

# THE STRUCTURE OF CONSPIRATORIAL BELIEFS IN CROATIA

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Izvorni znanstveni rad  
Primljeno: rujan 2009.

**Summary** According to results of a survey in 2007, this study analyses conspiratorial beliefs in Croatia and their correlates. Conspiratorial beliefs consist of politically controversial events and processes in recent Croatian history. Factorial analysis has revealed two factors: Government conspiracies during the 90's and Conspiracies of internal and external enemies. Based on the ideas of Sloterdijk and Žižek, we can name these Factors – Kynical and Cynical conspiracy theories. The first ones are a cheeky and bold exposure of cynicism of the power elite: secret meetings with the enemy and trade in territory during the war, political crimes, corruption, etc. The second ones are the back side of the public façade, obscene reactions to 'thefts of enjoyment' in the National Thing.

Further analysis has revealed strong differences in beliefs in conspiracies between citizens of different ideological affiliation and different political legacy, and between voters of two main political parties, HDZ and SDP.\*

**Keywords** conspiracy theory, cynicism, kynism, Government conspiracies, conspiracies of internal and external enemies, electoral behaviour

## Introduction

A conspiracy theory is the interpretative framework and narrative pattern which defines political events and wider political processes as the consequence of premeditated and deceptively random activities, i.e. secret agreements regarding the performance of illegal and

immoral activities (and objectives), or their application in accomplishing illegal objectives (see Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1976: 243). To sum up, it is a definition which implies a group of conspirators or a group which apparently conducts its activities in a secret manner and/or performs activities other than those it claims to be performing

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\* Prikazani rezultati proizašli su iz znanstvenog projekta "Javnost, elite, mediji i komunikacijska strategija ulaska Hrvatske u EU" provedenog uz potporu Ministarstva znanosti, obrazovanja i športa RH.

(see Coady, 2006: 2), but the real intentions and/or influences of which may be publicly “readable”.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, only a step further we are faced with problems, since this definition is quite often applied either selectively, i.e. only to unofficial statements or more frequently to statements issued by those not having political power, or it is simply perceived as an incorrect theory.

This paper attempts to avoid both the acceptance of conspiracy theories as “facts” and their mere reduction to a phenomenon of modern mass hysteria (Žižek, 1999: 6), analysing them beyond the opposition between delusion and hidden truth. We are interested in conspiracy theory as a specific (and quite frequent) public interpretation which has an impact on the political thinking and behaviour of both individuals and the wider community. Its primary function is to determine the front-line friend/enemy and it should, therefore, be studied as a manifestation of social cleavages.

Briefly, the objective of this paper is to determine the extent to which con-

spiratorial beliefs are present in the general population and its relevancy for their political opinion and behaviour on the basis of psychoanalysis and the previous discourse analysis of the historical period 1990-2007. This will be achieved by means of analysing the results of a survey conducted in 2007.

### Psychoanalytical Understanding of Conspiracy Theory

At the core of conspiracy theory there is the concept of a group of enemies or some collective enemy entity. By means of this construction, people try to avoid and reshape in an imaginary and symbolic manner the trauma caused by the experience of the elusive, terrifying, and traumatic properties of the Other. From the point of view of Lacanian psychoanalysis, conspiracy theories derive from the imaginary Real, from the experience of the Real in the Other, from the unfathomable gap of radical Otherness. This alien traumatic core as an inert, inaccessible, and enigmatic property of the Other raises the question *Che vuoi?*,<sup>2</sup> e.g. when communicating with the Other: “You’re telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at?” (Žižek, 2002: 155), what are your real intentions which differ from the literal ones, in other words “what is [that] in the subject more than the subject?” (*ibid.*: 158), what is the indefinable, the thing which resists interpellation

<sup>1</sup> In this sense, a conspiracy theory represents one form of the so-called symptomatic reading of the text (Žižek, 1994: 10), wherein it is assumed that, under the influence of the undeclared (hidden) interest (in domination, exploitation, etc.) there is a gap between the “official”, public meaning of the text and its “actual” intention, a tension between the explicitly enunciated content of the text and its pragmatic presuppositions. When interpreted in this manner, a conspiracy theory is close to the classical ideology critique. Conspiracy theories are, therefore, an attempt at uncovering the hidden, at discovering a secret, at “shedding light” on the abuse of power and obliterating the difference between insiders and outsiders (see Ellington, 2003: 443).

<sup>2</sup> Literally translated from Italian, it means: *What do you want?* See how it is elaborated in Lacan’s graph of desire (1983: 291-295) and by Žižek (2002: 155-168), who claims that it is a widespread phenomenon in politics, since every political request is caught up in the dialectic which always implies something different from its literal meaning.

and positioning in a symbolic network? It is what Lacanian psychoanalysis denotes as *objet petit a*<sup>3</sup> and defines as the object-cause of enjoyment.

*What does the Other want?* As an answer to this question expressing the “unbearable enigma of the Other’s desire”, we get phantasm<sub>2</sub>, an imaginary scenario, i.e. an unsettling explanation as to why something went wrong, for instance “why isn’t our society functioning”, “who is to blame for our pauperization”, “who is exploiting us” – and, in the long run, who is stealing our enjoyment. “In the case of anti-Semitism, the answer to ‘What does the Jew want?’ is a fantasy of ‘Jewish conspiracy’: a mysterious power of Jews to manipulate events, to pull the strings behind the scenes” (*ibid.*: 160). This construction of the enemy is the pre-ideological core of ideology containing the spectral phantasm which fills the void in the Real, while functioning as defence from “*Che vuoi?*” and, at the same time, as the framework which coordinates our desire, as well as the “the formal matrix, on which are grafted various ideological formations” (Žižek, 1994: 13). In the sense of the latter, conspiracy theory also possesses a symbolic dimension which manifests itself through a series of signifiers, specific of the ideological context within which they manifest themselves, most usually in the form of more or less elaborated narratives.

The main function of the Symbolic order, in the framework of which conspiracy theories take form, is to make the

co-existence with others at least bearable by imposing laws and obligations, i.e. to act as a kind of attenuator and consideration generator. It manifests itself as the third element which, while it is functional, prevents the relationship “between me and my neighbours, so that our relations do not explode in murderous violence” (Žižek, 2006: 46). Therefore, as long as the Symbolic order is functional, conspiracy theories remain a local phenomenon which reflects the dynamics of the interrelation between various agents and the modalities of coping with different problems. If the symbolic network is narrowed down, and its constituents are suspended, for instance in the context of social anomy or collapse of a certain order, the black-and-white description technique provided by conspiracy theories becomes more prominent. Within such a context, a single moment of its temporary complete suspension is enough to induce violence, conflict, or war.

Nevertheless, in order to enable a relatively successful functioning of the Symbolic order, it has to be supported by the phantasm of its functional completeness. It is a phantasm which accompanies the spectral phantasm of conspiracy theories. In other words, we can talk about two types of phantasms. One is the idealistic construction of society or the community, whereas the other is the unsettling explanation as to why something (or everything) “went wrong”. These two phantasms – used to express the aforementioned dichotomy – are closely interrelated.<sup>4</sup> Under certain circumstances,

<sup>3</sup> A paradoxical mysterious object which represents the aspects which, in the positive empirical object we are studying, elude the eye and, as such, serve as the driving force underlying the desire for it (see Žižek, 1996: 69).

<sup>4</sup> Žižek (1996: 87) states that two dimensions of the phantasm are “as two sides of the same coin: as long as the community experiences its own reality as arranged, structured by

on the level of an individual subject and a certain discourse, the two phantasms may become mutually interchangeable as to which will dominate and which will be subordinate. A more dominant first phantasm will imply a higher level of identification with the Symbolic order, and thus more pronounced confidence in official authorities and structures, a situation which corresponds to the context of a relatively “peaceful” reproduction of the existing order, wherein disturbing factors are easy to neutralize or present as exceptions to the rule. The situation where a more pronounced dislocation of the Symbolic order, due to some Real antagonism, causes the first concept to lose its functionality, leads to the explanation and, quite often, identification of the agent responsible for the problems, who has the role of “thief of enjoyment” (Salecl, 2002). Quite frequently, these social agents may be various ethnic, linguistic, or racial minority groups, civil associations and organizations, but also political and other elites within or outside the community which perceives itself as being threatened. In this situation, the dominant position is taken over by the unsettling aspect of the phantasm which leads to distancing from and distrust of the designated culprits, accompanied by the request for their neutralisation and/or removal.

Such an interpretation of the subject as split between the phantasms is close to Sloterdijk’s (1992) definition of the cynical reason as a universal and dif-

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phantasm<sub>1</sub>, it needs to negate its own impossibility, the antagonism in its own centre. Phantasm<sub>2</sub> (e.g. the picture of the ‘imaginary Jew’) is the embodiment of this denial. Shortly, the effectiveness of phantasm<sub>2</sub> is a precondition for the persistence of phantasm<sub>1</sub>.”

fuse phenomenon of the present. According to this author, a cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he nonetheless still insists upon the mask. Translated into the language of the previous psychoanalytical explanation, this means that, on the level of everyday experience, in the course of reception and interpretation of politically relevant events, the subject experiences a gap between the ideological meaning of discourse, i.e. the formal vocabulary used to publicly describe the event within the framework of the “stable and well-functioning” system (phantasm<sub>1</sub>), and premonition in the sense of decoding the “actual” meaning of this event on the level of political games of particular interest to the actual participants in a wider temporal perspective (phantasm<sub>2</sub>). In this process, phantasm<sub>2</sub> quite often acquires the form of conspiracy theory. In order to become clearly articulated and expressed, it requires an acute experience of personal and/or collective instrumentalization and/or threat, and an available or conceivable culprit. In that situation, the actual opinion (or, rather, what the critical mass suspects to be true) is expressed in order to go through a “purification ritual” and establish the old or new ideological discourse, i.e. remain within the framework of double phantasms.

