

KISS: KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID!

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE CROATIAN AMERICAN INTELLECTUALS DURING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CROATIA AND THE UNITED STATES, 1990-1992

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Croatia secured its state independence during the turbulent collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija* - SFRJ) from 1990 to 1992 under exceptionally complex international circumstances. The world's most influential countries, first and foremost the United States, upheld the unity and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia despite clear indications of its violent break-up.¹ After the democratic changes of 1990, an exceptionally important matter for Croatia's independence was the internationalization of the Yugoslav crisis. The unraveling of the Yugoslav state union dictated a redefinition of the status of the republics as its constituent units; in this process, in line with national homogenization which constituted the dominant component of societal transition at the time, the question of redefining national identities came to the forefront. The problem of presenting Croatia as a self-contained geopolitical unit, entailing arguments that should accompany its quest for state independence, imposed itself in this context. Political proclamations in the country, media presentation and lobbying associated with the problem of becoming acquainted with the political cultures and establishments of influential countries and the functioning of international institutions became the priorities for newly-emerging Croatian diplomacy. What is Croatia? What does it want? How should it present itself to the international public? How should it achieve its objectives?

In this work, this matter is examined in the context of Croatia's affirmation in the United States, based above all on the views of members of the Croatian American intelligentsia who became involved in this political discourse with their observations in the Croatian media (the newsmagazines *Danas* and *Globus*). What follows is a selective overview of the most important events in

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¹ David Binder, "Evolution in Europe; Yugoslavia seen breaking up soon," *The New York Times*, 28 Nov. 1990. Reference to information from this article can be found in the Croatian press as well; see, for example: Mirko Galić, "Ni rat ni mir", *Danas*, 12 Feb. 1991.

the establishment of Croatian-U.S. relations is provided for the period beginning with the first more or less independent Croatian ventures onto the international scene in the second half of 1990 until recognition of the Croatian state by the United States in April 1992; relevant events from later periods and their interpretation are only provided exceptionally.

Croatian émigré communities played a unique role in the promotion of political pluralism, securing of independence and the resistance to Greater Serbian aggression. From a distance of fifteen years after the beginning of Croatia's Homeland War and the achievement of independence, the first historiographic considerations of this matter indicate the need to analyze and contextualize the problem of Croatia's position in the international community given the contributions of Croatian émigrés to this process. One of the most intriguing questions in this context pertains to the role of the Croatian émigré intelligentsia. Were Croatian intellectuals abroad, particularly in countries with a great deal of influence on the course of the Yugoslavia crisis, like the United States, adequately employed at crucial moments during Croatia's appearance on the international stage? What was the attitude of the Croatian authorities, and what was the attitude of the intelligentsia? What problems were generated in the process of Croatia's international affirmation and what was the correlation between the processes of democratization in Croatian society and the approach to associations and processes in which Croatia wished to participate?

The public statements of a target group of highly-educated intellectuals, generally Ph.Ds and university professors from the United States, were taken as the reference framework for an initial attempt to illuminate this research question. Individuals such as Vladimir P. Goss, Ivo Banac, Tomislav Sunić, Mate Meštrović, Petar Kuzmić, Jerry Blaskovich, and others constitute a cross-section of Croatian Americans who were witnesses and chroniclers of the momentous years of Croatian history at the beginning of the 1990s. Although they differ in their political affinities and orientations, they contributed to the analysis and critical observation of events in Croatia and, particularly, in the international reception of events associated with Yugoslavia's collapse. Many of them even opted to return to Croatia and become actively involved in political life.

The research motives postulated here pertain to several essential problems of Croatia's affirmation in the international community at two basic levels: the first deals with the genesis of Croatia's institutional appearances in the international community as an independent political entity, and the second deals with the problem of adopting the value systems of liberal democracy and attempts to become integrated with its most eminent manifestations (the developed West; Euro-Atlantic integration).

Croatia and the United States, 1990/1992

A joke was circulating in the capital of Zagreb at the end of the 1980s that illustrated the political preferences of many residents of Croatia (Yugoslavia):

What color will the Sava River be if the Russians attack us?

Red. From our blood, because we'll defend ourselves.

What color will the Sava River be if the Americans attack us?

Red again. From our (red) communist party membership booklets.

As the world's 'top democracy' and the only remaining superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States played a major role in the formation of the political consciousness and reception of the West in Croatia and Yugoslavia, which in turn had particular significance in the tumultuous years of the Yugoslav crisis in 1990 and 1991. Pro-democratic political groups expected the active support of the United States in the turbulent process of society-wide transition. At the same time, the political bloc backed by Serbian strongman Slobodan Milošević, especially the top officers of the Yugoslav People's Army (*Jugoslavenska narodna armija* - JNA), feared any response by the U.S.

Immediately after the democratic elections in Croatia and Slovenia, in the spring of 1990, the newly-elected authorities of these republics tried to draw the attention of the United States on an independent basis, presenting themselves as pro-democratic political options, as opposed to Milošević's nationalist/communist movement. At the end of 1990, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman traveled to the United States.² Even though this visit had a practically marginal impact on Croatian-U.S. political relations (until Croatia's international recognition, political legitimacy was borne by the SFRJ which was unwaveringly supported by the U.S.), the public in Croatia and Yugoslavia was informed thereof in excessively optimistic tones, which clearly indicated the instigation of a propaganda war. The Croatian media, under the influence of the authorities, exaggerated the impact of the "state" visit of the Croatian delegation, led by Tuđman, to the White House; thus the press, through the national wire agency HINA, reported that "Dr. Tuđman (...) informed President Bush of the situation in Croatia and Yugoslavia."³ According to Slaven Letica, who was a member of that Croatian delegation, the meeting between Tuđman and Bush lasted less than two minutes and consisted of "handshakes" and "photographs."⁴

² "Dr. Tuđman doputovao u New York", *HINA*, 21 Sept. 1990; "Predsjednik Tuđman održao predavanje na sveučilištu Yale", *HINA*, 21 Sept. 1990; "Dr. Tuđman razgovarao s američkim kongresmenima", *HINA*, 25 Sept. 1990; "Dr. Tuđman se vratio u domovinu", *HINA*, 2 Oct. 1990; "Potpisana izjava o suradnji Hrvatske i Minnesote", *HINA*, 14 Dec. 1990.

³ See: "Bushov susret s Tuđmanom, Izvatci iz tiska," Miroslav Krmptić, ed. *Kronologija rata Hrvatska i Bosna Hercegovina* (Zagreb: Hrvatski informativni centar/Slovo, 1998), p. 30.

⁴ Slaven Letica, "Javni apel Mesiću i Račanu: Molim vas da priuipitate predsjednika Clintona za fonograme Tuđmanovih i mojih razgovora u Bijeloj kući iz rujna 1990!," *Globus*, 11 Aug. 2000. There are other account of this event. In his memoirs published a decade later, one of the most

Nonetheless, the “Croatian question” attracted some limited attention by the U.S. government. The Croatian delegation did manage to hold a brief meeting with National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, to whom it presented the “confederation project” for Yugoslavia and sought his support “to implement the idea of transforming the former SFRJ into an alliance of independent, sovereign, democratic states.”⁵ As noted by Slaven Letica, who together with Darko Bekić, was one of the lead associates on this project, together with “about thirty top Croatian economists, geo-strategists, military experts, geographers, political scientists, historians, lawyers, theologians and others,” the project was the result of “over three months” of studious work. This fact testifies to the importance placed at that time by the Croatian authorities on the visit to the United States and the confederalization of Yugoslavia. The project itself was “positively reviewed by leading constitutional and international law experts at Yale University,” certainly thanks to two of its professors of Croatian descent, Mirjan Damaška and Ivo Banac, who organized a lecture at Yale by Tuđman.⁶

Even though the meeting between Tuđman and Bush was symbolic in nature, and the Draft Confederation Agreement was “rejected by the Bush administration as unacceptable,” Croatia’s attempts were not entirely without effect. The U.S. did not officially endorse Croatia’s positions, but the well-known organization Human Rights Watch sided with Croatian and Slovenian projections of the outcome of the Yugoslav crisis in the influential *The New York Times*.⁷ At the very beginnings of Croatia’s international affirmation in 1990, it became obvious that bringing Croatia’s positions closer to the U.S. was one of the priorities of Croatian foreign policy, and the role of the Croatian intelligentsia in the United States (and among émigré communities as a whole) was welcomed in the top echelons of the Croatian government.

