
Realities and Directions: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts on Croatian Future Development

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On June 25th, 1991 the Republic of Croatia was proclaimed an independent State, and ceased to be part of Yugoslavia within which had existed for over seventy years, after 1938 having the status of a federal unit. The new State was in due course recognized by other members of the international community and accepted into full membership of the United Nations. This decision created a new situation where many problems that were high on the agenda of Croatian politics for a century and a half became almost obsolete, and others of which few had thought assumed the utmost urgency.

The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts elected a committee from among its members to analyse the new situation and try to identify the objective factor defining both the possibilities and limitations facing the country and its people, and giving some thought to the main immediate problems in the various fields of activity. Towards the end of 1992 the committee submitted a paper under the above title¹ which was widely discussed within the Academy and then published in book-form as an Academy edition.

I.

The first part of the paper, Realities, covers six areas: history, geopolitics, demography, culture (language, literature, fine arts, music), society, economy. The second part, Directions, also has six sections: science, spiritual and moral starting points, the State, social policy, education, health. The various parts

¹ Hrvatska - Zadaci i usmjerenja, Hrvatska Akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb 1992, 139 pp.

deal with questions considered fundamental for Croatia at the present moment, reduced, however, to their bare essentials. The historical continuity of Croatia in the same territory, within its present internationally recognized boundaries, is described but the claim to continuing statehood is confined to those periods when political autonomy and independent political decision making within an international context is documented by uncontroversial historical evidence. Geopolitically, Croatia has the problem of its odd moon-silver shape with thin elongated wings, creating difficulties in transportation, in general integration of the country, and, of course, in defense. Demographically, the birth-rate in Croatia has been falling for some time and there is strong outmigration, including a high rate of brain-drain, but also in-migration, particularly from Bosnia-Hercegovina; the population is ethnically mixed, with a considerable (12,5%) Serbian minority. In the area of culture, the problem of similarities and differences among the languages and dialects in the country and its neighbors is analysed, and achievements in the various fields of artistic activity in Croatia through history listed. Society in Croatia is going through processes of structural and value-change, but there is also some continuity and a tendency for institutions to revert to their accustomed mode of operation in spite of new names. The economy is a major problem and is considered here mainly from the point of view of what should be done in order to transform and to modernize it. The whole situation is at present under the impress of the military aggression against Croatia, with its terrible demographic, material, and psychological consequences.

The second part, Directions, starts with science, an affirmation of its universal character and an appraisal of its critical and innovative role in society, and lists the steps to be taken towards its full development in Croatia. Particular attention is paid to higher education and to the role of the universities. The chapter on spiritual and moral starting points analyses the psychological ravages wrought by the war and stresses the necessity to overcome the hate and anger caused by the aggression, it discusses the problem of war crimes, and the possible role of religious organizations of various denominations in the process of spiritual renewal. The chapter on the State compares constitutional and legal texts with the reality of the day-to-day functioning of the political system, considers foreign policy options, legal problems of the transition to a market economy, problems of modernizing public administration and of guaranteeing an independent judiciary. The last three chapters treat the problems and perspectives of the three large public service networks: social policy, education, and health. In social policy everything hinges on the question how to combine the welfare activity required by the present emergency of war (refugees, displaced persons, destroyed homes, the wounded and handicapped), with the longer-term policy of implementing the constitutional responsibility for general welfare and strengthening the institutions of a welfare society. Education must not only face a present State of reduced capacity because of schools destroyed in the war and the displacement of part of the student population, but also with the unfortunate consequences of past radical and insufficiently considered experiments in education. The health service has, perhaps best risen to the immediate necessities of war, but the problems of coping with its longer-term consequences and of keeping up with the expansion of modern health technology are still to come.

II.