Sloterdijk also differentiates cynicism from kynism, two terms which have in common the “motive of self-preservation in times of crisis”, cheekiness, “releasing the breaks” and “blurting things which are not for the public” (118), i.e. “a kind of shameless, ‘dirty’ realism” (197). Nevertheless, they are the expression of different positions of power. Sloterdijk associates cynicism with the Mas-

ter's culture and "refinement", whereas kynism is associated with the popular, plebeian thought, i.e. the opposition to official ideology which is expressed in the most plastic manner through satirical subversion. In doing so, kynism acts as "a resoluteness not to let the naked truth that hides behind cultural disguises to elude it" (158). Cynicism, on the other hand, tries to reduce everything "higher" to the lowest denominator, and represents "the masters' antithesis to their own idealism as ideology and as masquerade" (118). Since, in history, it appeared after kynism, cynicism may be defined as kynism that passed over to the side of power and idealism of the governing ideology and became its shadow, i.e. its dark side. Therefore, depending on whether they are critically oriented towards the governing structures and dominant ideology or they support them, we may differentiate between kynical and cynical conspiracy theories. One of the primary objectives of this paper is to study their manifestation and characteristics in one segment of Croatian history.

### **Where Do Conspiracy Theories Stem From?**

The answer to this question can be found in the post-Marxist theory of the social field which is represented both in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (e.g. 1985), and in the works of some Lacanians, for instance Žižek (1994, 2002, 2004, etc.) and Stavrakakis (1999). This theory starts from the assumption that the socio-ideological space is in itself "curved", restricted and unbalanced and that, prior to every positive entity, there is a so-called "pure difference" (see Žižek, 2004). This means that every society is based on an antagonism which

cannot be "exceeded" or "annulled", and which always resurfaces during traumatic events which cannot be symbolically overcome. This theory claims that, paradoxically, society is "kept together" precisely by antagonisms and cracks which prevent it from being integrated into a harmonious, transparent, and rational whole. Antagonism prevents the closing of the social field and the achievement of complete symbolization. What we perceive as social reality is a reactionary creation and an attempt at "taming" this radical antagonism, which develops its actual manifestations in a concrete historical and political process. Rather than being directly given, social reality is always previously established and structured by means of symbolic mechanisms. The problem lies in the fact that symbolization is never complete; it never manages to encompass the whole of the Real. There is always something elusive. Therefore, in order to establish a social reality which corresponds to the notion of a harmonious whole, it is necessary to repress antagonisms. In other words, in order to establish it, something must be excluded. The aspiration to abolish antagonism is the source of totalitarian temptation (see Žižek, 2002: 18). Here we can again take as an example Žižek's description (2004) of the mechanism of functioning of Nazi anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism perceives the Jews as disruptive elements of the harmonious "natural" order of things, as alien intruders, the elimination of which would make possible the re-establishment of a stable social organism. According to Žižek, in order to understand how anti-Semitism works, and also to get a general insight into the way social orders work, we have to reverse anti-Semitic thinking. It is not that antagonism, disintegration, social struggle and problems exists because of

the Jews or any other stigmatized group of enemies, but antagonism and imbalance that comes from the Real precede the construction of the enemy. In order to develop and interpret antagonism in an imaginary sense, society construes an image of the Jew, i.e. the enemy and projects into it the causes of antagonism. That is the image of the Other which functions as the return of the repressed social antagonism which cannot be depicted, but which lies at the basis of every society and is projected into specific enemies. Here the Real “erupts” as an imaginary spectre which haunts reality and manifests itself as a concrete conspiracy theory, which then influences the dynamics of the relationship towards the designated enemy.

Therefore, the image of the enemy, which in an ideological discourse takes the form of a conspiracy theory, is one way of “filling out” an empty space in the social antagonism in an imaginary-symbolic manner. Although the antagonism is Real, it can only be represented in the ideological form of social reality. By no means is this to imply that enemies do not really exist. They are always present as a potentiality – everybody is everybody’s potential enemy, but who will actually become one depends on the manner in which social reality is structured in a specific historical and political space-time. Conflict is the first social fact, a sort of constant, a traumatic difference society is trying to overcome in different ways by means of building symbolic structures, the function of which is to “tame” and/or eliminate the conflict in order to make society a functional harmonious whole. It tries to conceal the Real of antagonism, which then returns in the guise of spectral apparitions (Žižek, 1994: 17).

To illustrate this unusual logic, Žižek borrows an example from Claude Lévi-Strauss (1989), who describes a Native American village divided into two fractions. Depending on the fraction they belong to, members have a different concept of the spatial organisation of the dwellings in the village. Members of the first group, which Žižek denotes as conservative corporatists, imagine the layout of the village as a circle of houses which are more or less symmetrically aligned around a temple in the centre. Members of the other, so called revolutionary-antagonistic group perceive the village as two clusters of houses divided by an invisible border. The fact which is also emphasized by Lévi-Strauss is that this situation should not be interpreted in a cultural relativistic manner, according to which the perception of space depends on the belonging to one of the groups. The very splitting into the two ‘relative’ perceptions implies a hidden reference to a constant – not the objective, ‘actual’ arrangement of buildings but a traumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were not able to symbolize, to account for, to ‘internalize’, to come to terms with: an imbalance in social relations that prevented the community from stabilizing itself into a harmonious whole (Žižek, 1994: 16). Two mutually exclusive perceptions are simply two different attempts at dealing with this traumatic antagonism and its overcoming by means of a balanced symbolic structure. Nevertheless, Žižek further expounds, “common sense tells us that it is easy to rectify the bias of subjective perceptions and ascertain the ‘true state of things’: we hire a helicopter and photograph the village directly from above” (*ibid.*). The photographs will show “objective”, undistorted

reality. But, in this way we would completely miss the Real of *social* antagonism, the traumatic core that is impossible to symbolize, “that found expression in the very distortions of reality, in the fantasized displacements of the ‘actual’ arrangement of houses” (*ibid.*). To show the Native American photographs and expect that the existing perception will disappear would be the same as saying to the Hutu and Tutsi that they only differ in physiognomy, to black and white people in, for instance, the USA that the only difference between them is the colour of their skin, to the Serbs and Croats that they are divided only by slight differences in language and religion, etc. By doing so we would disregard a series of spectres – a pandemonium which governs their mutual relations in concrete history.

This phenomenon of facing the trauma in a certain period, which is expressed in the imagery of an enemy, as a “scared thought” caused by the supposed conspiracy of the Other, is the subject of study of this paper. Conspiracy theories are, therefore, symptoms of a fundamental Real antagonism which manifests itself in a series of neuralgic points which are fabricated in the Imaginary-Symbolic creations of a certain society.

The question this leads to is, in general, what kind of antagonisms in a positive, symbolic sense are we dealing with? What are these wider frameworks we could, at least, tentatively establish in respect to the concrete historical segment to be studied, wherein concrete conspiracy theories would act as their indicators and axes? Since we are dealing with a historical period in which we are analysing the disintegration of a political community which ends in war, followed by the establishing and struc-

turing of a new one, which later gets involved in wider integration processes, antagonisms in the widest sense in which conspiracy theories should manifest themselves, including what Laclau (1991: 59) denotes as the general gap of modern societies – between tendencies of integration which reflect themselves in the need for power acting on behalf of the whole community (including the threat of authoritarian power) and particularistic tendencies of different social powers aimed at the fragmentation of the social structure (with the threat of chaos, violence, and civil war). The fact that the conspiracy theories which are empirically studied here are an expression of this or some other kind of antagonism is confirmed by their *public expression* by relevant political subjects. Conspiracy theories regarding enemies of the state or of the political community, which work on their elimination by acting both from inside and from outside, should crop up in the period studied. These would be the so-called external and internal enemies which are defined from the position of power, i.e. from the centre towards the periphery of the political discourse. Pursuant to the aforementioned gap, such conspiracy theories would be communicated from the position of unity towards a potentially dangerous and unacceptable particularity. Moreover, depending on the political context, an opposite position is possible, which is expressed through criticism of the Government or dominant political agents in the activities of which conspiracy theories find tendencies of deliberate restriction of freedoms and rights, usurpation of power and illegitimacy of its operation, manipulation or betrayal of trust, etc.