At the end of 1991, when the leadership of the JNA threatened a military coup, President Tuđman responded by sending a letter to U.S. President George Bush. Although the significance of this act, similar to Tuđman’s meeting with Bush, was over-exaggerated when presented to the Croatian public,

respected Croatian Americans, Mate Meštrović, described this event as “an unpleasant incident when Franjo Tuđman waited in the corridor of the White House in the hopes of meeting with Bush, but the latter simply rushed past him barely waving his hand, without even knowing who he was.” According to Meštrović “Tuđman insisted on this alleged meeting because he wanted to show the public in Croatia that the U.S. president supports him,” and “because of this attempt to at least be photographed with Bush, Tuđman was ridiculed in the Serbian media for days.” See: Mate Meštrović, *U vrtlogu hrvatske politike – kazivanje Peri Zlataru* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 2003), p. 276. See also: Mario Nobilo, *Hrvatski Feniks, Diplomatski procesi iza zatvorenih vrata 1990.-1997.* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 2000), p.147.

⁵ Slaven Letica, “Javni apel Mesiću i Račanu: Molim vas da priupitate predsjednika Clintona za fonograme Tuđmanovih i mojih razgovora u Bijeloj kući iz rujna 1990!,” *Globus*, 11 Aug. 2000.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jeri Laber and Kenneth Anderson, “Why Keep Yugoslavia One Country,” *The New York Times*, 10 Oct. 1990.

it did articulate Croatia's positions.⁸ In this letter, which was supposed to be delivered through the mediation of U.S. Senator Robert Dole, the Croatian president publicly sought American endorsement of a peaceful settlement of the Yugoslav crisis that would guarantee future stability, respect for internal borders and cooperation between the national states. Tuđman emphasized that the "path to stability has only one direction, and that is the success of democratic society. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia have elected democratic governments. The election of the Marxist communist Slobodan Milošević cannot be compared to the democratically elected governments in the north."⁹ In his message the Croatian president did not conceal his expectation of direct support from the United States: "A disaster in Yugoslavia can be prevented by an explicit message from the United States of America that it supports the majority, meaning the newly-established democratic republics, calling on a peaceful solution to secure future stability and to respect internal borders and ensure cooperation between the national states. Yugoslavia is not the Soviet Union; Serbia is not Russia; the Yugoslav Army is not the Soviet Army."¹⁰

Although it was apparent that Washington did not endorse the separatism of Slovenia and Croatia, by the same token it was more than obvious that it was not pleased with the interference of the JNA in politics, particularly the increasing affinity of the top military leadership for Milošević's regime. In December 1990, the United States sharply condemned the saber-rattling in Belgrade. In his memoirs, U.S. Ambassador Warren Zimmermann stated that the putschist statements of Defense Minister Veljko Kadijević had aroused "deep concern" in Washington. Kadijević, in fact, addressed the Yugoslav public immediately before the elections in Serbia on 9 December 1990; "in a press interview clearly designed to help Milošević at the polls, he threatened to use the JNA to disarm the Croats and Slovenes by force."¹¹

The U.S. attitude provoked a revolt by the military leadership. Thus Kadijević notes that "it was known (...) that all activities by western embassies in Belgrade were coordinated by Mr. Zimmermann"; he will "be remembered as a man who bears great responsibility for the dissolution of Yugoslavia and

⁸ On this see: Davor Glavaš, "Jovićeva ucjena Bushom," *Danas*, 5 Mar. 1991. A similar assessment of policies aimed at "propaganda effects," such as the letter to George Bush, was made thirteen years later by Višnja Starešina: "Croatia's foreign policy initiatives from Zagreb were also very specific. Franjo Tuđman liked to write letters to international statesmen, which would then be published in Croatian newspapers and read on Croatian Television. Thus the Croatian public was given the impression of a vigorous foreign policy. Nobody else shared this impression. For example, while European monitors, who could have conveyed these messages to their governments, were ignored by the Croatian authorities and the Croatian leadership attempted to convey messages to them by means of domestic television broadcasts." Višnja Starešina, *Vježbe u laboratoriju Balkan* (Zagreb: 2004), p. 80.

⁹ Tuđman's letter is printed in its entirety in Slaven Letica and Mario Nobile, *Rat protiv Hrvatske-KOS-tajni dokumenti* (Zagreb: Posebna izdanja Globusa, 1991), p. 86.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹ Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe* (Times Books: New York, 1996), p. 96.

great responsibility for much bloodshed in Yugoslavia.”¹² Verbal attacks on the U.S. embassy included orchestrated accusations made by the Serbian press about anti-Yugoslav activities, so that they even claimed that Zimmermann was certainly a CIA operative.¹³ The newly-formed political party called the Communist Alliance/Movement for Yugoslavia went the farthest, as it called for the deportation of U.S. Ambassador Warren Zimmermann at its annual convention.¹⁴

The denunciation of Zimmermann in Belgrade was not only excessive, it was entirely misplaced given his (American) standpoints. The U.S. ambassador was certainly no admirer of Milošević’s policies, but he similarly did not support the Slovenian nor, especially, the Croatian divergence from the Yugoslav option upheld by Federal Prime Minister Ante Marković. For Zimmermann, “Slovenian nationalism was unique - it had no victims and no enemies”; although the Slovenes “hated Slobodan Milošević, they built no ideology against him. They practiced a ‘Garbo’ nationalism – they just wanted to be left alone. Their virtue was democracy and their vice was selfishness.”¹⁵ As for Croatia, Zimmermann, in his own words, “avoided” meeting with Tuđman prior to his electoral victory “because of the extreme nationalism of some of his campaign statements.”¹⁶ For Zimmermann, Tuđman, as opposed to Milošević “who was driven by power,” “betrayed an obsession with Croatian nationalism”: “his devotion to Croatia was of the most narrow-minded sort, and he never showed much understanding of, or interest in, democratic values.”¹⁷ Zimmermann readily rejected the Croatian president’s requests for U.S. intervention and military assistance.¹⁸

Nonetheless, given Yugoslavia’s complex circumstances, U.S. support for Ante Marković proved entirely erroneous. When the U.S. Secretary of State James Baker visited Belgrade on 21 June 1991, his support to the Yugoslav prime minister and the preservation of Yugoslavia’s unity was interpreted as a green light for intervention in Slovenia by the JNA, after which war broke out in Croatia.¹⁹ Upon the arrival of representatives of the European Community with the goal of extinguishing the Yugoslavia crisis, the United States left the entire matter in the hands of Europe, falling back on some form of neo-isolationism.²⁰

¹² Veljko Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada* (Belgrade: Politika, izdavačka delatnost, 1993), p. 21.

¹³ See: *Politika Ekspres*, 18 Feb. 1991, cited in: V. P. Gagnon, Jr., “Yugoslavia: Prospects for the Stability”, *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 70., No 3., Summer 1991, 25.

¹⁴ *Večernji list*, 2 Feb. 1991.

