
Issues in Croatian Politics: Voters, Minorities and Media

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**War and the Changes in Social Distance Toward the
Ethnic Minorities in Croatia**

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Summary

The author analyses two basic issues:

First, has the attitude toward the members of the ethnic minorities in Croatia changed in view of the war — and to what extent; and second, to what extent the attitude toward the minorities is the variable of the “ideological” rift in the electoral bodies of political parties.

By comparing the data on the social distance before 1990 and after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, and focusing on the study carried out in 1997, three conclusions have been made:

1. The war has brought about certain changes in the attitude toward the minority ethnic groups. These changes are not solely Serb-oriented (with whom the majority group — Croats — was at war with); a generally negative attitude toward other ethnic minority groups has been on the rise;

2. The results of the 1997 study have shown that the social distance is not a universal phenomenon and that there are two types of this distance: political and traditional/ cultural;

3. There are significant differences in the social distance toward the minorities among the voters of certain political parties; it is considerably smaller with the sympathisers of the “leftist” parties than with those of the “rightist” parties.

Introduction

The collapse of a political regime means the disintegration of the corresponding value system that, in a way, used to give legitimacy to this regime. When the collapse of a political system at the same time means the disintegration of a multi-national state, the inter-ethnic relations undoubtedly become one of the fundamental features of the totality of this process, both at the level of institutional and political relations and at the level of the changes in rating the members of national groups. In the analysis of the 1990 elections, we have shown how the attitude toward the national to a large extent determined the political preferences and how — together with the attitude toward religion — it influenced the desired options of the resolution of the political crisis in the former Yugoslavia

(Šiber, 1991). Meanwhile, there were some strong-arm attempts to impose certain solutions, contrary to the democratically declared will of the people, both with the internal uprising of the Serbian population and with the outside aggression. Regardless of the complex causes of the aggression which cannot be reduced to the inter-ethnic conflict, the fact remains that the inter-ethnic relations, the internal national homogenisation and the inter-ethnic hostilities are the most obvious aspects of that conflict that dominate the awareness of the peoples from the former Yugoslavia and remarkably change the existing evaluations, orientations and the readiness for certain forms of relationships.

The marked national homogenisation and the intensification of animosity toward the members of other national groups is not solely the characteristic of this war-engulfed territory or multi-national states in general, such as the former USSR or Czechoslovakia, but a universal phenomenon in the countries of central and eastern Europe. This is a value-vacuum of a sort and the need to find a firm foothold is generally felt — on the one hand, most usually in history, and consequently in nation and religion — and on the other in accumulated frustrations which demand rationalisation, the culprit, and the “socially acceptable” object of aggression. The attacks on the asylum-seekers in Germany after the unification, particularly frequent on the territory of the former eastern Germany, the strengthening of anti-semitism in Poland (though at the time when there are almost no Jews left there), the increased tensions surrounding the Hungarian minorities in Romania and Slovakia, are examples of that universal process (Held, 1993).

At uncertain times — and the changes that have swept over a large part of Europe were and have been accompanied with big promises, hopes as well as fears — there is a spontaneous search for the meaning, which very often means looking for “the culprit” for everything that happened or that stands in the way for things to be as we would like them to be. “Scapegoats” are sought out (and very often found) who, throughout our history have hindered the development of our potentials. Most often these are minority groups, on which prejudices — or *a priori* extremist negative attitudes — are fixated, based primarily on a cogent emotional attitude, devoid of marked cognitive elements. The word “prejudice” in itself signifies opinions formed prior to reasoning (pre-judging). In this context it is used in conjunction with certain attributes: ethnical, national, racial and other prejudices.

Prejudices always go hand in hand with ethnocentrism i.e. a value system which takes for granted the superiority of one’s own social group and its values in relation to the others. Ethnocentrism leads to unwillingness and the inability to try to understand other peoples’ beliefs, culture, religion, language. Ethnocentrism stems from group-centrism, the need of an individual to belong, to identify. According to the theory of social identity (Tajfel, 1982), prejudices surface when, regardless of the reason, social

“categorisations” are activated i.e. the processes of social divisions on the basis on ethnic (or any other) affiliation. This mostly happens at the time of sudden social changes and crises.

Having in mind the complexity of the former Yugoslavia, the existence of six republics (and two autonomous provinces within Serbia), in which different peoples lived, it is no wonder that the social crisis in time led to national homogenisation in individual republics. At first, there were the interests of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and so on, but the homogenisation very soon turned them into the interests of individual peoples and not individual republics. Thus, in the second phase the focus was on the interests of Serbs, Croats and so on. The conflict was not only inter-republic but inter-ethnic as well; the conflict both *within republics* and *among the national entities* on the former Yugoslav territory. This is the typical clash of patriotism and nationalism — the homogenisation in defence of the ethnicity wherever it may be. Applied to the other, fundamental aspect of the state crisis, that problem presented itself in the form of a dilemma: *is the right to self-determination (including secession) the right of individual peoples or the right of the population living on a certain territory?* Without getting into the concrete policies of policy-makers in individual republics-states¹, all of them more or less employed double standards, depending on their concrete interests: from Serbia and its claims on parts of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the basis of the “right to self-determination including secession” (but denying this right to the Albanians on Kosovo), to Croatia and its double standards when its territory or the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina are concerned.