## Hypotheses

1. According to the previous analysis of cynicism and kynism, and to the criterion of expressing the basic social antagonism, cynical conspiracy theories would support the integration and homogenisation of the community, as well as totalitarian and authoritarian power. These are theories which speak from the position of (or on behalf of) the centre of political power, and strive to protect a monolithically conceived system and a certain form of organically conceived community. This is not an instance of non-reflexive dogmatism, as it may seem at first sight, but rather a way of functioning of cynicism in conditions that are perceived as a crisis. Cynicism usually functions according to the formula: "They know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it", which means that it is manifested as hypocrisy in the interpretation of political events – by means of declarative acceptance of public interpretations and guessing the "true" motives and goals of the participants, which is a fertile ground for interpretation through conspiracy theories. When the situation is perceived as dangerous, or is just represented that way, conspiracy theories start cropping up among the public, regardless of whether it is an instance of a political group (such as a party or a coalition) trying to preserve or regain its own position of power and/or implement a certain more or less hegemonic project, or of bitter and distrustful citizens. In all these instances, public discourse is conceptually reduced in order to protect, in the most efficient manner possible, the imaginary source of pleasure, which is actually the "Common Thing", represented as a live organism.

2. Unlike previous theories, cynical theories speak from the position of par-

ticular, fragmented, and, in the last instance, individual powers. They criticise the (governing) power elite from the periphery of political discourse, pointing at cleavages which the cynics tacitly ignore, except when they feel endangered. Although they may be embittered by political events, the behaviour of the elite and the functioning of the order to the same extent as the cynics, they differ from them at least by partially abandoning the phantasmatic framework. In this sense, they either identify with the inability to establish a community as a harmonious whole and with the inability to establish a democratic order based on a permanently occupied position of power, and thus either deride these attempts or denounce them as dangerous political acts; or they sublimate their previous identification with the Common Thing into an Ego-ideal expressed through some kind of democratic ideology, from which they later criticise the behaviour of bearers of political power.

In the context of analysing the phenomenon and dynamics of appearance of conspiracy theories in a historical segment of 17 years, along with the analysis of the frequency of belief in conspiracy theories, we will try and examine these particular hypotheses by analysing the results of a survey wherein we have operationalized conspiracy theories in the following way.

## Method

A survey of a representative sample of Croatian citizens of legal age (n = 1081) was conducted in November 2007, prior to the parliamentary elections. On the basis of discourse analysis applied to texts published by Croatian political weekly magazines in the period from 1990 to 2007, a series of conspiratori-



al interpretations was made of concrete politically relevant events, processes or behaviours of participants in the political life of Croatia, or otherwise regarding Croatia. They were used as the basis for formulating the initial set of statements, which was later reduced due to the restricted space in the questionnaire. Finally, 13 statements were selected according to the estimated political relevance of the event, and in such a manner as to include the conspiratorial behaviour of various participants (Table 1). Their linguistic formulation in questionnaire statements tried to emulate the form in which they appeared in the discourse, with necessary reduction for the purpose of this kind of research. The subjects expressed their agreement or disagreement for every statement on a scale which consisted of the following levels: *completely disagree, mostly disagree, agree and disagree, mostly agree and completely agree*.

Since we are dealing with conspiracy theories which are typical of a specific political community and well-defined participants in the political life in terms of belonging to the (governing)

power elite, opposition parties, human rights activists, foreign agents or international factors which might influence the political life of the community (EU, World Bank, IMF) are mentioned in the chosen statements, we have established a framework hypothesis that these conspiracy theories should be structured in two groups, namely cynical and kynical conspiracy theories.

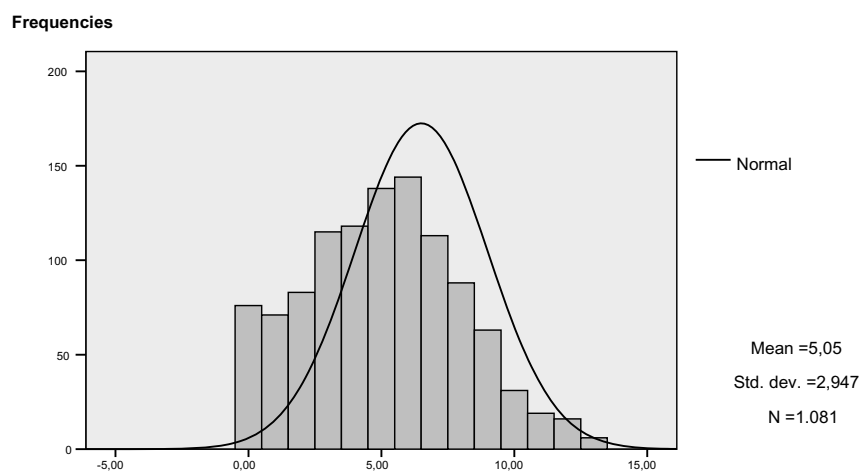
## Results

### *Distribution of Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories*

The first question is *to what extent do people believe in such conspiracy theories?*

When we sum up only the statements that the citizens agree with either mostly or completely, it turns out that 93% of the citizens believe in at least one conspiracy theory. On average, Croatian citizens believe in five politically relevant conspiracies. Moreover, the distribution of results does not differ significantly from the normal distribution. This is represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Number of believed conspiracy theories



This prevalence of belief in conspiracy theories corresponds to their frequent appearance in the political discourse. Clearly it is not some “exotic” opinion of political misfits which is inappropriate for a democratic society, but rather points to its common acceptance and ap-

plication to relevant political events. We will now examine the manner in which opinion is distributed with respect to agreement or disagreement with individual conspiracy theories. The results of agreement with individual statements are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Beliefs in individual conspiracy theories

STATEMENTS	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Agree and disagree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
a) Presidents Tuđman and Milošević arranged the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Karadordevo.	10.2	9.8	26.9	29.6	23.5
b) The murder of Josip Reihl Kir was organised by Croatian extremists, to whom the war with the Serbs was convenient.	10.7	13.1	43.8	18.3	14.1
c) In the course of aggression against Croatia, some great powers deliberately undermined its independence in order to preserve Yugoslavia.	2.4	4.4	18.0	40.1	35.1
d) Vukovar was sold in 1991 as part of a secret plan of territory swap.	14.5	17.7	28.2	21.4	18.2
e) Transition to market economy and privatisation were mostly the result of conspiracy between the Mob and the Government.	1.5	5.1	18.2	34.9	40.3
f) Crimes against civilians in military operations Flash and Storm are an expression of a carefully planned ethnic cleansing policy of the Croatian Government at the time.	37.0	25.2	21.1	9.7	6.9
g) The International Court in the Hague was founded with the intention of punishing those responsible for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, abolishing distinctions between the aggressor and the victims, and concealing the real role of great powers in this conflict.	6.5	10.7	26.8	31.0	25.1
h) For more than a decade, the World Bank, IMF, and other international institutions have been economically and financially colonising Croatia.	5.0	8.7	34.5	30.2	21.6

i) Under the guise of patriotism, the underground intelligence pursues only its own interests and settles accounts with non-sympathizers.	5.4	9.6	34.6	31.1	19.3
j) The so-called human rights activists who are recruited from Yugo-nostalgic groups and collaborators of foreign secret services are Croatia's most dangerous enemies.	14.9	24.5	31.2	16.5	12.9
k) Since the mid-90's, the parties which were then in the opposition have been deliberately destabilizing the country and endangering its independence.	21.9	28.4	31.1	11.6	7.0
l) The European Union is a conspiracy of big business, the aim of which is to destroy nation-states.	19.0	27.2	27.8	15.0	11.0
m) Far from the public eye and, contrary to the desire of its citizens, Croatia is attempting to join a new Balkan federation through regional integrations.	29.8	29.8	25.7	9.2	5.5

Note: The results are expressed in percentages of subjects. The statements for which agreement exceeded 50% are shaded.

According to the majority of analysed texts taken from political magazines, most people believe that an agreement was reached regarding the division of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina between presidents Tuđman and Milošević, although it appears that the hypothesis of an arranged war in Croatia does not have that much support. It is a hypothesis which appeared only occasionally in the political discourse and was faced with opposition. Consequently, two other statements which may be interpreted as supporting belief in an arranged war in Croatia – the murder of Reihl Kir<sup>5</sup> (b) and the selling of Vukovar

(d) – do not have majority support. Nevertheless, the support of this hypothesis should not be neglected, since there are a large number of indecisive subjects, while at least 30% agree with these statements. This is also supported by the quite high level of their correlations ( $r_{a,b} = ,53$ ;  $r_{a,d} = ,52$ ;  $r_{b,d} = ,42$ ). The idea of ethnic cleansing in the military operation Storm (f) could also be interpreted as part of the thought pattern of an arranged war in Croatia, which is supported by a mild correlation with the previous group of statements (which ranges at the level of about 0.30), but more than 60% subjects disagree with this idea. It appears that, as regards the perception of the military operation Storm, there is a strong emotional charge with a predominant heroic dimension of this event,

<sup>5</sup> Well-known pacifist, chief of police in Osijek (city in the eastern part of Croatia). Murdered in 1991 by a member of the Croatian Army.

which prevents confrontation with its possible dimension of planned and organised crime. The strength of this belief may be supported by the fact that the trial against the generals is not over yet and there is still hope of acquittal. Nevertheless, the awareness of both dimensions is present, which is an important starting point for the further process of coping with the past.