¹⁵ Warren Zimmermann, *Origins...*, 71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75. Zimmermann was the first in a series of U.S. officials (Peter Galbraith, Madeleine Albright) to have a particularly low opinion of the Croatian president because of his lack of political sensibility for democratic values.

¹⁸ Warren Zimmermann, *Origins...*, p. 95.

¹⁹ Janez Janša, *Pomaci-Nastajanje i obrana slovenske države 1988-1992* (Zagreb: Mladinska knjiga, 1993), p. 83.

²⁰ On this see: Laura Silber & Allan Little, *Smrt Jugoslavije* (Opatija: Otokar Keršovani, 1996), pp. 139-164. See also the first episode of the television series of the same name.

By proclaiming independence on 25 June 1991, Croatia, together with Slovenia, made public its separation from the Yugoslav federation despite repeated warnings not to do so from the world's most powerful country. Under such circumstances it was certainly impossible to develop bilateral relations, and the "insubordination" demonstrated by Croatia and Slovenia could be interpreted as an additional motive for U.S. withdrawal from the Yugoslav crisis and relinquishing its settlement to the European Community. When the twelve member states of the European Community recognized Croatia and Slovenia six months later, the U.S. remained silent. Recognition by the U.S. would come several months later – on 7 April 1992, while a U.S. embassy in Zagreb was only opened on 28 June 1993. During 1994, after the genocidal mission of Serbia and Montenegro in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the United States once more became actively involved in the Balkan war zone, which culminated at the end of 1995 with the 'Pax Americana' signed in Dayton, Ohio and, ultimately, the military intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, which led to peace and stabilization in the region.

Just as the United States played the most important role in the end-game of the "Yugoslav crisis" in the second half of the 1990s, at the beginning of this crisis, in 1990 and 1991, its passivity contributed to its flare-up. While democratically oriented Slovenia and Croatia idealized the American devotion to democracy and nurtured unrealistic expectations of the U.S., Milošević and the JNA, in equal measure, feared U.S. intervention.

Croatian Americans also participated in Croatian media assessments of the interpretation of U.S. policies concerning events tied to the collapse of Yugoslavia. Thus in his "View from America" (the title of his column in the newsmagazine *Danas*), one of the most respected pro-democratic émigrés, Mate Meštrović, tried to explain the tenets underlying U.S. foreign policy at the time of the JNA assault on Slovenia and the worsening situation in Croatia (the end of July and the beginning of August 1991). The passive attitude of the United States confused the public in Croatia and Slovenia, which expected support from the world's 'first democracy' in the conflict between the democratic northwest and the nationalist-communism of the Milošević bloc. About this, Meštrović wrote: "This has to do with the contradictory American self-image: the confrontation between egoism and idealism. As the leading superpower, the United States longs for world domination, which it often achieves through restraint, even though sometimes it is prepared to affirm itself by means of merciless war, as recently demonstrated in the Persian Gulf. At the same time, the United States believes that it is 'the land of the free and home of the brave,' the leading world democracy and capitalist economy whose manifest destiny is to promote the interests of democracy and capitalism worldwide."²¹

²¹ Mate MEŠTROVIĆ, "Zapad u šoku," *Danas*, 9 July 1991. This dichotomy in U.S. foreign policy – the tension between pragmatism and principle – has been examined by many authors; thus Peter Scowen stresses that the U.S. has always struck a balance between "instinctive isolationism" and the conviction of its own "heroic superiority" and international mission as the "defender of freedom." Peter Scowen, *Crna knjiga Amerike* (Zagreb: Izvori, 2003), pp. 221-223. These issues of "contradictory foreign policy stances" were also covered by Henry Kissinger in his contem-

Meštrović goes on to talk about aspects of American policy, which were particularly significant to the question of legitimizing Croatia in the international community in the context of the Yugoslav conflicts: “As part of the affirmation of democracy, a crucial aspect is support for the principle of self-determination of nations, which was proclaimed in 1917 by President Woodrow Wilson in his famous 14 Points, as one of the foundations of lasting and just peace in the world. The conflict between the United States as a superpower engaged in *realpolitik* to further its own strategic, military and economic interests (even though there is some disagreement in the United States as to what these interests actually are), and America as the torch-bearer of freedom, democracy and human rights, incorporated even in the policies that Washington implemented in Yugoslavia, creates constant tensions and contradictions. The State Department stubbornly insisted on preserving the unity and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, which it believes is an ‘interest’ of the United States, while at the same time it demands respect for democracy and human rights, and establishment of the rule of law and a market economy.”²²

In the spring of 1992, writing for the newsmagazine *Globus*, historian Ivo Banac caustically summarized U.S. policy at the beginning of the 1990s in the territory of the then already former Yugoslavia: “The United States actually has no specific Yugoslav policy. It goes without saying that the superficial nature and cynicism of U.S. policy, obsessed with Yugoslavia as an integral state, ignoring the centrifugal force of national movements and post-communism in general, revering the golden calf of ‘stability’ with Ante Marković playing the role of Bush’s beloved Gorbachev, and relying on the ‘Yugo-expertise’ of certain key officials in the Bush administration, have contributed to expansion of the conflict, legitimization of the unconstitutional pretensions of the JNA, marginalization of anti-imperialist forces in Serbia and Montenegro, and the bloodshed and aggression in Croatia. This is the bottom line of Bush’s opportunistic policy. If opportunism, in the positive sense, means adaptation to newly-emerging conditions, then the Bush administration has fallen short even in its principles. The fact that these virtual dwarves are now administering foreign policy in what is now the world’s sole superpower is actually unbelievable.”²³

The criticism of Petar Kuzmić, a theology professor from Boston, carried in the weekly *Danas* after the “tragically late” U.S. recognition of Croatia (7 April 1992), was no less biting. Emphasizing that U.S. recognition “greatly improves Croatia’s standing on the international scene” and observing that it will be followed by “an avalanche of recognition from many countries for which America serves as a reliable weather-vane,” Kuzmić also made the following point: “A

plation of the redefinition of U.S. national interests in the “multipolar world of the twenty-first century.” See: Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacija* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 2000), p. 272.

²² Mate Meštrović, “Zapad u šoku,” *Danas*, 9 July 1991.

²³ Ivo Banac, “Američki patuljci spašavaju Jugoslaviju!” *Globus*, 6 Mar. 1992.

bitter feeling remains over the fact that the Americans waited so long, unrealistically insisting on a peaceful and comprehensive solution to the Yugo-crisis, and their inconsistency in their own principles and their apparently hypocritical and indifferent policies means that they share in the responsibility for many victims.”²⁴

All of the contributions by Croatian American intellectuals commenting on events in Croatia and Yugoslavia from the “dual” Croatian-American perspective are characterized by outright, harsh criticism of official U.S. policy. However, the Croatian government’s foreign policy was not spared in this regard, either.

Two fundamental historical processes crystallized in Croatia in 1990 and 1991 under wartime conditions: the political affirmation of Croatia’s independence in the international community and the gradual change of the social system as a result of the introduction of political pluralism. Even though the stance of a superpower like the United States could hardly be altered by the Croatian government—the leadership of a small emerging state beset by war—the policies conducted by its top officials in this vital period often left much to be desired. As observed by well-informed journalist and writer Višnja Starešina, “the three most important forms of creating perceptions of the war in Croatia were left to chance and private initiative: the relationship with the foreign media, the relationship with European monitors and political lobbying. Even diplomacy was just being created, in a very peculiar manner at that.”²⁵ Thus, for example, during 1992, a course on public relations (with focus on the U.S. and Canada) was held at the initiative of Assistant Information Minister Ante Beljo (himself a returning émigré from Canada) for the staff of the Croatian Information Center in Zagreb. Lecturer Laurie Vandriel stressed simplicity as an axiom in communicating with the U.S., expressing the principle in the witty acronym ‘KISS’ (“Keep it simple, stupid”). Vandriel’s offer to conduct systematic training of Croatian officials in the relevant institutions was not accepted, even though it was quite obvious that Croatia’s culture of political communication with foreign countries was not satisfactory.

