrumentalization for its own political and economic interests (the concept of unitary and centralized Yugoslavia as an expanded Serbia).

It was obviously that Yugoslav federation, as a state, and communist internationalism as ideology have failed to provide national equality and freedom. Although the regime significantly based its legitimacy on overcoming national conflicts, it did not succeed because of its authoritarianism and ideologically based integration of the political community. Ultimately, it delegitimized the regime along with the underlying ideology, and opened the questions of justifiability and purpose of further existence of the Yugoslav multinational community. On the other hand, the long lasting suppression of national feelings produced a certain collective frustration. Besides that, authoritarianism and conformism as dominant socio-psychological characteristics has also contributed to permanent existence of interethnic tensions during the communist regime, although mostly latent. All of this were the reasons why the nationalism erupted with such force into the public area, right after the collapse of the regime.

One of the key structural factors explaining the emergence of nationalism and its manifestations is the limited social modernization during the communist rule. Modernization has made considerable progress in the industrialization, technological development and education. An adequate social standard was achieved, primarily in the social sphere, and over the time a matching social structure was formed (working class, bureaucracy, professionals, middle class). However, such modernization

11 The goal of Croatian and Slovenian political leaders was not to escape, but to join Europe. Their action was blocked by the Serbian integralist strategy of uniting Yugoslavia on a pro-Russian and anti-European basis. However, with the collapse of communism and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, and the European integration policy of Germany, Austria and Italy (which is why they were no longer a threat as it once was, but rather the opposite) – were gone those (earlier very important) reasons for preservation of Yugoslavia, as well as the inner legitimacy of its regime (cf. Sekulić, 2004: 31-32).

was not organic and endogenous as it was in the West, i.e. based on free market and free society in which various social actors had an initiative. Instead, it was imposed and carried out as state policy led by the Communist Party according to an ideological basis. Despite the development of industrial production, the requirements for creation of civil society as a main realm of sociability with intermediate civil organizations, diversity of public discourses and political pluralism – the indispensable prerequisites of democracy – were entirely absent in such conditions. There occurred a process of modernization without modernity (cf. Dahrendorf, 1990), industrial development without civic development, an ideological instead of societal integration.

The communist state had taken over the space of civil society by political mobilization of the citizens through the artificial quasi-social associations, while traditional norms gave way to ideological ones (which, *nota bene*, were in many ways just adapted traditional egalitarian and collectivistic norms). Thus society was atomized in a large number of unconnected individuals; while on the other side was the state, i.e. “the organized people” in ideologically based and Communist Party-controlled political organizations.¹² There was no sufficiently independent and autonomous social segment (interest, class, gender, occupational, age, and similar groups) that could develop other public discourses and collective identities than those allowed by regime, and to be at least a substitute to civil society and alternative to Communist Party leaders.¹³ The absence of that key segment and authoritarianism and repressiveness of the regime blocked political action outside of the allowed framework. Therefore the nation and nationalism, in the moment of crisis and the collapse of the system, were the dominant (if not only) political content with the potential to fill in

12 Integration of societal community there is not based on organic elements, from the “bottom”, by the interest-politically connections within the democratically regulated pluralistic space of civil society, but instead political power integrates the society “from above” by political-ideological compression of different social groups in a single political system. The purpose of such integration is a dulling of the natural social antagonisms by restricting, eliminating or neutralizing social conflicts (cf. Tadić, 1988: 140).

13 To consider communist social organizations (such as the Socialist Alliance of Working People, youth organizations, trade unions etc.) as segments of civil society is not possible because they were actually part of the state apparatus. Through them, the social life was monitored, instead of being free and opposed to the state and government. “The consequence was mass alienation and distrust of the Communist regime and a lingering cynicism toward both political and civil institutions (Mishler and Rose, 1997, 420)”.

the empty space between the atomized individual and the state, and articulate society as a political community.