The mutually slightly connected opinions on the hostility of the international community expressed in the adversity to the independence of Croatia (c), punishment for the destruction of Yugoslavia (g) and economic exploitation (h) are supported by more than half the subjects,<sup>6</sup> which may be a specific expression of current frustration with the international economic and political status of Croatia, but also a more permanent anti-Western sentiment, since we are dealing with beliefs containing a longer temporal dimension. In this respect, it will be interesting to see the manner in which this group of conspiratorial beliefs is structured with the others.

The last two conspiracy theories which obtained majority support refer to the internal problems inherent in the process of transition to market economy and privatisation (e), which certain criminal groups in connection with the Government took advantage of, and the problem of abuse of intelligence structures (i), i.e. a sort of privatisation of the state or private or clan interests.<sup>7</sup> Both ideas were strongly present in the political discourse, both in the 90's and in the first decade of this century – as an expression of criticism of the privileged groups which, due to closeness to the governing

structures and association with them, have illegally acquired wealth and/or political power. This opinion is the basis of the cleavage between winners and losers in the process of transition, which occurred due to a sort of legal and democratic deficit as an expression of an authoritarian regime.

Exactly those last four statements were the ideological constituents of the authoritarian regime of the 90's, as expressed in the speeches of the then president (j), his non-democratic actions, e.g. in the case of the infamous Zagreb crisis<sup>8</sup> (k), isolationist politics (l) and permanent worry and warnings about the hostile activities of external forces “which want to put us back into some kind of Balkan association” (m). Therefore, the prevalent disagreement with this kind of discourse seems encouraging. On the other hand, almost a third of indecisive subjects may reflect scepticism about all four ideas, but also a kind of “phobic” reaction towards the aforementioned political subjects.

The analysis of the prevalence of beliefs in particular conspiratorial ideas reflects the controversy of opinions on the majority of events and processes contained on this scale. Only two theories can be denoted as consolidated conspiracy theories, the one claiming that great powers had undermined the process of independence of Croatia (75% support) and the one defining transition to mar-

<sup>6</sup>  $r_{cg} = ,35$ ;  $r_{ch} = ,32$ ;  $r_{gh} = ,40$ .

<sup>7</sup>  $r_{ei} = ,37$ .

<sup>8</sup> This was one of the most striking examples of ignoring the democratic will of the citizens of the Croatian capital, which occurred in 1995 when the President of the Republic, according to his authorities (sic!), without providing any explanation, refused to confirm the mayors coming from opposition parties. The crisis lasted for two years in total.

ket economy and privatisation as a conspiracy of the Mob and the Government (74%). There is significantly more disagreement and dilemmas as to whether other events and processes derive from conspiracies, which makes them a sort of spectres of society, the existence of which lacks consensus. Most of the studied events and processes are controversial for Croatian society even a few decades after they took place, which may be an indication of certain lines of more permanent political cleavages. On the one hand, these cleavages would be a reflection of political events which took place at the time and which are further reproduced in the future, but it should also be examined to what extent some earlier historical concepts reflect through them and correspond with them. This will be discussed in detail further on.

After this analysis of manifest variables, the first task is to establish the la-

tent dimensions of conspiratorial belief, i.e. the structure of more general tendencies, and then examine the further world-view correlates.

#### *The Structure of Conspiratorial Beliefs and Their Correlates*

We have conducted factorial analysis of the statements in order to examine the wider structure of conspiratorial beliefs, the results of which are presented in Table 2. The method used was that of principal components with varimax rotations, with testing the established hypotheses on a number of components by which our data may be described in a meaningful manner on a first-ordered latent level.

For the specific Croatian conspiracy theories, we assumed a two-factor structure which should reflect two types of conspiracy theories – kynical and cynical conspiracy theories.

**Table 2.** Factorial structure of Croatian conspiracy theories 1990-2007

STATEMENTS	<i>Government conspiracies during the 90's</i>	<i>Conspiracies of internal and external enemies</i>
a) Presidents Tuđman and Milošević arranged the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Karadorđevo.	.786	
b) The murder of Josip Reihl Kir was organised by Croatian extremists, to whom the war with the Serbs was convenient.	.771	
c) In the course of aggression against Croatia, some great powers deliberately undermined its independence in order to preserve Yugoslavia.		.450
d) Vukovar was sold in 1991 as part of a secret plan of territory swap.	.695	
e) Transition to market economy and privatisation were mostly the result of conspiracy between the Mob and the Government.	.658	
f) Crimes against civilians in military operations Flash and Storm are an expression of a carefully planned ethnic cleansing policy of the Croatian Government at the time.	.493	

g) The International Court in the Hague was founded with the intention of punishing those responsible for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, abolishing distinctions between the aggressor and the victims, and concealing the real role of great powers in this conflict.		.584
h) For more than a decade, the World Bank, IMF, and other international institutions have been economically and financially colonising Croatia.		.569
i) Under the guise of patriotism, the underground intelligence pursues only its own interests and settles accounts with non-sympathizers.	.541	
j) The so-called human rights activists who are recruited from Yugo-nostalgic groups and collaborators of foreign secret services are the most dangerous enemies of Croatia.		.744
k) Since the mid-90's, the parties which were then in the opposition have been deliberately destabilizing the country and endangering its independence.		.657
l) The European Union is a conspiracy of big business, the aim of which is to destroy nation-states.		.685
m) Far from the public eye and, contrary to the desire of its citizens, Croatia is attempting to join a new Balkan federation through regional integrations.		.592
% of the explained variance	22.4	22.2
KMO	0,776	
Bartlett's test of the significance of the correlation matrix	$\chi^2 = 2958$ ; $df = 78$ ; $p = 0.000$	

Note: All factorial saturations below 0.35 have been excluded from the representation.

The results indicate that we have confirmed our previous hypotheses. Two factors were obtained, which, according to their contents, we have named *Government conspiracies in the 90's*, and *conspiracies of internal and external enemies*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> We have checked the stability of the results on various sub-samples, depending on the gender and by random choice of two sub-samples. The analysis by gender resulted in congruence coefficients of 0.98 and 0.99. In the analysis by case, the results were also 0.98 and 0.99, which proves a strong stability of the structures obtained.

Now we will try to establish and analyse in detail the hypotheses regarding the properties of the two obtained groups of conspiracy theories in the Croatian political discourse. According to the previously elaborated theoretical definition, cynical theories would be theories regarding Government conspiracies in the 90's, whereas cynical theories are theories regarding conspiracies involving internal and external enemies. The first would be a cheeky and bold exposure of the cynicism of the (governing) power elite – its secret meetings with the enemy, trade in territory and

people during the war, politically motivated murders and corruption behind the mask of patriotism. If that was true, the tendency towards this kind of interpretation would imply as the basic cynical attitude a certain criticism towards current political achievements and elites, along with setting higher standards of democratic behaviour. In this sense, the belief in Government conspiracies in the 90's would be connected with: increased sensitivity to manipulations by the political elites, reduced trust in political institutions, but also increased need for the improvement of democratic standards by the Government, or, in other words, improved diffuse support of the democratic order.

According to the psychoanalytical hypothesis, the other group of conspiracy theories is the back side of the public façade, i.e. an obscene reaction to “thieves of enjoyment” in the National Thing, which are identified, on the internal political level, with civil society and the opposition, and on the external level with the European Union, international institutions, “great powers”, etc. This is the kind of cynicism Žižek identifies with distancing from the public law and its derision from the position of the obscene internal side, structured by phantasms, which is manifested through the

imagining of conspiracies against their own object of enjoyment. If that was true, then the inclination towards belief in conspiracies of internal and external enemies should be connected with distancing from the democratic system and loyalty to an organically perceived nation. These tendencies could be observed in a reduced diffuse support to democracy, political authoritarianism and conservative attitudes, as well as in the need for the empowerment of an organically perceived nation in the form of a spiritual or biological “restoration”.

We will examine these hypotheses by means of two regression analyses, where the obtained factors of belief in a certain type of concrete conspiracy theory will be used as criterion variables, whereas the mentioned indicators can be used as predictor variables. The higher the predictability in the first two analyses, with a significant influence of most of the predictors, the easier it would be to corroborate our hypotheses of the cynical and cynical character of the two kinds of conspiracy theories. According to non-specific hypotheses which do not deal with the interrelation of predictors, we have used the “enter” method of introduction of variables in regression analysis.

The results are shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3.** Regression of predictors of beliefs in *Government conspiracies during the 90's*

PREDICTORS	$\beta$ coefficients
Perception of manipulation and recklessness in campaign	.218
Trust in political and social institutions	-.221
Specific support of democracy	-.158
Pleading for protection of human rights and discriminated groups	.137
Diffuse support of democracy	.086
R	<b>.487</b>
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	<b>.232</b>

**Table 4.** Regression of predictors of beliefs in *Conspiracies of internal and external enemies*

PREDICTORS	$\beta$ coefficients
Diffuse support of democracy	-.076
Political authoritarianism	.220
Liberalism-Conservatism	.247
Pleading for "organic" empowerment of nation	.148
R	<b>.543</b>
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	<b>.291</b>

Apart from the fact that both regression analyses displayed a quite low contribution of the variable of diffuse support of democracy, which can be attributed primarily to the quality of its measurement, generally speaking, in both analyses the statistic significance of all predictors and the direction of their "influence" indicate the accuracy of the hypotheses derived. All single predictors contribute in the expected direction. Moreover, coefficients of multiple correlation and coefficients of determination indicate that, in the case of belief in Government conspiracy theories in the 90's, 23% of the variance of results in the criterion variable may be explained by means of these predictors, whereas the model used to explain beliefs in conspiracies of internal and external enemies is somewhat more successful and explains 29% of the variance. Such levels of explanation are considered moderate, which means that these two groups of theories may be considered partly as an expression of cynicism or cynicism.