In the first phase of the crisis there were internal migrations, largely in Serbia, or better to say on Kosovo; later, and mostly during the war, there were mass migrations and changes in the ethnic composition of the newly-created states.

During crises, individuals and groups seek explanations, the causes and the possible ways out. In the state of frustration and overall psychological agitation, people are an easy prey for manipulation and focusing chagrin on culprits. The mediators between the political elites and the masses are mass media who very often (ab)use their position. By the negative selection of the information and the tendentious interpretations, “others” are demonised, their homogenisation is used to justify one’s own, their “privileges” serve as a source of dissatisfaction.

Crises and their manipulations in the media lead to the collective ethnic identification, in which an individual and their interests are lost, and what is left is only the ethnic group — alpha and omega of everything:

¹The term republic-state is used for the period preceding the open conflict up to the adjudication of the international commission that sanctioned the right to self-determination of the republics of the former Yugoslavia.

affiliation, rights, self-awareness, self-righteousness, and the legitimacy of interests. Individuals exist through groups, groups give them confidence and legitimacy. The group identity always exists solely in relation to another group's identity, the group that "endangers" us, our interests and even our survival. Those "others" (always minorities) are different, unadjusted, privileged, and intruders in the majority group. By their very existence, they are considered a threat in a period of crisis.

Within these universal processes, there is also the influence of certain dominating character traits, first of all, *conformism*, or the need to belong and enjoy support, and *authoritarianism*, or the need to be led. The end result of these processes is prejudice-based *xenophobia*, which surfaces in crises.

The aggressive Serbian nationalism was preceded by a long social crisis, fertile soil for ideological manipulation of the "Serbian national issue", leading to the aggressive hegemonic policy and the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbian populations.

When analysing the changes in the attitudes toward the other national groups in Croatia, it should be kept in mind that this was a specific war, which resulted in extreme emotional agitation, when the behaviour is not only the consequence of people's attitudes as relatively more permanent sentiments, but of situational variables as well i.e. war, death, destruction. One should not forget people's propensity for the conformist types of behaviour and their desire to bring their behaviour and values in line with the behaviour and values of the majority. Besides, earlier studies showed that concrete instances of conflict among national groups give rise to the changes in the evaluation of "others". Buchanan and Cantril (1953) studied the contents of the stereotypes that the Americans had about the Russians, both at the time of their close co-operation and alliance (1942) and during the intensification of the cold-war (1948). As expected, in the first study certain positive traits (hard-working 61% and brave 48%) dominated, while in the second study the dominant stereotype was — cruel 50%!

Even more dramatic changes and over an even shorter period of time occurred in an Indian study (Sinha and Upadhyaya, 1960). By coincidence, the first study was carried out on the eve of the conflict between India and China (1959), and the survey was repeated ten months later. While the dominant Chinese traits prior to the conflict, in the opinion of Indian students, were artistic sense (47%), religiosity (31%), diligence (24%), after the conflict there was a sudden turnabout in the content of the stereotype: the Chinese are aggressive (71%), deceitful (60%) and selfish (43%).

Certain behaviours in a crisis are to a large extent founded on a population's character traits. In some earlier studies, which critically presented the research done in the field of inter-ethnic relations on the terri-

tory of the former Yugoslavia, certain types of behaviour were predicted on the basis of such character traits.

In the critical review of the studies of inter-ethnic relations (Šiber, 1988), we noticed that various studies — using a miscellany of methodological approaches, numerous samples and covering the entire former Yugoslavia — showed that at least 10-15% of the people held latently extreme nationalist views. It was difficult to decide whether these data were a cause for alarm at that time; nevertheless, we concluded that “*if we take into account the sensitivity of inter-ethnic relations on Yugoslav territory, and the latent — and historically much too often openly manifested — tendency to manipulate the inter-ethnic relations to defuse social discontents, plus the mostly authoritarian and conformist personality structure of the average man, then these data are not so marginal and indicate that in different social circumstances a part of the population would instigate inter-ethnic confrontations*” (104). In line with this conclusion and by analysing the existing studies of the authoritarian personality structure we concluded that “*the marked authoritarianism of the psychological build-up of our population poses a real danger for various influences gaining the upper hand, particularly at the time of social upheavals, insecurity and conflicts*”. (Šiber, 1989, p. 144).

The issues and the assumptions of the research

There are two central issues to this research:

1. Has — and to what extent — the attitude toward the members of the ethnic minorities in Croatia changed in view of the war;
2. to what extent the attitude toward the minorities is the variable of the “ideological” rift in the electoral bodies of political parties.

The assumptions of the research ensue from these issues, with certain addenda:

a) wars, as an extreme method of settling conflicting interests among states, inevitably lead to national homogenisation and the intensification of negative attitudes toward the peoples engaged in the conflict;

b) negative attitude toward the members of a national group, accompanied with the national homogenisation, triggers off negative attitudes toward other minority groups;

c) since the attitude toward minority groups is a component of the totality of political *weltanschauung* (a greater openness toward the others is characteristic for the liberal worldview /which means “leftist” parties/, while national ostracism is a part of the conservative worldview /and of predominantly “rightist” parties/), significant differences within the electoral bodies of certain parties regarding minority groups were expected.