4. Nationalism during the democratic transition and establishment of the nation state

The deepening of the political and economic crisis of the Yugoslavian federation and increasingly pronounced threats of growing Greater Serbian nationalism and hegemonist policy of Serbia had an effect on the increase in discontent and fear of uncertainty which would be brought by further staying in Yugoslavia. At the same time, they affected the increase of nationalism as reaction to those threats and, even more, they fostered an articulation of general will of the vast majority of Croatian citizens toward final realization of national freedom and sovereignty. Therefore the separation from the Yugoslav federation and the establishment of an independent and sovereign nation-state were a true expression of a historical aspiration of the Croatian people for achievement of its political identity and autonomy in all aspects. Besides, that act had double democratic legitimacy because in the atmosphere of general collapse of communism and collapse of the multinational Yugoslav community, as an expression of the general will of the people, it proclaimed the establishment of democracy (as a political commitment) and the establishment of an independent national state (as a realization of democratic right to self-determination). That was precisely the most distinguished manifestation of the liberal and civil dimension of Croatian nationalism, which was in the foundation of the independent, sovereign and democratic Croatian state.

However, under the influence of specific conditions in which the processes of establishing of nation state and democratic system took place, nationalism was increasingly acquired the characteristics of ethnocentrism. There were multiple causes for that. Foremost, the absence of a sovereign nation-state and the long lasting status of political, economic and cultural submission during the modern history remained/became a burden to Croatian nation. Besides the strong commitment to national independence and sovereignty as a legitimate liberal aspiration, it also produced a certain collective frustration, particularly in conditions of crisis and dissolution of the Yugoslav federation and threatening Greater Serbian hegemonism. In that situation, leading political elites, but also a substantial part of the citizens, have increasingly manifested their national feelings through the national exclusivism. On the other hand,

authoritarianism and political exclusiveness as undemocratic legacy of Yugoslavian communist regime have significantly influenced the formation of same or similar characteristics of nationalism (not only in Croatia). Because of limitations of political freedoms, especially the freedom of expression of national feelings and articulation of national interests, that regime was perceived as a framework of unfreedom for the Croatian people. Therefore nationalism has simultaneously manifested as revanchism towards the regime (anti-communism) and as exclusiveness towards other nations (ethnocentrism).

To those primarily political causes we should add the economic ones. Namely, the economic crisis culminated at the end of the 1980s and, along with the political crisis, significantly contributed to the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation. At the same time, it also contributed to the development of ethnocentrism not only in the Croatian society, but in other republics as well. Uncertainty, increasing economic problems (indebtedness, inflation, unemployment, goods shortages, energy reductions, decline of living standard), political disputes and growing political instability – affected the spreading of apathy and pessimism, but also the increase of discontent and frustration, anger and national intolerance.

One of the key causes that affect increase in ethnocentrism was the sociocultural discontinuity. It was a direct consequence of transitional process which consists of complete transformation in which the society abandons the old social and political system whose values and norms are no longer valid, and builds a new system whose values and norms are not yet established, therefore not yet internalized among the citizens. In that situation, occurring an anomie as a values and norms system crisis. In that interregnum, the renewed and the strengthened values of the traditional complex prevailed. They had the function of a socio-psychological support and a source of security. Lack of democratic experience (hence an insufficient presence of democratic values) and deepening of political and economic crisis was considerably contributed to it. Consequently, such situation significantly favored the strengthening of ethnocentric characteristics of nationalism.¹⁴

14 The results of research of sociocultural aspects of the transition in Croatia (Štulhofer and Karajić, 1996/1997: 23) indicate a very prominent dimension of ethnocentrism among respondents. Directly or indirectly, many other studies of nationalism confirm its pronounced presence as a constant in the Croatian society, especially in the first decade of transition (cf. Šiber, 1984b; Radin, 1991; Blažević, 1995; Bulat and Štrelov, 1995a, 1995b; Mirić, 1996; Šiber, 1998a; Zakošek, 1998; Ilišin, 1998; Caratan, 1998; Pusić, 1999; Karajić, 2000; Galić, 2000).