To produce a paper of such scope on the Croatian situation within a comparatively short time means to accept in advance certain limitations and weaknesses. First, the difference between Realities and Directions is less sharp than the classification in the paper makes it seem. "Realities" are supposed to be objective states, stable over a longer period, the "givens" of our situation. Actually, most of them although they existed before the present historical moment, have been significantly influenced by the war and its corollaries. So, the shape of the territory of the Republic, which used to be a geographical oddity but no particular problem, has now become a fundamental geopolitical and strategic difficulty and threat. What were considered to be demographic constants have been changed by the war, loss of life, refugees and displaced persons from parts of Croatia and from Bosnia, the further reduction of the birth rate and increase in the rate of emigration. Economic indicators, discussed earlier in the context of possible advantages or disadvantages in economic exchange among the Yugoslav republics, have now become thresholds of our own economic survival.

"Directions", on the other hand, are supposed to be new orientations of activity in the here and now. Some of them are indeed new, the product of our present situation, such as the spiritual and moral starting points for building the future, or priorities in organizing the institutions of democratic government, though, in the latter case, they are novel only with respect to this country: there is no real alternative to adopting institutions developed elsewhere and adapting them to local needs and traditions. Others, such as science, are simply a continuation in the direction already being followed. Most "directions" are a mixture of both long-term development trends and specific tasks of the present moment, as in social policy, education, or health.

Second, the paper does not include the most important and most agonizing question of our present and our immediate future, the war and the occupation of a part of the territory of the Republic. How long is this situation going to last? What are the possible solutions? The silence of the paper on this central problem means conscious self-limitation in view of the character of the Academy as an institution. The Academy represents, in a manner of speaking, the long-term experience of our community that can be usefully applied to the consideration of the long-term characteristics of our national situation, but does not give special qualifications in providing answers to current crises. This must remain the task and the responsibility, not of scholars, but of a different functional sector, politics.

Third, the paper is not based on research, as research was out of the question within the time available and in the absence of the necessary preconditions of stability. It is based on existing data, though some of the data is of questionable reliability, e.g. the data on losses and destruction caused by war in any area, or data on some of the economic factors. Many of the opinions offered are based on the impressions and the estimates of their authors and as such they represent rather starting points for a discussion than definitive appraisals.

In view of these limitations, the question might be asked why did the Academy start a project knowing beforehand the weaknesses to which it is necessarily subject? On the surface level the answer to this question is: because it felt that its position in our national community imposed upon it the responsibility to speak about the fateful epoch in which we live, even if its words are mainly based on common sense and good will rather than on verified knowledge. On a deeper level, however, the main motivation for this undertaking was the feeling that the Academy has the possibility, and therefore the responsibility, to point out certain facts and circumstances of cardinal importance for our very existence that other institutions in our country, each for reasons of its own, are unlikely to discuss. Such as,

- Croatia is a national State in a multi-ethnic territory where beside the Croatians as the largest ethnic group, live other groups representing together almost a quarter of the population. One of the major dangers in this situation is the emergence of nationalism, i.e. the assumption that one ethnic group is inherently better than the others, that it has a better right than the others to live in the territory it occupies. Such assumptions run counter to the fundamental principles of equality of all citizens without which a multiethnic community, or any community for that matter, is not viable. This fact is unlikely to be discussed in the platforms of political parties who cannot forego the advantage which the attractiveness of national slogans for the voters gives to the party using them.

- A country where such a large number of people have changed their political allegiance in such a short time, or at least the outward manifestations of their political allegiance, as in Croatia since 1990, must reckon with the possibility of a general moral crisis of major proportions. However good and however morally acceptable the reasons for such change in the individual instance, in the mass it could give rise to a cynical attitude towards politics, and not only towards politics, but to loss of confidence in the trustworthiness of public statements and promises, and, in its extreme consequences, to an increase in corruption, unwillingness to work, and other socially obnoxious behavior.

- The high value attached to their own State, particularly by Croats, could lead to a dangerous cult of the State as such, implying readiness to relax the necessarily watchfulness towards governmental authority and its possible abuses, so that the State could transform itself from a good servant into a bad master.

Croatia - Realities and Directions is a position paper on the country's situation at a certain moment in time. As such it is not only a call for discussion but also an obligation accepted by the Academy to continue its work of analysing in more detail, area by area and problem by problem, taking its time and using the scholarly resources at its disposal.