The method

The attitude toward other national groups was examined by means of the Bogardus' social distance scale; in the comparative part of the analysis only two, extreme, dimensions were included: the readiness to marry into another nationality and the acceptance of the fact that the members of other nationalities live together with us in our state. The readiness to marry indicates the lack of any negative attitude, since it is the most immediate, direct and intimate relation with a person. On the other hand, denying other nations the right to live with us on the same territory indicates an extremely negative attitude, intolerance and exclusiveness.

Apart from the scale of social distance, which measures the *behavioural* component of the attitude, we have used three standard questions from the scale for measuring the attitudes toward the national — the *value* component. The focus of the analysis in this research is on social distance, while the other indicator serves as the controlling variable.

The study was carried out in the spring of 1997, on the eve of the elections for the House of Counties of the Croatian parliament and local self-government, on the sample of 1,168 respondents from four biggest Croatian cities.

The basic research findings up to 1990

We are going to review only two studies carried out on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, but in two totally different social and political periods. The first study (Pantić, 1967) carried out at the time of the still remarkable homogeneity of the Yugoslav territory, prior to the momentous events of 1968, and particularly those of 1971.² This was still the time when the former system and its value superstructure enjoyed immense popular support, and when the concepts of “brotherhood and unity” and equality were fundamental values. The other study (Toš et. al., 1988) was carried out at the time of the economic crisis which had not yet reached the proportions of a serious political crisis.³ This is important to note in order to understand that the findings of these studies are the result of more permanent orientations, formed over a longer period of time, and that they are not contaminated with the current political processes.

²The year 1971 will be remembered as the year of the so called “Croatian spring” i.e. Croatia's lobbying for changing the relations in the Yugoslav federation, for the bigger independence of republics, market economy and the elements of political pluralism.

³The study was carried out in 1986–87. The first spark of the crisis was probably the 8th Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Serbia in 1987.

Judging by the findings from the second study, the mid-1980s witnessed the end of the illusion about the ethnically conflict-free society, and the data on the social distance are increasingly similar to those in other countries, US for example. In any case, it is thought that in relatively stable and conflictless Western societies, about 50% of the population is not ready to form close familial ties with the members of other ethnic groups (Triandis, 1965). This datum is also the criterion for appraising the findings of our studies. Based on the research carried out at the time of the relatively stable functioning of the former Yugoslavia, the conclusion is that the ideologically promoted image of an ethnically conflict-free society was rapidly losing ground, and that a significant fraction of people increasingly began to turn to the members of their own nation; this trend was noticeable everywhere in the world.

Table 1. Comparative chart of the marked social distance in the two studies (in %)

republic/province	1966	1987
Voivodina	4	25
Croatia	11	22
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6	31
Montenegro	13	26
Serbia	11	30
Kosovo	17	54
Slovenia	40	42
Macedonia	48	43

The results of the research after 1990

In the more recent wartime and post-wartime periods, three studies on social distance toward certain minority groups have been carried out in Croatia.⁴

In the study of the 1992 and 1995 elections, the social distance toward three, most interesting and relevant minority groups (in view of the political and military hostilities) was analysed. Since Croatia was faced with the

⁴The studies were carried out on the eve of the elections for the Parliament or the bodies of local self-government, i.e. at the time of a more pronounced political participation — pre-election campaigns. This fact might have influenced the findings of the study only in the sense of a more explicit articulation of the respondents' answers within the more general individual political attitudes.

internal uprising of a part of the Serbian population and with the Serbian aggression, it is understandable that the social distance toward the Serbs is most indicative. The social distance toward the Bosniac Muslims was also studied, since the relationship with them is most interesting and complex. On the one hand, they were considered Croatian allies against Serbia and the Serbs living on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and (by some) as “Croats of Muslim faith”; on the other hand, some bitter fighting flared up between Croats and Bosniac Muslims in some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along religious lines. The third group are the Albanians as the group with the greatest social distance on the entire territory of the former Yugoslavia (Pantić, 1967, 1991; Jerbić et al., 1982; Toš et al., 1988) and who were potential Croatian allies (an enemy of my enemy is a friend of mine!) In the 1997 study, the Albanians were replaced by the Italians as a typical minority group in Croatia with a similar cultural (Mediterranean-western-European) and religious (Catholic) tradition.

The 1992 research was carried out at the end of the open, all-out conflict with Serbia, the 1995 research immediately upon the termination of the last military operations for the liberation of parts of the Croatian territory, and the 1997 study after the peaceful reintegration of the remaining part of the Croatian territory. It had been expected that such *situational variables* would significantly influence the social distance toward certain minority groups. The answer to this may be found in the percentages on Table 2.