Since, within the measured authoritarianism, there is a variable similar to the variable of diffuse support of democracy,<sup>10</sup> which proved to be poor-

ly predictive due to its "roughness", we have left out the latter from further analyses.

Moreover, the results obtained indicate the need to extend the hypotheses onto the properties of cynicism and their correlates in order to further test and improve the model. Since conspiracy theories involve political thinking, it can also, apart from being a partial expression of psycho-political dispositions, be perceived as an expression of wider values, world-views, and political heritage, and partly under the influence of variables which are change-

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*times democracy doesn't function very easily. Some people think we need strong leaders to sort things out. Others think democracy is the best solution even when things don't work out that easily. What is your opinion on this subject?* The potential answers: a) *we need strong leaders*, b) *democracy is always the best*, and c) *I don't know, I am not sure*. The variable in the analysis has been recoded in a manner that a = 1, c = 2, b = 3. The following, substitute statement was used within the scale of authoritarianism: "The thing this country needs more than laws and political programmes are a few brave and determined individuals the people can trust". The subjects could agree or disagree therewith on a five level scale.

<sup>10</sup> Diffuse support of democracy was measured by means of the following question: *Some-*



able to a larger extent, such as, for instance, the dominant problems in the society which may, as intervening variables, re-actualize or suppress antagonisms expressed through the conspiratorial way of thinking. To this we can add the influences of political campaigns and the importance of which political parties are currently in the Government, which are in the opposition, and which is their preferred communication style.

#### *Additional Testing of Cynicism/Kynism*

As part of this approach, we perceive kynism and cynicism as attitudes basic to political reality, wherein both may co-exist up to a certain level and refer to its different aspects, particularly political agents. The hypothesis is that they are partly an expression of wider social values and political world-views, adopted in the course of the process of socialization. The political legacy, as another instance which precedes them and which can present another form of indirect influence on cynicism/kynism, influencing thus the perception of political experience of the presumed inheritors of existing political traditions as a reproduction of previous relations and promotion of certain political concepts, depending on whether their political parties are in the position of government or in the opposition, may “refract” through both of these basic determinants of kynism and cynicism.<sup>11</sup> The experience of being in oppo-

<sup>11</sup> E.g. those whose family political tradition is linked to the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) could (no matter how strange it may sound) perceive the Government elected on 3 January 2000 as a return of the Communists and, pursuant to their own imagery, built on the memories or stories from the traumatic historical period, or their fabricates, expect a politics that would, in their opinion, have an-

sition in the period when crucial events or processes took place may also have a direct influence on the development of a cynical attitude, whereas the experience of power influences the cynical attitude. Nevertheless, it is presumed that the mediational relation of the system of values and the political world-view can also make the experience of opposition to power more or less prone to such attitudes. Moreover, belonging to a certain political tradition may directly influence the inclination to distrust the historical inheritors of the opposite side, and thus kynism/cynicism.

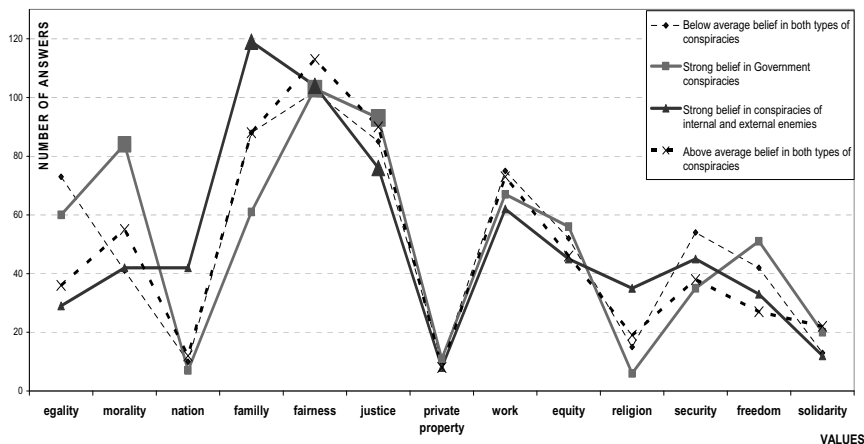
In this sense, the interrelation between beliefs in certain kinds of conspiracy theories and a) the system of values, b) political world-view, c) political tradition of the family should be checked<sup>12</sup> in order to establish whether existing predictors (from the first analysis) are merely a reflection of ideological pref-

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ti-Croatian attributes. This would be a belief on the naive level which may later, on the reflexive, or, as Sloterdijk calls it, refined level, be strategically applied to political relations.

<sup>12</sup> The variable of political experience could not be measured in any way, since we are not in possession of voting information throughout the nineties. The thing that could be done with reliable measures is the evaluation of a certain short-term effect of the opposition experience, which refers to the period of the current mandate. The hypothesis is that, with control of the variables of political world-view and family political tradition, the citizens supporting the opposition parties would prefer cynical conspiracy theories as information resources for the negative evaluation of the party in power. We have not examined this last hypothesis in the further analysis, since, according to the answer to the question who they voted for in 2003, the number of participants would be 402.

**Figure 2.** Value profiles of different groups of conspiracy believers



erence towards certain conspiracy theories, or rather the historical cleavage dating from World War II is reproduced in the support of particular kinds of conspiratorial beliefs.

a) As regards social values, the existing instruments allowed us to establish profiles of the participants according to their preference in respect of the three most important values. In order to determine the values characteristic of different kinds of conspiracy theories, and thereby also the values typical of kynism and cynicism, we have applied the logic of differences between “extreme groups”. The criterion of arithmetical mean was used to divide the participants into four groups. The first group consisted of those whose belief in Government conspiracies in the 90’s was above average, whereas their belief in conspiracies of internal and external enemies was below average, which should represent a group of kynics. The other group consisted of cynics, i.e. those whose belief in conspiracies of internal and external enemies was above average, whereas their belief in Government conspiracies in the

90’s was below average. The third group consisted of those who were below average in both dimensions of belief, whereas those from the fourth group displayed above average results in both dimensions of belief.<sup>13</sup> When conducting this analysis we were primarily interested in the first two groups, in order to be able to determine at least approximately the foundations of belief in the two types of conspiracy theories, and, accordingly, the values of kynism and cynicism. The results are presented in the following graph (Figure 2).

When discussing the three most important values, their order and, partly, their contents differ between the presumed kynics and cynics. Whereas the kynics emphasize fairness, justice, and morality, the cynics emphasize family, fairness, and justice. Although only one value is different, the difference in the level of support of single values is indicative. For the cynics, the value of

<sup>13</sup> The groups were of the same size: kynics = 219, cynics = 219; below average = 220, above average = 213.

family strongly occupies the first place, followed by fairness and then by a significant slope towards justice, which has the least support in all other groups. We have to ask ourselves whether the weaker support of justice, which is otherwise highly estimated in society, is actually a reflection of scepticism with regard to the plausibility of its realization and another expression of distancing from the political order which is trying to establish it. Likewise, a significantly lower support of the second and third values when compared to the first is also interesting. Primarily, this difference could be interpreted from the position that the values of fairness and justice are in substantial discord with the value of family, meaning that if you value family the most, you will have to sacrifice the other two values more frequently (or you will apply them selectively only within the circle of your own group or family). Also, the disproportion between the support of fairness and justice may indicate the belief that it is easy to achieve high goals on the personal, but not on the social level, since, unlike the second, the first level can easily be controlled personally. Nevertheless, it may also point to the existence of a fundamental cynical gap between the preservation of the public image of personal integrity and the perception of the world as unjust, i.e. as a place where the principle of justice cannot be applied instead of the supremacy of the power struggle. As opposed to this profile of paramount values, the difference among the most supported values is least pronounced in the group of cynics.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> E.g., the difference in support of the first and the third value is 19 answers in the case of cynics, in comparison 43 answers in the

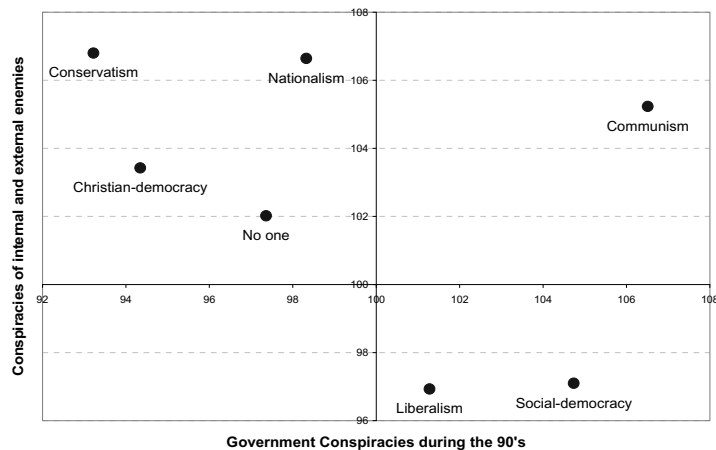
If, along with the previously analysed differences, the most considerable differences among these groups of participants are analysed, regardless of the absolute support of the values, the cynics, when compared to the kynics, put much stronger emphasis on the values of family, nation, and religion, whereas the values of equality, morality, and freedom are considerably more important to the kynics. These comparisons clearly indicate the collectivist pattern of values present in the cynics and, on the other hand, the universalistic-individualistic values of the kynics, which is compatible with the presumed logic of defence of the organic nation present in cynical conspiracy theories, and of the democratic order in cynical conspiracy theories.