However, events in Croatia and the former Yugoslavia during 1991 and 1992 proceeded at an exceptional pace. Croatian-U.S. relations can also be examined in this historical context, as these relations increasingly slid to the peripheries of Croatia’s foreign policy interests since the U.S. left the Yugoslav crisis in the hands of the European Community in the second half of 1991. To be sure, the problem of Croatia’s independence and its international affirmation, as well as a series of matters tied to democratization of Croatian society, were the subject of observation (and political involvement) by Croatian Americans.

²⁴ Petar Kuzmić, “Zahvalnost bez oduševljenja,” *Danas*, 14 Apr. 1992.

²⁵ Višnja Starešina, op. cit., 68.

Croatian diplomatic activity in the United States in 1990-1992 and critical observations by the Croatian-American intelligentsia

The steps taken by Croatia to prepare for its declaration of its independence, particularly in the international sphere, were generally symbolic. The socialist institution of chairman of the Republic Foreign Relations Committee, an office held by Zdravko Mršić after the elections, followed by Frane Vinko Golem, was transformed by decision of the Croatian Parliament on 20 June 1990 into the appropriate ministry (and the presiding member of the Presidency became the President of the Republic, the Executive Council became the Government as the highest executive body, and the remaining secretariats and committees were transformed into ministries, and so forth). However, the process of institutional transformation that stressed republic (state) sovereignty and the aspiration for independence proceeded much more slowly than in Slovenia; while Croatia demonstrated its international aspirations by establishing associations such as the Croatian Council of the European Movement, on the same day (23 June 1990) Slovenia released its new draft Constitution which was supposed to be a step toward state independence within the proposed confederal reorganization of Yugoslavia. Following Slovenia's example, on 18 January 1991, President Tudman decided to establish Foreign Offices of the Republic of Croatia, which were supposed to facilitate more independent activity by Croatia abroad. Over the coming months, such Republic of Croatia offices were established in major European cities, in the United States and Canada, and in South Africa and Japan.²⁶

The practice of opening offices abroad did not violate the Yugoslav Constitution nor did diplomacy at the federal level have any specific opposition thereto. Yugoslavia's foreign missions included, besides embassies, consular offices and culture and information centers. The visit by Croatia's first foreign minister, Zdravko Mršić, to New York in the autumn of 1990 was partially organized by the Culture and Information Center in that city, just as Yugoslav diplomatic institutions assisted the travel of Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović to Iran and Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov to Canada and the United States. Under conditions of increasingly tense relations between the republics in Yugoslavia, the expansion of a network of foreign offices certainly contributed to reinforcement of the position of individual republics in internationalizing the Yugoslav crisis.²⁷

A decision of the Supreme State Council on 9 April 1991 led to establishment of the Republic of Croatia Foreign Office in Washington, D.C. (it commenced operating on 8 July). The foreign minister at the time, Frane Vinko

²⁶ On this see: Davor Glavaš, "Raskršća Jugo-diplomacije," *Danas*, 14 May 1991.

²⁷ It would be wrong conclude that the option of international affirmation was only exploited by Slovenia and Croatia. This practice was initiated by the Socialist Republic of Serbia, whose representative Aleksandar Prlja virtually functioned as Serbia's foreign minister abroad before Slovenia and Croatia even held elections to change their governments. See for example: "Sudbina Jugoslavije nije vezana ni za jednu partiju- Prenosimo: Intervju Slobodana Miloševića američkom *Njuzviku*," *Borba*, 1 Feb. 1990.

Golem, was appointed to head the office as the fully authorized representative of the Republic of Croatia in the United States. As the Croatian foreign office in Washington began functioning, Croatia was preparing (in an effort to keep pace with Slovenia) to declare its independence. The individuals most responsible for foreign relations, President Franjo Tuđman and the new Foreign Minister Davorin Rudolf, placed their highest hopes in help from the United States.²⁸ On the eve of the visit by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker to Belgrade in June 1991, news arrived that Germany's Bundestag ratified a draft declaration on Yugoslavia that stressed the constitutional right of Yugoslav republics to self-determination and secession. According to later testimony by Rudolf, who was traveling with the president to meet with Baker on 21 June, Tuđman was emboldened by the news from Germany, and very optimistic in his expectations of U.S. support.

Even though the United States announced its support for the autonomy of the Yugoslav republics provided that the country's unity was preserved as a "major turnaround" on the eve of the visit by the Secretary of State, Tuđman was convinced that the U.S. would support Croatia's decision to declare independence and, moreover, he "claimed (...) that it would provide armed support."²⁹ Although more restrained, even Rudolf did not conceal that he had expected the most support from the United States: "I always placed an absolute priority on relations with the Americans. I was convinced that only they were capable of saving a young state from eradication, a state fighting against considerably stronger opponents."³⁰ The emphasis that the Croatian leadership, especially the Croatian president, placed on the "American card" in the spring of 1991 is also demonstrated by Tuđman's personal offer to the Democratic senator and former Minnesota governor, Rudy Perpich, an American of Croatian descent, to assume the duties of Croatian foreign minister from Frane Vinko Golem.³¹ Even though the appointment of Perpich came to naught, and Rudolf became the minister, the United States was still highly regarded by Zagreb in its attempts to attract the attention of the international community.

However, the reality of relations between Croatia and the United States was quite different. The actual steps taken by Croatia in the United States were based more on rhetoric about Croatia's place in the West than on practical steps to set the foundations for effective lobbying. As noted in his subsequent writings by President Tuđman's advisor at the time, Mario Nobilo, summarizing Croatia's official relations with the U.S. at the beginning of the 1990s: "Croatia did not, unfortunately, place sufficient emphasis on publicity in New York and throughout North America, even though the role of the United Nations and the U.S. was crucial to resolving the crisis. The Croatian authorities were more obsessed with the status symbols of hard-won independence

²⁸ Davorin Rudolf held the post of foreign minister from 3 May 1991 to 31 July 1991.

²⁹ Davorin Rudolf, *Rat koji nismo htjeli* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 1999), p. 250.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 250.

³¹ Krešo Špeletić, "Guverner kao ministar," *Danas*, 16 Apr. 1991. An opposing candidate was respected maritime law expert Hrvoje Kačić.

rather than on deployment of resources to end the war and facilitate reconstruction.”³² Nobile’s assessment is reflected in the reminiscences of officials of the time, and in numerous articles in the media and other publications.

Judging by available sources, including the observations of Croatian Americans, something of a paradigm for emerging Croatian foreign policy in 1991 and 1992 was encapsulated in the activities of Frane Vinko Golem, first as foreign minister and then as Croatia’s authorized representative in the United States. Even though it is possible to find a few laudatory evaluations of the role of the second Croatian foreign minister at the beginning of 1991, according to many sources his response to the tempestuous events surrounding Croatia’s achievement of independence was not up to the level demanded by circumstances.³³

In the extensive writings of former Prime Minister Franjo Gregurić (prime minister from 2 August 1991 to 12 August 1992), Frane Vinko Golem and his work in the Croatian office in Washington are only mentioned sporadically, in the briefest notations.³⁴ Thus, “Croatian Government minister and authorized representative of the Croatian Government in the United States, Dr. Vinko Golem” reported to the Government on the work of his office. Golem warned that “since the U.S. administration only acknowledges official communication, everything directed at the United States should go through the Republic of Croatia Foreign Office in Washington D.C.” Based on the proposal that “it is necessary to consider the possibility of a representative of Croatia’s International Relations Office to visit the U.S. and address the Congressional

³² Mario Nobile, *op. cit.*, 266.