Table 2. Social distance toward certain minority groups

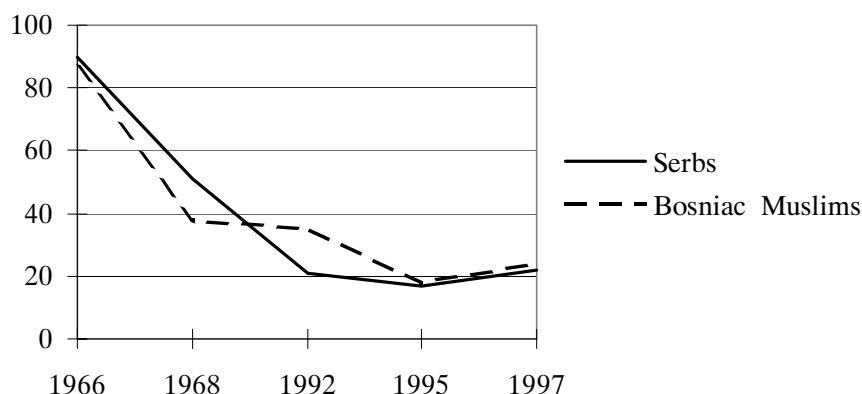
Form of ties	Serbs			Bosniac Muslims			Albanians		Italians
	1992	1995	1997	1992	1995	1997	1992	1995	1997
living in my state	47,8	46,8	55,1	73,7	58,3	59,5	58,0	48,1	77,8
being my neighbours	37,5	38,4	46,5	69,4	55,1	55,9	49,1	41,1	81,7
working together	38,3	37,7	45,1	69,6	53,7	53,9	50,9	41,4	78,2
being friends	37,8	36,5	42,9	72,5	55,6	53,0	52,2	44,0	80,0
being in-laws	20,7	17,2	21,3	32,5	18,4	23,4	21,0	13,0	48,2

Note: These data refer to the percentages of the respondents who accept certain forms of social ties.

In the 1992 study, carried out during the war, the social distance toward the Serbs rose dramatically; marriage-wise, the Serbs were as

(un)desirable as the Albanians. If the Albanians are — regrettably — taken as the measure of undesirability on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (like the black people in the US), we can conclude that those people who are unaccepting of the Albanians, do not accept the Serbs, either. In other words, only those without any prejudices at all, those who are emancipated enough to accept marriage with another person regardless of race, religion, or nationality, were ready for marrying a person of Serbian nationality, even during the war. The negative attitude toward the Serbs remained at the same level (the percentage of the respondents ready to accept any social ties with the Serbs) throughout this period.⁵ It will be interesting, from both scientific and social point of view, to observe how this attitude is to evolve in the future and how much time will elapse before the level of the readiness to tie the knot reaches 50%, considered to be an acceptable standard.

Figure 1. Changes in the readiness to marry members of the Serbian and Bosniac Muslim minority



And while the readiness to get married is an indicator of the ultimate openness toward others, or in other words, the indicator of the non-existence of any social distance, the opposite extreme is the readiness to live in the same state with the members of other nations, religions, and races. This form of social distance has been seldom studied since it has been thought, both in Croatia and abroad, that this belongs to the past; this is why there are only the results of the three studies, all Croatian.

⁵Minor variations in 1997 were the result of the differences in the composition of the sample, since it included only the inhabitants of big cities.

These data display considerable differences, which is the result of the social changes and the war. But the fact that over 50% of the Croatian respondents would not like to live in Croatia together with the Serbs, points to the depth of the crisis of inter-ethnic relations and the need for the creation of mutual confidence (of course, following the termination of the conflict and the elimination of its causes). The pronounced social distance toward the members of the other two national groups — the Bosniac Muslims and the Albanians — with whom, at least at the time of the 1992 study — there were no conflicts, also deserves attention. It seems that there is a sort of “stonewalling” at work here, closing within one’s own nation at the time of a crisis or a war, i.e. that the negative attitude toward a particular group is generalised toward “all those who are not us”. In other words, these data are the result of a real crisis and war, as well as of a latent tendency toward national exclusion and stonewalling.

Party preferences and social distance

Within a multi-party political system, political attitudes are directly linked with party choices. The attitude toward “the others” is a component of the comprehensive political outlook. Independent of the current political crisis, which intensifies these stances, there are still important differences in the expression of social distance among the voters of certain political parties. Certain indicators of this relationship were showed in an earlier work (Šiber, 1993).

The following Table sums up the findings of three studies, carried out as part of the analyses of electoral processes in Croatia in 1992, 1995, and 1997. In the 1995 elections, some parties entered a coalition — “Sabor 1995” — so that the responses of the supporters of individual parties making up that coalition cannot be analysed separately. The problem is even bigger since the data for 1992 and 1997 demonstrate significant differences in the social distance toward the non-Croatian groups among the voters of individual parties within this coalition.

In the table, the parties are included on the basis of the readiness of their voters for certain kinds of societal ties with the minority groups with which Croats directly clashed. Regardless of certain variations in the achieved results of individual parties, largely caused by the small number of respondents who opted for them, a marked consistency of the results in the three studied periods is evident. This consistency is above all evident in the fact that in all these periods, the line-up of the parties is almost identical and that basically it follows the line-up of the parties on the continuum “left-right”. According to the findings, the biggest readiness for co-existence and the closest social (familial) ties is manifested by the SDU and ASH voters, who are regarded (and even self-declared) as leftist

parties. Next are the SDP and regional parties' voters.⁶ The parties of the centre (HSLs, HNS, and HSS) had average percentage values. HDZ supporters are centre-right and HSP's are on the extreme right.⁷

Table 3. Social distance and party preference

parties	co-existence						marriage					
	Serbs			Bosniac Muslims			Serbs			Bosniac Muslims		
	92	95	97	92	95	97	92	95	97	92	95	97
SDU	100	100	100	100	100	100	94	100	67	69	67	67
ASH	90	77	91	93	69	82	80	69	80	79	46	70
SDP	90	68	75	90	70	77	54	30	35	53	25	40
REG	79	(60)	70	86	(71)	77	39	(28)	60	45	(28)	50
HSLs	60	58	63	82	69	65	27	19	23	39	23	25
HKDU	53	(69)	*	84	(71)	*	20	(28)	*	16	(28)	*
HNS	52	(69)	54	78	(71)	77	20	(28)	23	31	(28)	15
HSS	31	(60)	50	56	(71)	51	11	(28)	21	24	(28)	16
HDZ	31	33	40	71	48	47	10	8	10	27	9	12
	16	22	17	60	46	40	2	4	0	22	10	6

Note: The parties for which the 1995 data are supplied in brackets were at the time in a coalition so that it is not possible to distinguish among the supporters of individual parties.