b) When determining the relation between the political world-view and belief in certain groups of conspiracy theories, we may employ concrete identification with a certain world-view and left-right self-identification. The hypothesis is that those identifying themselves with the left ideological pole and with ideologies such as Communism and Social Democracy, which are traditionally attributed to that pole, will be more inclined to believe in theories of Government conspiracy in the 90's. On the other hand, the right ideological pole, i.e. the ideologies attributed to it, such as Nationalism and Conservatism, should manifest the least level of faith in this group of conspiracy theories. The reasons underlying this structuring could

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case of cynics. This is only the result of the difference in frequencies and does not have the force of statistical significance, but rather serves as an impressionistic indication, which is the only possible indication at this level of measurement.

**Figure 3.** Beliefs in conspiracy theories and political world-view



Note: Results for both dimensions are expressed through standardized values ( $M = 100$ ,  $sd = 10$ ).

be multiple. They might derive from both supported contents of certain ideologies (e.g. in Socialism in the emancipation and development of every human being, in Liberalism in the protection of citizens from the influence of the state or in the Conservative dependence on national values which might then escalate as fundamental principles in nationalism). However, since all world-views are actualized within a certain historical context, this inclination towards conspiracy theories should also be influenced by the nature of political events in the 90's, which represent a kind of national revolution. Therefore, depending on the supported ideology, the perception of emancipation of national ideals and their protection with respect to the perception of abuse of power in that period will be more or less pronounced, which is also the cause of aversion of the right and inclination of the left ideologies towards these conspiracy theories. For the same reasons, the inclination to conspiracy theories involving the ac-

tion of internal and external enemies of Croatia should function in a completely opposite direction. The attitudes of some ideological groups towards both dimensions of belief in conspiracy theories are presented in Figure 3.

The results of the analysis of the variance at the level of all groups indicate statistically relevant differences in respect of both dimensions of belief in conspiracies.<sup>15</sup> A post-hoc analysis<sup>16</sup> indicates the presence of statistically significant differences between Conservatism and Christian Democracy on the one hand and Social Democracy and Communism on the other as regards the dimension of Government conspiracies

<sup>15</sup> For government conspiracies in the nineties:  $F = 30.511$ ;  $df = 850, 6$ ;  $p = 0,0001$ . For conspiracies of internal and external enemies:  $F = 17.235$ ;  $df = 850, 6$ ;  $p = 0,0001$ .

<sup>16</sup> The Scheffé test displayed a risk level of 10%. Due to the strictness of this test, this is the usual level.

in the 90's. With respect to conspiracies of internal and external enemies, differences between Liberalism and Conservatism (along with nationalism) appear at the level of risk exceeding 17%. The general direction of the results corresponds to the expectations, as shown in Figure 3. While citizens close to left ideologies, who at the beginning of the 90's were, so to speak, ideological losers and the opposition, express in a more pronounced manner their belief in the first type of conspiracy theories, citizens close to ideologies of the right, wherein clear tendencies of imaging the nation as an organic whole are present and whose ideals are at the same time realized in a threatening environment, display stronger belief in theories involving conspiracies of internal and external enemies. A small group with a Communist world-view ( $n = 8$ ), the members of which support in a more pronounced manner both conspiracy theories, stand out from this pattern. This is not a surprising result as regards the other dimension when we consider the nature of the Communist order, which "cultivated" and quite often made use of the categories of internal and external enemies with a specific vision of an organic community to which these citizens have (presumably) remained loyal.<sup>17</sup> They, therefore, do not find it difficult to apply the same thought pattern to new situations, or even to those resembling the previous ones, in which, for instance, the old anti-imperialism is veiled with new patriotic feelings. The relations between certain kinds of Croatian conspiracy

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<sup>17</sup> The effect of length of the socialization period is present in this group. Among them, 6 out of 8 are older than 50, whereas the others are older than 30.

theories and left-right self-identification are consistent with these results.<sup>18</sup>

We were further interested in the extent to which our predictors, which in their combination present an expression of cynism/cynicism, may be explained by these world-views, i.e. ideological variables. The question arising here is whether they are a reflection of ideology and whether ideology manifests itself along with them as an independent factor which additionally explains and contributes to the inclination to certain conspiracy theories. With this objective, by means of a hierarchical regression analysis, we have included left-right self-identification as the following step in previously conducted regression analyses. After that, on the third level, we introduced the previously analysed political world-view (dummy variables), in order to gain an insight as to whether the identification with specific ideological orientation makes its members more inclined to believe in conspiracy theories.<sup>19</sup> The results are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

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<sup>18</sup> The correlation of left-right self-identification with the belief in Government conspiracies in the nineties equals  $r = -.420$ , whereas its correlation with the belief in conspiracies involving internal and external enemies equals  $r = .323$ .

<sup>19</sup> The potential objection that this is a variable measuring for a second time the same thing as left-right self-identification, could be overcome with two arguments. The negative argument would be the fact that they are only partly connected ( $\eta = .56$ ). This, of course, does not mean that they explain the same part of the variance in the dependent variable. Finally, the indicator of multicollinearity, the indices of tolerance, and VIF indices for each single variable indicate that our predictors are far from the values critical for diagnosing multicollinearity (the lowest tol-

**Table 5.** Hierarchical regression of predictors of beliefs in Government conspiracies during the 90's with additional variables of ideological orientation in three steps

PREDICTORS	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients
Perception of manipulation and recklessness in campaign	.230	.201	.209
Trust in political and social institutions	-.231	-.161	-.153
Specific support of democracy	-.146	-.122	-.106
Pleading for protection of human rights and discriminated groups	.128	.102	.086
Diffuse support of democracy	.093	.054*	.034*
Left-Right self-identification		-.299	-.201
Christian Democrats			.036*
Communists			.050*
Conservatives			-.019*
Liberals			<b>.189</b>
Nationalists			.088
Social-democrats			<b>.274</b>
Others			.068
R	<b>.490</b>	<b>.563</b>	<b>.601</b>
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	<b>.234</b>	<b>.311</b>	<b>.348</b>

\* The influence of the marked variable is statistically non-significant ( $p > .05$ ).

The addition of new variables in both steps contributes to a better explanation of the belief in conspiracy theories in a statistically significant manner, but this effect is much less pronounced in the case of conspiracy theories involving internal and external enemies. In the case of belief in Government conspiracies in the 90's, two effects of left-right

erance index equals .347 and the VIF index equals 2.88, whereas 0.1 and 10 are taken as critical values). The positive justification for the introduction of another ideological variable is the need for a stronger assessment of its mediation influence and the possibility of determining the influence of specific ideological world-views.

self-identification may be noticed. The first one is the partial overlapping with the previous predictors (expressed as a non-significant reduction of their regression coefficients), which proves that they are, only in a minor part, a reflection of ideological inclination towards these types of conspiracy theories. This indicates that cynicism could be the basic attitude that co-exists with ideological orientation which, on the other hand, significantly influences on its own the inclination towards theories of Government conspiracies in the 90's. This influence of ideology on the belief in Government conspiracy theories in the 90's is pronounced in Social-Democrats and Liberals.

**Table 6.** Hierarchical regression of predictors of beliefs in conspiracies of internal and external enemies with additional variables of ideological orientations in three steps

PREDICTORS	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients
Political authoritarianism	.233	.234	.232
Liberalism-Conservatism	.250	.228	.216
Pleading for “organic” empowerment of nation	.160	.127	.122
Left-Right self-identification		.097	.078
Christian Democrats			-.001*
Communists			.048*
Conservatives			.016*
Liberals			-.058*
Nationalists			.064*
Social-democrats			-.036*
Others			.048*
R	<b>.536</b>	<b>.543</b>	<b>.555</b>
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	<b>.285</b>	<b>.291</b>	<b>.298</b>

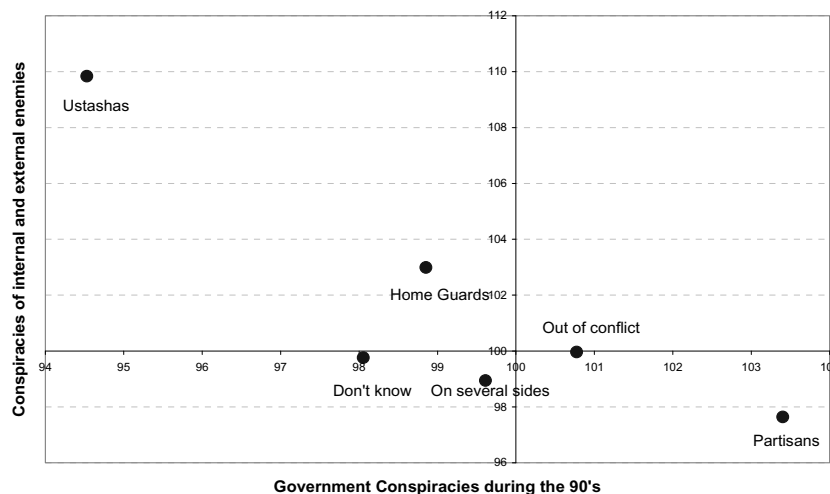
\* The influence of the marked variable is statistically non-significant ( $p > .05$ ).