³³ A positive assessment of Golem as foreign minister was made by *Danas* reporter Krešo Špeletić; citing “outside observers,” he states that the news of Golem’s replacement with Croatian American Rudy Perpich was accompanied by the question of “how much sense does it make to send an exceptionally dynamic and resourceful minister to the U.S. and simultaneously appoint an American to his post, when the former, according to general assessments, has found his bearings with uncommon speed and acumen.” Krešo ŠPELETIĆ, “Guverner kao ministar,” *Danas*, 16 Apr. 1991. Some of the controversies surrounding emergent Croatian diplomacy can be found in a description of the stay of a Croatian mission in Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg), when unexplained and alleged abduction (!?) of Golem occurred, contained in the memoirs of the energy minister at the time, Božo Udovičić. The bizarre scene of the minister’s “abduction” took place in front of the hotel in which the Croatian officials were staying (he was pushed into a car which drove off in an unspecified direction), and it was reported to the German police by the minister’s wife. The first assumptions pertained to the involvement of “Serbs or some secret service.” After several hours, Golem returned to the hotel, and the event was never explained to Udovičić. The poor organization of this visit was also illustrated in the events surrounding a scheduled visit to the parliament of the state of Baden-Württemberg by the Croatian delegation; according to Udovičić, when the Croatian ministers, headed by Parliamentary Speaker Žarko Domljan, arrived at the parliament building, “nobody was there to receive them, and not even the doorman had been informed of their visit.” See: Božo UDOVIČIĆ, *Statisti u demokraciji-Čitanka za buduću povijest*, Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 1999, 171-172. These and similar incidents demonstrate the level of organization and coordination in Croatian institutions at the beginnings of Croatia’s independence.

³⁴ Franjo Gregurić, *Vlada demokratskog jedinstva Hrvatske 1991.-1992.* (Zagreb: Naklada Zadro, 1998), p. 298.

Foreign Affairs Committee,” one can discern the topics that preoccupy the American public.³⁵ This attitude of the Croatia’s top leadership toward the U.S. and the restrained stance of the chief of Croatia’s diplomatic mission to the U.S. were at odds with the dramatic escalation of the war in Croatia. Frequent violence and mass destruction began to attract the attention of the U.S. media and this opened the doors for explanations and promotion of Croatia’s positions in the United States.

Referring to “confidential interviews” in her book from 2004, Višnja Starešina also testifies to the work of Golem and the Croatian office from July 1991 to the second half of 1992 (when, after Croatia’s recognition by the United States, Petar Šarčević arrived as the Croatian ambassador).³⁶ The Croatian office should have been a “center that would coordinate information and lobbying activities to get the U.S. to recognize Croatia as soon as possible.” However, it was opened in a “questionable neighborhood,” and Frane Vinko Golem was only joined in his work at the end of 1991 by a graduate student from Zagreb and a Croatian American. To meet the needs of lobbying from Zagreb, “a low-profile lobbying agency was hired for some laughable fee, for which someone in America would not even assent to shine shoes for the contracted period, much less lobby for state interests in high U.S. political circles”; Starešina also states that “there were no known results of this lobbying, nor did anybody in the Croatian office ever see their Washington lobbyist,” while diplomatic contacts remained “at the most rudimentary level.”³⁷

Nonetheless, Golem tried to attract the attention of the U.S. administration and he invested efforts incommensurate with his resources. Due to meager funds, ignorance of protocol and conventions and inadequate command of the English language, his activities did not represent Croatia properly. With help from the Croatian émigré community in the U.S., which attempted to help its homeland with great enthusiasm, in August 1991 Frane Vinko Golem organized a large demonstration of Croats in front of the White House. Starešina picturesquely describes his attempts to point out “to Washington the crisis that had slid into war” and his striving to encourage “consideration to recognize Croatia”: “It was a hot and humid Washington summer, about forty degrees Celsius in the shade. The unrecognized Croatian ambassador, the demonstration’s keynote speaker, did everything he could and endured much to appear stately and represent a country as he believed it should be represented. He wore a formal black frock coat, in which he, corpulent as he was, perspired in the humid weather. He put an ambassadorial sash over it – the symbol of the state sent to his delegates by President Tuđman. He wore white tennis shoes on his feet, because they were so swollen from the heat that he could not wear anything else. This was the image Croatia sent to the world. Tragicomical at first glance. But in fact it was so archaic, so maladroit, so ineffective, so trite-

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

³⁶ Višnja Starešina, *op. cit.*, 77-79.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

ly childish. Frane Vinko Golem really tried hard, but he was the wrong man in the wrong place.”³⁸

Despite the dramatic changes under way in Croatia and Yugoslavia at the end of 1991 and beginning of 1992, the situation surrounding Croatia’s representation in the United States did not essentially change even later. When the United States finally granted recognition to Croatia at the beginning of April 1992, the staff of the Croatian office in Washington was notified thereof by Zagreb. On the same day the United States recognized Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the latter was also recognized by Croatia on that date. Despite this, Golem responded to the news of the Serbian massacre of civilians waiting in a bread line in the besieged Bosnian capital Sarajevo, “genuinely distressed but without consulting anyone,” by writing a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State for the first time; in a letter that began with the words ‘*Dir Mister Baker*,’ Golem “called attention to events in my country,” forgetting that “Bosnia was now another country.”³⁹

According to Starešina, Golem’s associates described him “as an honest, simple and above all frugal man,” who was “exceptionally loyal to Tuđman.” However, “he knew nothing about diplomacy, nor did anybody tutor him prior to his arrival”; “his spoken English was passable, but his writing skills were poor.”⁴⁰ Golem himself made no particular effort to conceal his diplomatic shortcomings. His ingenuous attitude toward diplomacy was not well-accepted by some in the Croatian media. Thus, the weekly *Danas* mockingly cited his statements given to television reporter Damir Matković in the news program *Slikom na sliku* (‘Picture to Picture’). Croatia’s official representative in the United States spoke for television “after much calumny” and confirmed that he—although the only Croatian representative in Washington—“does not have the best command of the language of his new workplace.” The *Danas* reporter accompanied the statement made by the Croatian representative in the United States, who “talked about his knowledge of English,” with this joking commentary: “He revealed something we didn’t know – that Americans find broken English pleasing!” Continuing in this tone, the reporter concludes: “Unfortunately, it seems that Dr. Golem is suffering from culture shock. He sees Americans laughing at him and believes they find him ‘molto simpatico.’ Otherwise, so-called broken English is only acceptable if you are speaking to Little Joe from Dock 43. But it is no secret that Golem could not even be invited to one of the most respected American political news programs, McNeil-Lehrer, because his knowledge of English is below McNeil-Lehrer’s minimum standard.”⁴¹

To be sure, the work of Frane Vinko Golem and the Croatian office in Washington, and Croatian foreign policy as a whole, elicited much commen-

³⁸ Ibid., 79.

³⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁴¹ “Molto simpatico Golem,” *Danas*, 28. 4. 1992.

tary from Croatian Americans as well. Danica Ramljak,⁴² who actively lobbied for Croatia in the United States, commented on the functioning of the Croatian office in Washington in a newspaper interview in the spring of 1993: "I believe that the office's chief of staff, Mr. Frane Vinko Golem, had the best intentions, but intentions and reality are entirely different things. For example, once I wanted to ask him to send me some data I could use for a 'round table' that I had organized at the Department of Political Science at the University of Georgia. He was not in the office, and his clerk informed me that they do not have this type of information, directing me to the Ministry of Information in Zagreb. But she could not even give me the ministry's phone number!"⁴³ Danica Ramljak also noted that "Cyrus Vance received her twice, while he never met with Frane Golem," and she pointed out the poor cooperation with Croatia: "Tonči Vrdoljak never sent me a news piece from Croatian Television for CNN!"; "After the fall of Vukovar, Ante Beljo could not even manage to send at least a few people from that city to the United States to act as witnesses."⁴⁴

Several Croatian Americans, university professors, commented on the shortcomings of emerging Croatian diplomacy and the problems of representing Croatia in the United States during 1991 in the newsmagazine *Danas*. In a text published in August 1991, at the time of the distressing demonstration of Croats in Washington, Tomislav Sunić and Vladimir P. Goss warned that "a year after the establishment of a democratic government in Croatia, the Croatian Government is still wanting in its presentation of events in Croatia to the international public"; they similarly note that "so far any of the modest victories for Croatia should, paradoxically, be largely credited to the primitivism of Serbian politics and much less to any initiative made by Croatian diplomacy."⁴⁵ In the United States, "Croatian foreign policy is limping," and the officials who should be representing Croatia are not suitably qualified: "It appears as though the Croatian Government is employing a considerable number of dilettantes who are, perhaps, capable of writing moving obituaries for Croatian historical figure Stjepan Radić, but who, unfortunately, can, with the best intentions but rather stupidly, lead Croatia into a political catastrophe. Whether we like it or not, Croatia's state legitimacy is obtained not only in Zagreb, but also in Washington and the Quai d'Orsay. A well-qualified staff of public relations experts in the United States is much more effective than two well-trained divisions in Croatia."⁴⁶

⁴² Danica Ramljak was in the United States at the beginning of the 1990s completing her doctoral studies. When the war in Croatia began she began to successfully lobby for the country. Later she became a member of the management of the Croatia House, a Croatian American organization that promotes Croatian culture.

⁴³ Interview by Rosa Grca with Danica Ramljak, "Sinjanka koja je osvojila Ala Gorea," *Globus*, 15 Mar. 1993.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Tomislav Sunić, Vladimir P. Goss, "Defanziva," *Danas*, 6 Aug. 1991.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

As residents of the United States, Sunić and Goss emphasized that “on the American political scene, and in formal contacts with the media, it is necessary (...) to know how to impose oneself elegantly, rather than wait for foreigners to begin crying out that Croatia is threatened on our behalf. Americans love the initiative, especially when it is well-formulated. One cannot discount that the reason for U.S. unwillingness to recognize Croatia’s independence lies in the constant reshuffling of the Croatian Government and in statements made by certain Croatian officials that are unacceptable to the language of international diplomacy, and particularly for American ‘soft’ politics (...). Impeccable knowledge of the American language in all of its finesses and body language [*author’s note*: certainly an allusion to the poor impression left on interlocutors by individuals such as Frane Golem or Franjo Tuđman] acceptable to Anglo-Saxon ears and eyes are today more important trump cards than the Croatian lyrical heart and epic horizons. Something that is obvious to a Croat in Croatia need not be obvious to an American.”⁴⁷

Writing twelve years later on the general problem of communication between Croatian politicians and Americans at the beginning of the 1990s, Mate Meštrović also made this observation: “I daresay that almost no politically-involved Croat in the United States, with the possible exception of myself, was aware of how to successfully communicate with the Americans. It is a matter of different mentalities. This difference was even greater between Americans and Croats from the homeland, who grew up in more than a half-century of communism and seven decades of Yugoslavia. Lack of proficiency in communicating with Americans was immediately apparent among representatives of democratic opposition parties, and later those of the Croatian authorities, who came to the United States in larger numbers.”⁴⁸ Meštrović shared his views on the problems of Croatian communication with the world in 1991 as well. Thus, in an article published in *Danas* in May 1991 under the headline “Croatian catastrophe,” Meštrović harshly criticized Croatian foreign policy, obviously prompted by the attitudes of Croatian representatives in the United States. He leveled his criticism at “political amateurism and improvisation” formulated for the objective of “short-term propaganda effect.”⁴⁹ Observing that “over a single year (...) three and half Croatian foreign ministers had come and gone [*author’s note*: Z. Mršić, F. V. Golem, D. Rudolf and Z. Šeparović],” Meštrović warned that “foreign policy has largely (...) consisted of President Tuđman traveling around the world.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mate Meštrović, *U vrtlogu hrvatske politike – kazivanje Peri Zlataru* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 2003), p. 269. In this context, it is interesting to read Meštrović’s view that “one of the rare Croats who knew how to approach the Americans was Slavko Goldstein. I became convinced of this at the beginning of 1990 when he arrived with Vlado Gotovac as the head of the newly-established Croatian Social-Liberal Party”. However, “Goldstein, with his views, diverged not only from those of radical Croatian émigrés but also from a large majority of people in the homeland.” Ibid., 269.

⁴⁹ Mate MEŠTROVIĆ, “Pogled iz Amerike-Hrvatska katastrofa,” *Danas*, 14 May 1991.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Due to this critical observations, in which he also mentioned the state's top leadership, Meštrović was fiercely criticized in a response printed in the very next issue of *Danas*, in an article under the headline "Indulgence of an Americanized Croat."⁵¹ In this article, Meštrović's critic states that "in several recent articles that we have all read, Meštrović demonstrates a deep-seated lack of understanding for the fates of ordinary Croats who have been thrust into the grindstone of potent historical forces, and then thoroughly pulverized and discarded"; the author ask "whether it is possible that Meštrović has succumbed to a stereotype when speaking of communists? Perhaps he was thinking otherwise, but he wrote that the communist authorities were only formally overthrown in the first Croatian elections and that they are actually in power and sharing in the spoils of victory. So to him the new authorities are undemocratic and corrupt. His opinion of Croatian freedom fighters in exile is just as poor. He himself, as opposed to the views of ordinary people, illustrated his stance in the case of Bruno Bušić. Americans, Meštrović writes as a genuine American, believe that airline hijackers—and one of their principle ideologues was Bruno Bušić—are terrorists who have to be prosecuted as such (...) With these examples, Meštrović wants to expose *urbi et orbi* the structure of the Croatian Democratic Union and the structure of the new authorities, which to him are Bolshevik and Ustasha."⁵²

Elements of day-to-day politics but also major differences in the political and cultural standpoints of "America" and "Croatia" are notable in the arguments of Meštrović's critics. Meštrović's views on the need to create a government of "national salvation" that would "consist of the most qualified people of all political orientations in Croatia" together with the establishment of a government "that will have the genuine authority to make decisions and formulate Croatian policies together with the Croatian Parliament" ensued from his calls for reinforcement of democracy in Croatia.⁵³ Meštrović did not limit the establishment of Croatia's freedom and democratization to Croatia alone, rather he saw the need for "a just solution to the national conflict in Yugoslavia" ("which cannot be achieved unless everybody is equally involved in talks, meaning the Albanians and Muslims, Hungarians and others"). Meštrović's theory of the maintenance of "one-party rule" in Croatia even after the introduction of political pluralism, his demand for an end to "narrow-minded partisan politicking in Croatia" and his calls for new elections and new electoral legislation were met with hostility among top Croatian officials because they

⁵¹ Mate Marsin, "Popustljivost amerikaniziranog Hrvata," *Danas*, 21 May 1991.