However, the greatest generator of ethnocentrism undoubtedly was the Greater Serbian nationalism which gradually grew in strength with the crisis of Yugoslav federation. Rightfully perceived as a threat (regarding to its hegemonist character evident from the very beginning in politics of redefining the basic provisions of the Constitution of 1974 and pretensions toward limiting the independence of the republics) the Greater Serbian nationalism directly influenced the strengthening of nationalism among all non-Serbian nations in Yugoslavia. The Greater Serbian war aggression that followed it up, has directly jeopardized the survival of the newly established Croatian state and people, and extremely contributed to the strengthening and spreading of ethnocentrism. Particularly important is the fact that the aggression was initiated and helped by armed rebellion of a large part of Serbian citizens in Croatia in areas where they were the majority. Instrumentalized and conducted by the nationalist government of Serbia and the Yugoslav army (which completely took the side of the Greater Serbian hegemonist interests) the rebels were direct actors of the military aggression and occupation. Among the Croatian citizenry it was perceived as a betrayal and an unprovoked attack. This in turn strongly affected the increase of intolerance and national exclusiveness towards Serbs and the Serbian minority in Croatia due to the identification of Serbs and Yugoslavia with the Greater Serbian aggressive politics. The enormous human suffering and material damage brought by the war aggression additionally petrified the pronounced ethnocentrism and anticommunism.

Nationalism had a key role in dismantling the communist regime and in process of achieving state independence. However, the contribution of nationalism to the creation of a nation-state does not mean it contributed to the establishment of a democratic state. Quite the opposite – within the space of undeveloped institutions of the rule-of-law and welfare state, and in the wartime conditions, extremely unfavorable for democratic development – so formed nationalism contributed to authoritarian tendencies and even to blocking of democratization process. New, democratically elected government replaced the former authoritarian communist rule. However, manifesting itself far more as a nationalist and populist movement than as a modern democratic party, the new government kept the political style of its predecessors in many ways. Above all, it was manifested in the symbiosis of the ruling party and the (nation-) state, and in the (undemocratic) political practice coming out of it.

In that period, the government used the nationalist homogenization in order to neutralize the differences of interest in the society (mainly socio-economic) and their political articulation. Significantly assisting was the underdevelopment of political parties and democratic institutions, allowing for an arbitrary function of the government. In such context, marked by disintegration of old forms of sociability, nationalism becomes a substitute for organic integration factors absent in undeveloped society. However, when identification and social solidarity based on rational foundations are being suppressed by ideological and collectivist factors (such as nationalism) – which are thereby established as a basis for individual and collective identity – the foundations of democracy slip away.

Despite the normative constitution and formal proclamations, the political system was not founded on liberal democratic values and the right(s) of the citizen as a political subject, but on a collective right of the people and the state, which were superordinate to individual rights, freedom, and autonomy. Consequently, the establishment of democracy upon individualism, equality, and respect of civil rights and political freedoms remained in shadow of achieving national sovereignty and independence. In other words, the idea of national liberation was hypertrophied at the expense of the democratization.

The enthusiasm of the people about the Croatian state as a finally realized national dream, on the one side, and the situation of objectively endangered nation on the other – has conditioned the absence of objectivity and criticism towards many undemocratic characteristics of the new state. Equally so, the absence of democratic (civic) culture and the traumatic war experiences of a substantial part of population – additionally strengthened the acceptance and justification of the government's authoritarian populism, but also the ethnocentrism as normal and intelligible. Among the many citizens in that period there was a thin line between ethnocentrism and patriotism, either in its understanding, expressing or accepting (justifying).

By the end of the war the external pressures – often used by the government as a pretext for justification of difficult social and political circumstances – were disappeared. Already established, liberated and internationally recognized nation state has diminished possibilities of further anathematization of the political opposition and all other opponents as insufficiently national aware. It resulted in a political agenda which favoring increasingly more socioeconomic than political (national) issues. That was a clear indicator of democratic

maturing of Croatian society and shifting the weight from traditional, collectivist and affective behavior to a more modern, rational and interest-based one. The period of opening the Croatian society to the world, following the change of the political government in 2000, influenced the changes in the collective perception of their own nation, especially in the context of new political relationships and the position of Croatia in the international surroundings (the processes of joining the EU and NATO). In that period, increasingly so during the second decade of transition, a large ebb of ethnocentrism is evident, as well as its reduction to the level and manifestations usual in Western democratic societies.