The introduction of ideological variables into the prediction proves to be less useful in the case of belief in conspiracies involving internal and external enemies. In the second analysis it has an even weaker mediational effect (expressed through the reduction of previously present regression coefficients) and a weak direct effect expressed by low regression coefficients. Nevertheless, one should be careful when interpreting the direct contribution of this ideological dimension for two reasons: one part of the variance of direct ideological influence of the left-right self-identification has already been included with the previous predictors, primarily in the dimension of Liberal-Conservative attitudes. Moreover, there is also the influence of political experience, which may be masked by this variable and can-

not be measured in this research. Therefore, the variable of political experience in power/opposition should be included in future studies and, in the best case, one should try to reconstruct the political cynicism and cynicism as a dispositional variable, i.e. a more permanent tendency expressed through a series of attitudes towards different objects, not only with respect to conspiracy theories. Still, these results clearly indicate a direct influence of both cynicism/cynicism and ideology on the inclination to certain kinds of conspiracy theories.

c) Interesting results are also obtained with regard to the relation between political tradition and propensity to certain conspiracy theories referring to recent Croatian history. The conducted variance analyses show considerable differences among groups regard-

**Figure 4.** Beliefs in conspiracy theories and family political tradition from World War II



Note: Results for both dimensions are expressed by means of standardized values ( $M = 100$ ,  $sd = 10$ ).

ing both dimensions of conspiratorial thinking.<sup>20</sup> Subjects with an anti-fascist legacy from World War II have shown a statistically much higher level of belief in Government conspiracies in the 90's in respect to those belonging to the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) tradition, both home guards or ustashes. The situation is opposite when we analyse beliefs in conspiracies involving internal and external enemies. This belief is strongest and considerably more pronounced in subjects belonging to the ustasha tradition, followed by those of the home guard tradition, and finally those belonging to the anti-fascist tradition. The results are shown in Figure 4.

These results clearly indicate that the belief in two kinds of Croatian con-

spiracy theories is partly an expression of the historical cleavage dating from World War II. The manner in which it has manifested itself, as previous perceptive priming or as subsequent interpretation of the past, is a question that requires further research. We can only generally assume that, according to their historical experience, there existed potentials for such a perception, but a significant role was also played by the so-called idea of "reconciliation" which non-selectively rehabilitated the ustasha movement, thus making it a positive point of identification, not only in the sense of absolving the patriotic motivation of members of this tradition, but also, for some of them, in the sense of absolution from identification with Nazi ideology, both in the old and in the new generations. As regards the preference of certain types of conspiracy theories, this would imply that specific knowledge of the political past partly influ-

<sup>20</sup> For government conspiracies in the 90's:  $F = 10.136$ ;  $df = 858, 5$ ;  $p = 0,0001$ . For conspiracies involving internal and external enemies:  $F = 11.397$ ;  $df = 858, 5$ ;  $p = 0,0001$ .



**Table 7.** Hierarchical regression of predictors of beliefs in Government conspiracies in the 90's with additional variables of family political tradition

PREDICTORS	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients
Perception of manipulation and recklessness in campaign	.233	.248	.223
Trust in political and social institutions	-.237	-.217	-.156
Specific support of democracy	-.138	-.136	-.100
Pleading for protection of human rights and discriminated groups	.119	.103	.070
Diffuse support of democracy	.090	.069	.028*
Partisans (anti-fascists)		<b>.197</b>	<b>.131</b>
Ustashas (fascists)		-.026*	.018*
Home Guards (regular army of fascist Independent State of Croatia)		-.015*	-.005*
On many sides		.047*	.033*
Out of conflict		.101	.073*
Left-Right self-identification			-.186
Christian Democrats			.035*
Communists			.058*
Conservatives			-.017*
Liberals			<b>.184</b>
Nationalists			.104
Social-democrats			<b>.255</b>
Others			.061*
R	<b>.487</b>	<b>.523</b>	<b>.611</b>
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	<b>.231</b>	<b>.274</b>	<b>.355</b>

\* The influence of the marked variable is statistically non-significant ( $p > .05$ ).

enced the readiness to perceive some subjects, groups, or factors as potential enemies, but it also presented the symbolic resource for subsequent theoretical formulation of the relation through the vocabulary of the past – particularly ethnic intolerance – as well as the inclination to tolerate criminal behaviour, “privatisation” of the state, and violation of civil rights.

In order to check which political traditions significantly influence the belief

in conspiracy theories and the manner in which this influence is manifested, we have conducted regression analyses similar to the previous ones by adding the variables of family political tradition to the first group of predictors; later on we have added world-view ideologies to circumferentially check which part of this influence is performed through ideology.

The anti-fascist family political tradition and, to a minor extent, non-in-

**Table 8.** Hierarchical regression of predictors of beliefs in conspiracies of internal and external enemies with additional variables of family political tradition<sup>21</sup>

PREDICTORS	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients	$\beta$ -coefficients
Political authoritarianism	.231	.239	.236
Liberalism-Conservatism	.248	.221	.196
Pleading for "organic" empowerment of nation	.157	.145	.117
Partisans (anti-fascists)		.011*	.025*
Ustashas (fascists)		<b>.127</b>	<b>.119</b>
Home Guards (regular army of fascist Independent State of Croatia)		.080	.081
On many sides		.010*	.000*
Out of conflict		.008*	.019*
Left-Right self-identification			.065
Christian Democrats			-.014*
Communists			.049*
Conservatives			-.001*
Liberals			-.062*
Nationalists			.052*
Social-democrats			-.047*
Others			.050*
R	<b>.529</b>	<b>.547</b>	<b>.562</b>
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	<b>.277</b>	<b>.291</b>	<b>.301</b>

\* The influence of the marked variable is statistically non-significant ( $p > .05$ ).

involvement in the conflict,<sup>21</sup> show little mediational influence and a significant direct influence on theories of Government conspiracy in the 90's. This direct influence remains significant even after we introduce ideology into the predic-

tion. When compared to the results in Table 5, where variables of political tradition were not included in the analysis, ideological variables display a slightly lesser contribution, which proves that they were partly mediated by political tradition, but the influence of Social Democratic and Liberal orientation on the preference for these conspiracy theories is still present. To sum up, members of the antifascist political legacy and those who identify themselves with the Social Democratic and Liberal ideologies are more inclined towards cynical conspiracy theories.

<sup>21</sup> The results for particular predictors for both types of conspiracy theories differ only slightly in the first step in respect to the previous Tables 6 and 7. The cause of this difference is technical, since the program takes into consideration only the cases containing data for all three hierarchical levels of regression analysis.

The results displayed in Table 8 indicate that subjects with an NDH legacy are somewhat more inclined to believe in conspiracy theories involving internal and external enemies, particularly those whose family members mainly served in the ustasha units. The introduction of ideological variables indicates mainly the non-significance of their influence. Also, their introduction slightly reduces the influence of variables of political tradition and the majority of variables from the first prediction step, which, again, is an indicator of a weak mediation and direct influence. As expected, the latter is manifested in the prominence of Conservative attitudes from the first group of variables.

To sum up, these results indicate that subjects with an NDH legacy and belonging to the right ideological pole are more inclined towards cynical conspiracy theories involving the existence of internal and external enemies, under the guise of distancing from the democratic order.

So far we have analysed beliefs in different types of Croatian conspiracy theories as a dependant variable, trying to determine the extent to which they are an expression of the kynical or cynical attitude, and what is their relation towards more permanent ideological and value dispositions relevant for political behaviour. The next question is the mere extent to which conspiracy theories are important for understanding political behaviour. Bearing this in mind, in the next section we will analyse whether it is possible to distinguish among voters of certain political parties in Croatia on the basis of the knowledge of belief in certain conspiracy theories.

### *Conspiracy theories and voting behaviour*

In order to determine if there is any ground for the analysis of the influence of conspiracy theories on electoral behaviour, we have conducted a simple analysis of variance in order to determine the existence of differences between the two kinds of conspiratorial belief between voters of particular political parties. Significant differences on the level of the general ANOVA test were obtained in respect to two dimensions of concrete conspiracy theories in Croatia,<sup>22</sup> but a subsequent post-hoc Scheffe test does not reveal significant sub-sets for the belief in conspiracies involving internal and external enemies. Nevertheless, according to their direction, the results are indicative of both kinds of conspiracy theories.<sup>23</sup> The results are shown in Figure 5 (on the next page).