⁵² Ibid. Meštrović's confrontations with the Croatian authorities go back to the pre-election period, which can certainly, at least partly, explain his uncompromising criticism. After joining the National Accord Coalition (rather than the Croatian Democratic Union/HDZ) in the 1990 elections and supporting moderate stances pertaining to the dissociation of Yugoslavia, Meštrović came into full frontal conflict with the HDZ. In April 1990, President Tuđman rejected a proposal by politician Dražen Budiša that Meštrović be appointed Croatia's representative to the United Nations, despite his experience and flawless knowledge of English. See: Mate Meštrović, op. cit., 320.

⁵³ Mate Meštrović, "Pogled iz Amerike-Hrvatska katastrofa," *Danas*, 14 May 1991.

impinged upon the integrity of the president, the governing party (Croatian Democratic Union) and the state leadership.⁵⁴ Other contributions by Croatian Americans—for example, letters to the editor published in *Danas*—indicated the differences between American and Croatian cultural and political paradigms. Thus, for example, President Tuđman was the butt of their criticism for his purchase of a jet aircraft with funds donated by émigrés and his tendency to create a cult of personality (“Does Croatia need another Tito?”); they criticized the ethnocentrism of individual Croatian officials (e.g. statements such as “only someone whose father and mother are Croats can be a good Croat”) and they criticized government moves such as opening debate on the renovation and future function of the medieval Medvedgrad fortress on the mountain above Zagreb (‘Altar of the Homeland’) in light of more pressing events in Croatia (“Medvedgrad and Vukovar”).⁵⁵

A brief interview granted to the weekly *Danas* by theology professor Petar Kuzmić from Boston also contained recognizable themes that most often characterized critical overviews of Croatian actions in the United States. “Croatia has lost the media war. ‘How are we portrayed in the American media?’ – that was what they asked me in Osijek last week for Croatian Television. ‘Quite poorly, I mean, not at all...’ I refrained from elaborating because they told us Croatia shouldn’t be criticized while its blood is being shed... Generally I agree... but perhaps less blood would have been shed if we had subjected certain careless moves and euphorically conveyed shallow speeches and statements to critical scrutiny... ‘You’re poorly represented in Washington,’ a U.S. congressman otherwise fond of Croatia told me last week. This was confirmed by others from the media and friends as well. ‘You’re represented by a man who does not know enough English, who has no strategy to promote Croatia and who doesn’t know how to articulate your pain and suffering...’ I immediately reported this to my friends in Zagreb and Osijek, who personally told the Croatian president that we need a more capable representative in Washington. Nothing helped. In mid-December I once more informed President Tuđman of this severe defect of Croatian diplomacy. He asked me why the United States does not support us. I agreed with him that we have many enemies of Croatia in America, such as Mr. Eagleburger, a strong Serbian lobby, high-profile Congresswoman Helen Delich-Bentley, the financially and informatively biased CNN and others, but that we largely had ourselves to blame because we were working to our own detriment. In America elections and wars are won and/or lost in the media. We lost ours because we were represented in diplomacy and the media by a man who is by nature and profession allegedly good, but who is entirely illiterate in these two key fields. He doesn’t know anything himself, but will not give others the opportunity. He classifies Croats

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See: Dr. Slavko Knežević, “Cincinnati, Oh, USA, Tuđmanov avion-Kada lete predsjednici,” *Danas*, 2 June 1992; Tomislav Nagy, “River Forest, USA, Dobri Hrvati-Neukusna izjava,” *Danas*, 26 May 1992; Stjepan Boričević, “Chicago, Medvedgrad i Vukovar,” *Danas*, 24 Mar. 1992.

into those who have money and merit because they helped the governing party, and those who, albeit perhaps the most patriotic and the most clever, but who are nonetheless 'morally and politically unsuitable.' All of America knows about this, but one-party Zagreb has remained deaf (and mute) for an entire year. Perhaps it is a matter of a third thing – which everyone is talking about – but about which my Christian pen cannot write!"⁵⁶

Kuzmić's frequent criticism, of which some were directly aimed at Frane Vinko Golem, were answered in *Danas* by Croatia's representative in the U.S. himself, saying that "without any detailed analysis and lacking any factual citations (...), I was brutally slandered and insulted" by Kuzmić.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he acknowledged that "Croatia was poorly portrayed in the media in the United States" and that "what little there was, was (...) at odds with Croatia and its entire leadership"; however, he stressed that since "the opening of the Office in Washington (8 July 1991), the situation had gradually but surely began changing to Croatia's benefit, and the opposing side frequently complained to American media outlets that they favor Croatia." To this he added a list of American senators and congressmen with whom contacts had been set up by the Croatian office.⁵⁸

Even though he was a *persona non grata* to the governing HDZ, Mate Meštrović was contacted for assistance in the U.S. by many Croatian officials during 1991 and 1992. Prior to the arrival of Foreign Minister Zvonko Šeparović to the U.S., Meštrović was asked to set up a meeting with U.S. officials.⁵⁹ Even on this occasion, ignorance of American protocols and conventions came to the forefront. Not without some bitterness, Meštrović testified to these "double standards": "Despite mistrust of me, the Croatian authorities continued to ask me for favors. (...) Yesterday they called me from Zagreb. Minister Zvonimir Šeparović was coming again, so they asked me to arrange a meeting with James Baker, Bush's Secretary of State. I'm not sure who they think they are. They obviously think I can ring Baker and schedule a meeting with Šeparović just like that. When they need me, they seek my assistance urgently. When they don't need me, they denounce me as a CIA agent and a traitor to the Croatian people ..."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Davor Glavaš, "Nobelova nagrada za Cyrusa Vancea," *Danas*, 10 Mar. 1992. See also: Petar Kuzmić, "Zahvalnost bez oduševljenja," *Danas*, 14 Apr. 1992; Petar Kuzmić, "Popaljeni olimpijski gradovi," *Danas*, 12 May 1992; Petar KUZMIĆ, "Došlo im do mozga," *Danas*, 2 June 1992.

⁵⁷ Frane Golem, "Držite se Biblije," *Danas*, 14 Apr. 1992.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Zvonko Šeparović was foreign minister in the so-called Government of National Unity led by Prime Minister Franjo Gregurić from 31 July 1991 to 27 May 1992 (he replaced Davorin Rudolf at this post). Šeparović traveled to the U.S. three times as minister. On this see: Davor Ivanković: "Intervju sa Zvonimirom Šeparovićem - Kako smo (s)lomili čuvare Jugoslavije," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 28, 29 & 30 May 1994.

⁶⁰ Mate Meštrović, op. cit., 320.

Meštrović also states that even “before (...) I had unpleasant experiences when arranging Šeparović’s meetings with Americans”: “When he arrived in the U.S. the first time as foreign minister, I arranged a meeting with the editorial board of *The New York Times*. This paper, not without reason, is considered almost as influential as the White House. After a series of phone calls, and intervention by friends, I managed to set up a meeting for Šeparović with *The New York Times*. But then he cancelled at the last minute, saying he had more important obligations. This flippant gesture on his part angered the otherwise busy editors, and certainly ensured that their already negative views of Croatian officials became even poorer. I was puzzled that Zvonimir Šeparović was not aware of the immeasurable influence of this paper in the United States. Perhaps he thought he could treat them like a man in high authority, the way they treated reporters from *Vjesnik* or *Večernji list* in Croatia!”⁶¹

In an analysis entitled “Legend-Induced Paranoia of the Serbs and Hits and Myths of the Croats,” contained in his book *Anatomy of Deceit*,⁶² Jerry Blaskovich, an American physician of Croatian descent, shared some exhaustive and fascinating observations on the specific causes of Croatia’s misunderstanding of the American political milieu and media at the beginning of the 1990s. He noticed that the attention of the international public concentrated on Croatia “from the moment the Serbs unleashed their onslaught on Croatia,” and this resulted in the appearance of many pundits, reporters and authors of the most diverse backgrounds who “offered highly speculative and suspect opinions” on the Yugoslav crisis. He notes they “persistently pontificated that regional history was the exclusive genesis of today’s conflicts, without accurately understanding that history. So they’ve invariably recounted Serbian mythologies instead.”⁶³