The constantly present nationalism in many West European societies, especially the open ethnic conflicts breaking out occasionally, and the increase of nationalism, ethnic, racial, and religious intolerance and exclusiveness – which in particular showed in the recent global crisis – show that even the most developed democracies haven't overcome the problems causing them, nor have they found adequate ways to solve them.¹⁵ At the same time, it should be noted that the reasons generating ethnocentrism in the Croatian society were much more serious than the reasons causing such occurrences in contemporary developed democratic societies. That serves as another indicator that the claims of ethnocentrism as an "inherent" characteristic of Croatian society – often coming from certain political and scientific circles of the West during the past two decades – are not valid, in spite of insufficient presence of democratic values among the citizens.

5. Conclusion

Nationalism significantly marked the processes of democratic transition of many post-communist countries; especially those emerged from disintegration of multinational federations, such as Croatia. The pronounced Croatian nationalism prior to the onset of democratic changes, and even more after them, was an expression of legitimate aspirations of a vast majority of the Croatian people for national liberation and state independence.

¹⁵ It is about political conflicts in the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), France (Corsica), Spain (Basque Country, Catalonia), Italy (South Tyrol), Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Canada (Quebec), and about strengthening of (right) political radicalism, nationalist exclusion and racism directed against immigrants and ethnic minorities in the most developed countries in Europe (Netherlands, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland). The recent economic crisis has been just the catalyst of apparently latent ethnocentrism which exists in those societies under the surface.

That nationalism was led by liberal ideas of realization of freedom and equality, establishment of democracy and market economy, and by the feelings of affiliation to West European cultural circle. It necessarily meant the secession from Yugoslavia, which political framework did not allow it. On the other side, first the crisis of the communist regime and the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, and then the Greater Serbian aggression – which directly jeopardized the independence and existence of the newly established Croatian state – were the causes of substantial increase of intolerance and national exclusiveness, i.e. pronounced ethnocentrism which significantly marked the political and social life during the first decade of democratic transition.

Besides its liberal and patriotic character, nationalism, on the one side, was the instrument of the government, firstly in political mobilization of citizens in processes of secession and creation of the nation state, and then as a basis of legitimacy of post-communist regime and their stays on power. On the other side, nationalism was a mode of unleashing suppressed dissatisfaction and many interests which under the communist regime didn't have the space for articulation and organization due to political unfreedom and undeveloped civil society. Liberalization and democratic changes opened up that space, but in the conditions of structural underdevelopment (due to limited modernization in the communist period), non-existence of civic culture and democratic experience – it didn't function as free and autonomous public space. Instead, it still remained under the strong influence of political actors, particularly government. That structural deficiency resulted that the nationalism became the main (political) content that fulfilled that space. In other words, (underdeveloped) civil society was incorporated into a (nation-) state.

The disappearance of the old, ideologically based system, upon which identity, loyalty and social hierarchy were based, conditioned a strong need for new identification. However, the formation of new identity happened in the conditions of non-existing social base of political pluralism and disintegration of norms and values (anomy) caused by the collapse of one and underdevelopment of new system, restoration of traditional value patterns, and undemocratic aberrations of government. In such circumstances, on the individual level, appear uncertainty and insecurity. Individualism weakens, and collective identities (functioning as a socio-psychological "refuge") and traditional patterns (as a socio-psychological defense from the new and unknown) strengthen,

and conformism towards the government appears. In that context, nationalism grows stronger and has distinct identificational meaning (on the level of the individual and his/her need to belong to a community) and cohesive strength (on a societal level).