* No respondents chose the party in the 1997 survey!

Since the 1992 study was carried out when the war with the Serbs was already raging, we cannot find out how it influenced the readiness of the voters of individual parties for certain forms of social ties. However, the effect of the conflict is noticeable in the social distance toward the Bosniac Muslims, since the open conflict with them began in 1993. The review of the comparative data shows that — more or less — the social distance increased with the voters of all parties, and that the biggest increase was with the voters on the right — those of HDZ and HSP. This can be seen in Figure 2, showing the data for the four typical parties in the Croatian political spectrum.

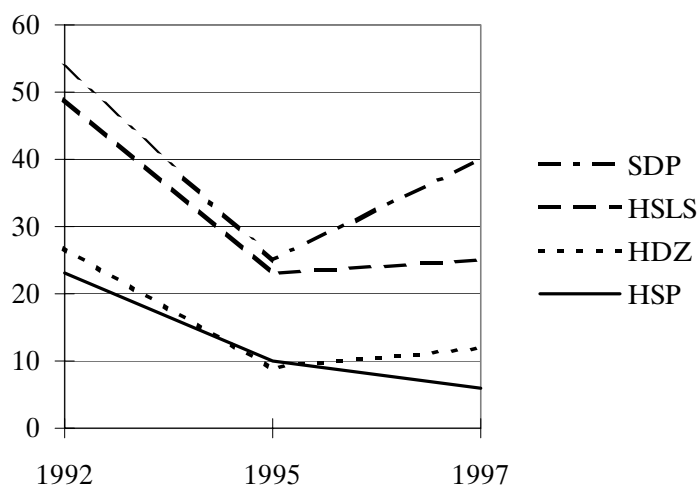
And while the changes in the attitude toward the Bosniac Muslims between 1986 and 1992 can be interpreted as an indirect effect of the national homogenisation and generalised antagonism toward other national

⁶Regional parties in these studies include: IDS, PGS and DA.

⁷HKDU is not included since the data are available solely for 1992. In 1995, that party was in a coalition, and in 1997 none of the respondents declared himself/herself as that party's voter.

groups, due to the conflict with the Serbs, the changes after 1992 are the direct result of the conflict with Bosniac Muslims.

Figure 2. Changes in the readiness to marry Bosniac Muslims



The 1997 social distance research

This study was carried out in a sort of the post-war period, i.e. the time when the outcomes of a war, the winners and losers, are known, when there is no possibility for new conflicts, when scores are settled, wounds healed, and the conditions for a normal, peacetime life created. The life with “others” is a component of everyday social relations and ties, but the war must have left some traumas.

The focus of this study was on the forms of social relations i.e. on the social distance toward particular groups. Unlike the earlier studies, we were interested in our attitude toward the Serbs, the group which Croatia was in war with and which is, regardless of all the migrational trends⁸ still the most numerous national minority in Croatia; the attitude toward the

⁸We are using the phrase “migrational trends” although this has been an exodus from Croatia of the members of a particular ethnic group triggered off by the war, whether through “auto-cleansing” i.e. a voluntary decision not to live in the former homeland, or the real or only perceived pressure to leave Croatia.

Bosniac Muslims, with whom Croatia formed an uneasy alliance during the war: on the one hand, the co-operation imposed through the common peril and on the other the conflict due to the differing visions of the state structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the attitude toward the Italians who served as the control group for the Catholic tradition and the western-style European civilisation, very much like Croatia's.

An elaborate scale of social distance was applied in the study: from the opinion whether a group should or should not live on the Croatian territory, to the readiness to enter the closest social tie — marriage. Since there is a total of 15 concrete indicators, we wanted to find out whether it was possible to reduce all these data into a smaller number of meaningful concepts. This was done by factor analysis⁹ and in this way three meaningful and interpretable factors were obtained.

Table 4. Factor analysis of the social distance variables

Relations with individual groups	factor I	factor II	factor III
Serbs — living in my state	.7987		
Serbs — working together	.7962		.3000
Serbs — being my neighbours	.7808		
Muslims — living in my state	.7764		
Muslims — working together	.7472	.3110	
Muslims — being my neighbours	.7247		
Serbs — being friends	.6279		.5163
Muslims — being friends	.5855		.4383
Italians — being my neighbours		.8254	
Italians — working together		.8105	
Italians — being friends		.7785	
Italians — living in my state	.4243	.6094	
Serbs — being in-laws	.3652		.8234
Muslims — being in-laws	.3270		.8183
Italians — being in-laws		.5086	.6497
Percentage of the total variance	49,9%	11,4%	8,5%

Note: The table includes only the saturations higher than .30!