Voters of SDP and HNS<sup>24</sup> are in the lead as regards belief in theories of Government conspiracies in the 90's. They differed statistically only from voters of HDZ,<sup>25</sup> among which the support of this kind of conspiracy theory is least pronounced when considering the whole sample. In terms of tendencies, these and other results mostly reflect the political cleavages and the relation between the Government and the opposition which existed in the 90's (this applies to

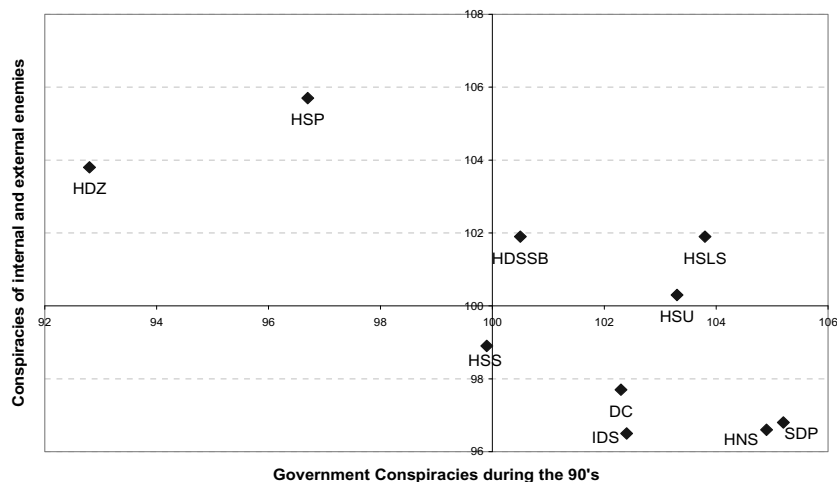
<sup>22</sup> For government conspiracies in the nineties:  $F = 25.951$ ;  $df = 596, 9$ ;  $p = 0.0001$ . For conspiracies involving internal and external enemies:  $F = 7.984$ ;  $df = 596, 9$ ;  $p = 0.0001$ .

<sup>23</sup> Eta (government conspiracies in the nineties) = .524; Eta (conspiracies involving internal and external enemies) = .326.

<sup>24</sup> Social-Democratic Party and Croatian People's Party (liberal-democrats).

<sup>25</sup> Croatian Democratic Union (conservatives).

**Figure 5.** Beliefs in conspiracy theories and voting behaviour



Note: Results for both dimensions are expressed by means of standardized values ( $M = 100$ ,  $sd = 10$ ).

parties which existed at the time). Completely opposite results are obtained for the belief in conspiracies of internal and external enemies.

The relation between belief in Croatian conspiracy theories and attitudes towards political parties is theoretically observed as the influence of the first group of variables on the second, i.e. parties and their leaders are perceived through the prism of events which occurred in the last decade of the last century, to which the beginning of all theories here analysed refers. Therefore, this is an assessment of a particular party according to its role in the presumed types of conspiracies.

One can clearly notice the extent to which the inclination towards certain kinds of conspiracy theories “influences” the attitudes towards political parties<sup>26</sup> on the basis of regression analyses

<sup>26</sup> We use them as an alternative variable to voting behaviour.

which show interesting results (see Table 9 on the next page).

The attitudes towards HDZ and SDP, main competitors on the Croatian political scene, and towards parties close to them, i.e. HSP<sup>27</sup> and HNS respectively, and to their leaderships, can be successfully predicted by means of these theories, whereas the belief in conspiracy theories does not have any predictive value for the attitude towards parties of the centre, HSLs, HSS, and HSU.

The reasons underlying this correlation can be attributed to the significance of information from the past which appear in certain conspiracy theories as the foundations for further evaluation of the past and recent behaviour, and as a perceptive filter for the prediction of future behaviour of political parties. As we have seen in the previous section, this relation partly derives from the historical-ideological cleavage in the electorate

<sup>27</sup> Croatian Party of Rights (nationalist).

**Table 9.** Regression of attitude toward political parties in relation to conspiracy theories

	HDZ	HSP	HDSSB	HSU	HSS	HSLs	SDSS	IDS	HNS	SDP
<i>Government conspiracies during the 90's</i>	-.485	-.318	-.148	-.008*	.048*	.038*	.181	.271	.333	.395
<i>Conspiracies of internal and external enemies</i>	.222	.205	.170	.023*	-.035*	-.073	-.263	-.225	-.268	-.275
R	.533	.379	.229	.024	.059	.082	.321	.356	.427	.482
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	.283	.141	.050	.001	.001	.004	.101	.125	.180	.231

\* The influence of the marked variable is statistically non-significant ( $p > .05$ ).

and the presumed political experience in the 90's which resulted in the current political cleavage between left and right, understood as the opposition between the Social Democratic-Liberal and the Conservative-Nationalistic poles.

The assessment of particular party leaders is in accordance with the assessment of particular parties, and can be explained as the projection of relations between political parties on their leaders, which are experimentally established. This conclusion is supported by the fact that some of them, e.g. the leaders of the two major parties, did not have a significant role in the political life at the time of the events which are interpreted in a conspiratorial way and the attitudes towards which can largely be predicted. A high level of competition, i.e. polarisation between the major political competitors can also contribute to the prominence of these conspiracy theories, connected with the recent Croatian past and the near future, since it may include the use of conspiracy theories as one of the sources of distinctions, which is, moreover, linked to the ideological dimension important for the origin

of their opposition. This information is not a relevant basis for decision-making in the case of voters of minor parties, whose aim is to win votes outside of this historical ideological matrix of opposition and which are, consequently, located in the ideological centre.

### Conclusion

Let us sum up the results of our research. They clearly indicate that the majority of citizens believe in at least one conspiracy theory, whereas the average number is five. Furthermore, the majority of conspiracy theories represent opinions raising considerable controversy. The existence of two types of conspiracy theories has been confirmed as regards the structure of conspiratorial belief: *Government conspiracies in the nineties* and *conspiracies of internal and external enemies*. In accordance with previously established psychoanalytical hypotheses, we have corroborated the hypotheses of the cynical character of the first and the cynical character of the second type of conspiracy theories. In line with this, the first type represents support to the democratic order, as a kind of criticism of the

Government, whereas the other kind of conspiracy theories is connected with authoritarian tendencies which support the "siege mentality". Furthermore, the first kind of conspiracy theories is typical of citizens with a Social Democratic and Liberal political world-view, whereas citizens of a nationalistic, Conservative, and to a somewhat lesser extent, Christian Democratic world-view are more inclined towards the second type. Regression analyses indicate that, along with the influence of a basic cynical/cynical attitude, belief in these conspiracy theories is influenced by ideological orientation and family political tradition from World War II, with subjects of anti-fascist legacy being more inclined to believe in Government conspiracies in the nineties, and inheritors of NDH legacy being more inclined to believe in conspiracies involving internal and external enemies. Further analyses indicate that these two types of Croatian conspiracy theories have a significant influence on the attitudes towards political parties, which can be useful for successful prediction of attitudes towards the main competitors on the Croatian political scene. Of the two types of belief in conspiracy theories, the belief in Gov-

ernment conspiracies in the 90's proves to be the better predictor of these attitudes. This shows that such conspiracy theories are relevant for the prediction of potential voting behaviour. The use of these theories alone makes it possible to predict approximately one fourth of the total variance of voting preferences for the major competitors on the Croatian scene. Therefore, belief in conspiracy theories referring to the recent Croatian past, as well as the development of predictors of cynicism and cynicism as the basic attitude towards political reality, prove to be predictors which should not be overlooked in the future.

Finally, the results of this research clearly indicate that conspiracy theories are not typical of eccentrics, but are rather a widespread way of thinking connected primarily to politically controversial events and processes. It does not have solely antidemocratic, authoritarian, and collectively-protective potentials, since one of the types thereof functions as a way of "exposing the dirty linen" of the democratic order. Moreover, both kinds of conspiratorial thinking are relevant for understanding the political order and the articulation of political divisions in Croatian society.

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### Struktura konspirativnoga mišljenja u Hrvatskoj

SAŽETAK Sukladno rezultatima anketnog istraživanja iz 2007. godine, ova studija analizira konspirativno mišljenje u Hrvatskoj i njegove korelate. Konspirativno mišljenje odnosi se na politički kontroverzne događaje i procese iz nedavne hrvatske povijesti. Provedena faktorska analiza pokazala je postojanje dvaju faktora. Jedan se odnosi na zavjere vlasti u 90-ima, a drugi na zavjere unutarnjih i vanjskih neprijatelja. Na temelju Sloterdijkovih i Žižekovih razmatranja o cinizmu, ova dva faktora možemo nazvati kiničnim i ciničnim teorijama zavjera. Prvi je tip teorija zavjera drsko i odvažno raskrinkavanje cinizma elita moći – njihovih tajnih sastanaka s neprijateljem tijekom rata, političkog kriminala, korupcije itd. Drugi je tip naličje "javne fasade", opscene reakcije na "kradljivce užitka" nacionalne stvari, u koje takva ideologija ubraja civilno društvo, oporbu, EU, MMF, Velike sile itd.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI teorija zavjera, cinizam, kinizam, zavjere vlasti, zavjere unutarnjih i vanjskih neprijatelja, izborna ponašanje