Finally, under conditions of an immediate threat to personal and collective existence caused by Greater Serbian aggression and the war for liberation, it is understandable for nationalism to grow into a general political discourse expressing patriotism, but also political alignment towards the nation state and the government, even in spite of their serious democratic deficit. Those extreme conditions directly generated ethnocentric manifestations of nationalism which, on individual (socio-psychological) inasmuch on collective (societal, political) level functioned both as identificational and defensive mechanisms.

Therefore, ethnocentrism cannot be comprehended as an inherent characteristic of Croatian (or any other) society, despite insufficient presence of democratic values. Although sociocultural and political heritage in many respects favors authoritarian and illiberal characteristics, ethnocentric manifestations are primarily caused by structural factors, both the endogenous and exogenous.

Thus the nationalism, which marked the period of democratic transition of the Croatian society, isn't an "innate" cultural trait, but a social phenomenon directly caused by certain social and political context. Nationalism, in considered period, occurs primarily as a consequence of political unfreedom and limited modernization during the period of communism, then as response to specific conditions of democratic transition (which consists of simultaneous processes of democratization and nation state establishment, political and social discontinuity, anomie and lack of adaptedness to the new system – all caused by deep transitional changes), and as reaction to external pressures (particularly war aggression). Manifestations of nationalism, including the ethnocentrism as the most pronounced, was directly induced and shaped by them. With consolidation of the new social and political system and weakening of the outer pressure(s), nationalism wanes. Normalization of social and political life after the war and the period of post-war recovery, and the renewed processes of democratization during the second decade of the transition – contributed to a considerable decline of ethnocentrism and strengthening of liberal characteristics of nationalism.

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Nacionalizam u hrvatskoj demokratskoj tranziciji: između strukturne uvjetovanosti i utjecaja naslijeđa povijesti i političke kulture

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Nacionalizam je obilježio demokratsku tranziciju mnogih postkomunističkih društava, među njima i hrvatskog. S jedne strane, on je pokazao svoj liberalni karakter potaknuvši demokratske promjene i ostvarenje državne samostalnosti. S druge strane, manifestirao se kao isključivi etnocentrizam koji je znatno usporio demokratizacijski proces i koji se nametnuo kao njegovo glavno obilježje. U članku se pokazuje neutemeljenost stava koji etnocentrizam smatra inherentnim svojstvom tzv. istočnih (etničkih) nacija, držeći ih zbog toga nedemokratskim i sklonim etničkim konfliktima, dok istovremeno nacionalizmu zapadnih (civilnih) nacija pripisuje imanentno liberalni karakter. Uz objašnjenje povijesnih, političko-kulturnih i sociopsiholoških aspekata nacionalizma u Hrvatskoj, upućuje se na njegovu primarno strukturnu i kontekstualnu uvjetovanost, pri čemu se posebno ističu okvir političke neslobode i ograničena modernizacija u razdoblju komunizma, te specifični uvjeti demokratske tranzicije obilježene stvaranjem nacionalne države i Domovinskim ratom. Nacionalizam se tu pojavljuje kao izraz domoljublja i političke identifikacije, ali i kao odgovor na društveni, politički i vrijednosni diskontinuitet (kriza i dezintegracija starog i neprilagođenost novom sustavu) i poglavito kao reakcija na vanjski pritisak (rat). Oспорava se njegova inherentnost budući da on nije neka urođena kulturna crta, već društveni fenomen koji je izravno uvjetovan društvenim i političkim kontekstom. Zaključuje se da je nacionalizam u razdoblju demokratske tranzicije u Hrvatskoj, usprkos neprijepornim etnocentrističkim manifestacijama, u svojoj osnovi ipak liberalan, na tragu ostvarenja državotvorne ideje i uspostave demokratskog poretka. Normalizacija društvenog i političkog života nakon rata i obnovljeni procesi demokratizacije tijekom drugoga tranzicijskog desetljeća, pridonijeli su znatnom opadanju etnocentrizma i jačanju liberalnih obilježja nacionalizma.

Ključne riječi: nacionalizam, etnocentrizam, demokratska tranzicija, nacionalna država, postkomunistička društva, Hrvatska