⁹The orthogonal analysis with the Varimax rotation and the extraction Lambda 1 criterion was used.

Factor interpretation

These three abstracted factors explain almost 70% of the variance. This fact is the proof of the markedly developed and consistent relation. Factor I explains almost 50% of the total variance of the five different forms of social relations with the three minority groups; the Serbs, the Bosniac Muslims, and the Italians. It is interesting, however, that this factor contains only the variables of the relation between the Serbs and the Bosniac Muslims, while the variables of the relations with the Italians are contained in factor II. Having in mind the already mentioned data on the acceptability of certain forms of social ties with the mentioned peoples, we may conclude that factor I contains the attitudes toward the *undesirable ethnic groups*¹⁰; factor II the attitudes toward the *desirable ethnic groups*¹¹. The *desirability* or the *undesirability* of a group in a society depend on a cascade of historical, cultural and situational reasons (for more details, see Allport, 1954). As the results of the earlier studies show, in Croatia, in a stable social situation, this primarily depends on the historical and cultural (particularly religious) reasons. The findings of this study — differing a lot from the earlier ones — are surely caused by the situational reasons.

The reason that the first factor can explain such a big part of the total variance lies in the fact that it has been structured to up to 10 variables, while the second factor (11.4% of the total variance) covers only five variables. An outstandingly significant finding is that the attitudes toward the Serbs and the Bosniac Muslims are extremely divided (50% accepting and 50% rejecting), while the attitude toward the Italians is extremely positive (about 80% accepting).

Factor III (explains 8.5% of the total variance) includes primarily the readiness for familial ties with minority groups, the closest form of social ties, which implies a lack of any distance toward the minority groups.

These three factors are the foundation for any future analytical attempt to find out which character traits of the Croatian citizens are linked with the existence or the non-existence of social distance.

¹⁰Presumably, a component of this factor would probably be the attitude toward the Albanians if the stance toward this group was the subject of the research.

¹¹Again, presumably, a component of this factor would be the attitudes toward, for example, the Hungarians or the Austrians.

Objective character traits and social distance

When the attitudes toward other social groups are concerned (particularly toward minority groups — ethnic, religious or racial) or, more generally, regarding prejudices, the first assumption is that prejudices originate in poor education, or special social status within a certain traditional culture (women, for example), or that the elderly are more prone to nurturing them than young people, who are regarded much more open. It is interesting, however, that the findings of this study do not confirm these assumptions. Admittedly, in strict statistical terms, significant differences do exist, but they are negligible¹² to the point of social insignificance. This fact requires an explanation which is, it seems, threefold:

1. the results show that the social distance is so big that it has, in a way, become a universal feature of the whole society. The war, the common enemy, the homogenisation of the society, the conformist pressures — all this stimulates more or less uniform responses and the potential differences in the reactions, occurring in “normal” situations, are levelled off;

2. in certain historical periods (social crises, abrupt changes of political regimes, and alike) there are certain divisions in societies which are much more important for the analysis of political behaviour than the classical variables of individual social character traits.

3. in the development of any society there are events that affect people's opinions over the long haul, both politically and socially. In the case of Croatia this primarily means “political biographies” formed during World War II that divided the population along completely different lines (Šiber, 1997).

Values/individual political traits and social distance

In this analysis we are to focus on the three relevant character traits: religiosity, familial political biography and party choice and see to what extent they are linked with the expressed social distance. We are not going to analyse each form of social distance but limit ourselves to their concise indicators obtained through the factor analysis: general distance toward the Serbs and the Bosniac Muslims (factor I), general distance toward the Italians (factor II), and the distance regarding marriages with the members of other nations (factor III).

¹²In this research we have decided to take into consideration only the connections higher than 0.15 i.e. those that explain the minimum of 2.25% of the total variance.

Table 5. Values and political traits and social distance

	Distance toward Serbs and Bosniac Muslims	Distance toward Italians	Readiness for marriage
religiosity	.247	independent	.324
political biography	.217	independent	.175
party choice	.328	independent	.246

The data from the table show that the social distance toward the Italians in Croatia is not a consequence of systematic value-oriented or political causes, but more of certain individual preferences which have not been covered by this study, and which probably cannot be analysed by means of such an approach.¹³

Concerning the other two factors we can see that all three analysed variables are significantly linked with social distance, though in different ways. This will be much clearer from the following tables.

Table 6. Religiosity and social distance

Form of religiosity	Distance toward Serbs and Bosniac Muslims	Readiness for marriage
fervent believer	52.97	52.42
habitual believer	49.09	51.38
doesn't know	49.01	46.64
non-believer	45.97	44.00
anti-religious	44.87	42.97

Note: The data are shown here in the so called “standard figures”; AM (arithmetic mean) — 50, SD (standard deviation) — 10. Higher values indicate greater social distance.

The influence of religiosity on the social distance is understandable. The confessional affiliation of both minority groups differs from that of the majority of the Croatian populace; thus, siding with one's religion is on the one hand a factor of internal homogenisation, and on the other a factor of the differences regarding the others, including the creation of

¹³More appropriate methods are those of the in-depth psychology or heightened interview developed by R. Lane (1962) in the study of political ideologies.

social distance. This influence is even more evident in the category of the readiness to marry into minority groups since there are concrete obstacles if future spouses are of a different religion.

As might have been expected, those individuals (or their parents) with a “NOB” /partisans/ political biography show much more readiness for certain forms of social ties with minority groups, while those with an “NDH” /the pro-Nazi independent Croatian state during World War Two; U — ustashas, paramilitary voluntary units; D — regular army/ political biography show a much bigger social distance. As was shown in an earlier work (Šiber, 1997), even fifty years after the dramatic events of World War II, the political choices of that time still affect current political attitudes and behaviours.

Table 7. Political biography and social distance

Political biography	Distance toward Serbs and Bosniac Muslims	Readiness for marriage
“NOB”	47.47	47.87
“NDH-U”	53.74	51.93
“NDH-D”	52.73	52.77
on several sides	48.27	50.74
outside conflicts	48.94	49.03
does not know	50.95	49.46

Table 8. Party choice and social distance

Party choice	General distance toward Serbs and Bosniac Muslims	Distance toward marriages
SDU	40.19	47.68
ASH	45.87	38.78
SDP	45.64	48.03
Regional Parties	45.64	45.56
HNS	48.56	51.18
HSLs	48.75	50.47
HSS	50.32	50.10
HDZ	53.90	51.95
HSP	56.41	53.21

These data are identical to those on Table 4 but are here shown more coherently.

We have already shown the attitude of the voters of individual parties and their readiness to enter into two forms of social relations — co-existence on the same territory and marriage. Now we are going to show the relation between the party preferences and the two obtained factors: the general distance toward the Serbs and the Bosniac Muslims and the general readiness for marrying into another minority group.

The regression model of the connection between values/political opinions and social distance toward minority groups

Since we have found out that there are three individual values/political opinions that are linked with the social distance toward the minority groups, the question is what the relation between them is, or to what extent each of these variables contributes to the established connections. On the basis of numerous studies it may be assumed that religiosity and party choice are interconnected; the religious people more often support the parties on the right end of the political spectrum, and the non-religious those on the left. In the mentioned paper we also found out that there is a connection between the political biography and the party preference. Let us see their inter-correlation:

Table 9. The relationship between value/political variables

	religiosity	political biography
party choice	.370	.289
religiosity	—	.309

As we can see, all the three variables connected with the social distance toward the minority groups are inter-connected so the question is to what extent their connection decreases or increases the total connection with the social distance.

Since we have earlier (by means of a factor analysis) reduced all the data to three basic indicators — the general distance toward the Serbs and the Bosniac Muslims, the general distance toward the Italians, and the distance toward marriages — it will be interesting to see whether these relations are identical or one form of the distance is more strongly linked with one value/political variable or another.

Table 10. Regression relationship of values/political variables with social distance factors

variables	factor I	factor II	factor III
religiosity	.094 (.247.)	independent	.307 (.324)
political biography	.111 (.217)	independent	.084 (.175)
party choice	.244 (.328)	independent	.002 (.246)
multiple correlation R	.334	independent	.341

Note: Brackets contain the original correlations; outside the brackets are the partial correlations, i.e. the connection among various variables with the criterial variable (social distance), controlling for the influence of the other two variables.

Three central findings are contained in this table.

1. as we have already shown, not only is factor II (general attitude toward the Italians) independent of any value/political orientation of the respondents, but even when combined, they do not make up for a statistically significant connection;

2. by combining the three variables (political biographies, religiosity, and party preferences), the total correlation with the criterial variable has increased only so slightly;

3. an analysis of the partial correlations shows a marked change in comparison with the initial correlations. This is probably the most important finding of this research. Namely, it shows that the general social distance toward the Serbs and the Bosniac Muslims (factor I) is connected, above all, with the party (and, probably, the political) preferences of a respondent, while the universally negative attitude toward marrying into another ethnic group (factor III) stems primarily from the religiosity of the respondents. In other words, rejecting the idea of marrying into another ethnic group is the result of social, cultural, and traditional beliefs in a society; religion is one of the most important factors in this. One should bear in mind that religious doctrines in themselves (not only the Catholic) stand in the way of marrying members of other faiths or put certain requirements therein. Nevertheless, and regardless of religiosity, and at the level of the general attitude¹⁴, people in general object to marriages between the members of similar communities, on the assumption that in this

¹⁴We speak of the “general” attitude as opposed to the concrete behaviour since the classical psychological studies show that there is a significant difference between the verbal responses (like those in such studies) and the behaviour in concrete situations (LaPiere, 1934).

way possible conflicts and misunderstandings caused by social and cultural differences might be avoided. Thus, unlike factor I (general social distance toward the Serbs and the Bosniac Muslims), the dislike for marrying outside one's ethnic group should not be interpreted as an a priori negative attitude toward the "others", but more like a desire to bond with the members of one's own group — the reasons being the observance of religious norms and the fear of possible baneful influence of these differences.

The attitude toward the national as a general dimension

In our analysis so far, we have focused on the problems of the social distance toward specific minority groups. Now we are interested in the general attitude toward the national or, in other words, in the *national openness* vs. *national seclusion*. As we have already mentioned, we took only three statements, which we thought would best illustrate the dimension we were looking into. The following table includes the responses on the acceptance-refusal scale.

Table 11. Acceptance of certain statements about the national

Statements	completely disagree	disagree	do not know	agree	completely agree	AM
Best that members of one nation live alone in their state	41.7	9.7	22.6	11.6	14.4	2.47
One should return to the tradition and the original values of one's own people	10.9	8.4	30.3	14.4	36.0	3.56
At the end of 20 th century any national seclusion is pointless	8.2	4.2	20.6	15.7	51.3	3.98

In short, the responses indicate that a great majority of the respondents are against national seclusion (67% vs 12.4%)¹⁵, against that only the members of one nation live in one state (51.4% vs 26%), but at the same time they are for the return to the original values of their people

¹⁵For the sake of clarity, we combined the responses "agree completely" and "agree" on the one hand, and on the other "disagree completely" and "disagree", leaving out the "do not know" response.

(50.4% vs 19.3%). The responses express a desire for national openness with a pronounced craving for traditionality.¹⁶

By applying the factor analysis to these three statements, we got a single common factor which explains 50% of the common variance, while the connection of individual statements with the factor ranges from 0.67 to 0.77, the standard value for this type of research.

A comparison of the percentages of the responses advocating national seclusion in this study with those from the earlier studies shows that the percentage of the respondents who opt for a bigger national seclusion has slightly increased (in the earlier studies the percentage was about 15%; see Šiber, 1988), but these changes are much smaller than the changes revealed in the study of social distance.

It showed that all the analysed variables, both objective and those value/political, are linked with the general value attitude toward the national; the connections remain significant within the regression analysis as well, which testifies to the independent contribution of each of these variables to the understanding of the attitude toward the national, as can be seen from the following table.

Table 12. Regression relationship with the attitude toward the national

variable	connection	partial connection
party choice	.309	.228
religiosity	.243	.203
education	.124	.135
political biography	.198	.108
age	.052	.081
multiple correlation R		.472

Note: The direction of the connection is not included, since this is related to the construction of a variable.

All these connections, even those smaller than .10, are statistically significant. What is significant about these data is that their combined contribution (i.e. their connection with the criterial variable — the attitude toward the national) — is $R .472!$ In other words, it means that although these variables explain only a little more than 10% (10.39%) of the total

¹⁶Similar results were obtained in an international study of historical awareness of young people (Šiber, 1996).

variance of the social distance, in this case they explain as much as 22.3% of the total variance of the attitude toward the national.

Conclusion

The results of the research, juxtaposed with the data from the earlier studies of the same issues, unequivocally and unambiguously confirmed that *the war has brought about the change in the attitudes of the people toward the minority ethnic groups*. These changes are not exclusively directed toward the minority — Serbian — group with which the majority — Croatian — group was at war, but the *generalised negative attitude toward all other ethnic minority groups*. This is the proof of the assumption that the national homogenisation, as the result of a conflict with another national group, inevitably creates distance toward all those who are not “us”. Thus we can speak of two phases in boosting the social distance, triggered off by military conflicts. The data related to the social distance toward the Bosniac Muslims prove the same. In the first phase, the conflict with the Serbs broadened the social distance toward them as the result of the homogenisation of the Croats, while in the second that distance greatly increased (to the level of the social /un/acceptability of the Serbs) as the result of a concrete conflict with that ethnic group.

Since we had at our disposal the findings of the studies with the same subject in relatively “normal” circumstances, we may formulate another extremely important and far-reaching conclusion. Namely, the studies carried out before 1990 showed that the percentage of the respondents with extreme views of others is about 15%. In the studies after 1990, carried out during and after the war, we found out that only about 20% of the respondents are still open toward everybody, regardless of the minority. In other words, *the greatest number of the respondents (and probably, of the whole population) are people without the unambiguously articulated opinions toward the others, i.e. individuals who change their preferences according to the changes in social conditions*. This group is usually called the “silent majority”; it “sways” in their political preferences, often without a clear and articulate political opinion, is an easy prey to manipulation, acts in line with immediate problems, choices, and feelings, and not with long-term interests, goals, and stable internalised value preferences. It will be interesting to see to what extent the actual conflicts have been “instilled” into people’s consciousness and how much time will be needed for the social distance pendulum to swing back.

The findings have also shown that one cannot always speak of social distance as a universal dimension¹⁷, but that we can distinguish (as in our

¹⁷B. Jerbić and S. Lukić (1982) in their analysis of the social distance of high-school youth got, by means of the factor analysis, only one universal social

case) between the *political social distance* (rejection of others as the result of the totality of political preferences) and the *traditional/cultural social distance* (expressed as the refusal to marry into other ethnic groups). The quieting down of the general political situation is probably going to alleviate the political social distance, while the traditional/cultural distance is going to remain, like in other countries.

The finding which shows that there has been a relatively small change in the opinion as a more permanent attitude toward the national, can be expressed as follows: *social changes — primarily the war and the destruction — have provoked rejection of certain forms of co-existence with minority groups, above all with those who Croatia was in conflict with, but that did not greatly influence the general value orientation, i.e. the attitude toward the national.*

Since the combination of demographic and value/political variables defines the general attitude toward the national to a greater extent than it defines the social distance toward particular minority groups, it could be concluded that *the attitude toward the national is much more stable and that it is to a great extent conditioned by some relatively permanent and stable character traits, while the social distance is much more influenced by the situational variables — in this case, the war and the destruction.*

distance factor which might be interpreted as ethnocentrism — seclusion and rejection of others. However, their research was carried out in “peacetime”.

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