Under circumstances marked by media concentration on Croatia, there was room for Croatian interpretations of events as well. Blaskovich provides broad observations of Croatia’s lack of readiness to confront these challenges. Here he dedicates considerable attention to Croatia’s counter-productive attempts to explain the complicated historical background of the Yugoslav conflicts. Although speaking in general terms, it is not difficult to discern criticism that applies (and probably pertains to) the rhetoric of President Tuđman: “To the detriment of more important priorities, the Croats have spent a great deal of energy trying to set the record straight. In the process, they’ve gotten caught in the trap of quoting their own history ad nauseam. The Croats felt that history was on their side and once the world learned the real truth, in contrast to the Serbian version, everything would miraculously fall into place for Croatia.” He goes on to observe: “Instead of discussing the contemporary political situation, most Croatian government representatives spent all their time trying to decon-

⁶¹ Ibid., 320.

⁶² Jerry Blaskovich, *Anatomy of Deceit* (New York: Dunhill Publishing, 1997). At the behest of the J.P. Mackley, head of the Foreign Press Bureau in Zagreb, Blaskovich traveled to Croatia in December 1991 as a medical specialist to ascertain the facts surrounding the massacre of Croat civilians in Voćin.

⁶³ Ibid., 13.

struct the Serbian take on Croatia's past. Croatian spokesmen didn't comprehend that the attention span of their audiences started to drift as soon as they brought up the Croats' significance during the time of Christ's birth. By the time the spokesmen reached the seventh century, when the Croats finally settled in the Balkans, they had lost their audiences completely. Croatian officials never reached the point where they could articulate the real issues and Croatia's present agenda because they spent all of their energy explaining history."⁶⁴

Historical interpretations of practical political matters were particularly problematic for pragmatic Americans: "...Croatia's representative to Washington, Franjo [sic] Golem, always thought the answer to an American legislator's question, 'What can we or what do you want us to do for Croatia?' was *carte blanche* to deliver a lesson on Croatian history. One leading congressman told me that he dreaded having to meet with Golem, but did so because of protocol. He described these meetings as analogous to asking someone for the time and receiving a lecture on how to make a clock instead."⁶⁵

The only "protagonist" from the territory of the former Yugoslavia that did not utilize a "version of history to embellish their own agendas" were, according to Blaskovich, the Slovenes. Blaskovich concludes his review on the role of history in the diplomatic activities of the warring peoples with a comment that reflects the views of an American who, even though Croatian by descent, provides an "American" portrayal the political culture of his people of origin: "Whether that history was credible was of least importance. For a long time we were bombarded with the 'Loony Tunes' Serbian version because it was the only one used by Western leaders and the media. But I have no doubt that because of the decisive Croatian military victories in 1995 we'll soon be inundated with the Croatian 'Merry Melodies.'"⁶⁶

The "progenitor" of the approach based on proving "the historical right" in which historical interpretations played a vital role was President Tuđman himself, who represented Croatia to the largest degree.⁶⁷ During a visit by foreign reporters, President Tuđman "patiently and exhaustively recounted a historical and scholarly interpretation of the roots of the Croatian-Serbian conflict, the pedigree of Croatian statehood, culture and identity and his views on the future of this part of Europe and the European continent as a whole. Foreign reporters did not like Tuđman because he seemed morose, close-minded and outmoded with his 'fanatical historicism,' but they came to him persistently in increasingly larger groups, because their professional instincts told them that something major and bloody was about to happen. The president rejected any instruction on press relations, zealously adhering to his historical approach, to which diplomats and journalists either did not respond or among whom

⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁵ Jerry Blaskovich, *op. cit.*, 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁷ Gordana Uzelak, "Franjo Tuđman's Nationalist Ideology," *East European Quarterly*, Volume XXXI, Number 4, Winter 1997, p. 451. Based on an analysis of Tuđman's rhetoric in fifty articles containing his statements, Uzelak came upon the term 'history,' in various contexts and meanings, 35 times.

it provoked concealed laughter.”⁶⁸ However, one of the most influential international authorities on Yugoslav history, Ivo Banac, who has been one of the most strident critics of Tuđman’s policies since 1992, has an exceptionally poor opinion of Tuđman, not just as a politician, but also as a historian.⁶⁹

Many years later, Ante Čuvalo from Chicago made similar observations at an international seminar, “about how Americans who deal with our problems, look at or looked at Yugoslavia”; among other things, Čuvalo stressed: “Too much is said about the Balkans and local matters, so don’t be surprised when a reporter, expert or sub-expert on this part of the world comes home and writes that we live solely off of history here. Many of them do not understand this.”⁷⁰

The justification for objections raised by Croatian Americans and other qualified observers of the weaknesses of Croatian policies vis-à-vis the United States and the world in general is reflected in a study of foreign receptions of Croatia and the (post)Yugoslav territory and the manner in which the international community responded to Yugoslavia’s collapse. In a synthetic overview of analyses of various “crisis management models”—applied by the great powers and international organizations in the Yugoslavia case—American historian James Sadkovich critically examines an indicative example of consideration of the Yugoslav conflict that was unfavorable for Croatia. Sadkovich states that individual foreign interpreters of (post)Yugoslav circumstances “committed grave errors in citing the facts and making conclusions that they could not defend”; thus the “Serbs in Croatia are portrayed as insurgents and the role of the JNA and Serbian propaganda in initiating, supplying, training and supporting the Croatian Serbs is ignored. Instead, they stress Tuđman’s use of ‘Ustasha symbols’ as an evocation of ‘memories of past crimes’ of Croats against Serbs. Because they saw the conflict as a ‘civil war,’ they believed that it was a ‘bafflingly complicated’ and ‘irredentist conflict’ in which ‘kaleidoscopically changing alliances’ at the local and national levels make it difficult to discern who holds the power. The authors of the analysis saw the Bosnians as ‘Muslim Serbs,’ Yugoslav history as dark and violent, everyone was proclaimed equally culpable of cease-fire violations, Germany as the driver of the EU, the ‘early recognition’ of Bosnia as an obstacle to the formation of a sustainable federation, and they ultimately condemned the U.S. for undermining the EU and UN peace efforts, the frustration of negotiators such as David Owen, the provocation of the Serbs and encouragement of the Muslims.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Mario Nobilo, op. cit., 108.

⁶⁹ Ivo Banac, “Krv nije država-Kako je Tuđman krivotvorio povijest hrvatske nacionalne integracije,” *Feral Tribune*, 26 Dec. 1994. See also the interview by Tatjana TAGIROV with Ivo Banac in *Arkzin* (no date – author’s personal photo-copy). For an assessment of Tuđman as a historian, see also: Vladimir Đuro Degan, *Hrvatska država u međunarodnoj zajednici* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 2002), p. 267.

⁷⁰ *Međunarodni znanstveni skup “Jugoistočna Europa 1918.-1995.”* – Dubrovnik, 23-25 May 1996 (Zagreb: Hrvatski informativni centar, 2000), p. 195.

⁷¹ James Sadkovich, “Klimavi početak: Što možemo naučiti iz raspad Jugoslavije?” *Polemos 2*, (Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 1999), p. 156.

Certainly this comment (as one of many) prompts the basic question of the level of accountability of the protagonists in the Yugoslav conflicts and the (co)responsibility of international community “factors.” It remains an open question as to what Croatia could have objectively done to improve its image in the world given the circumstances: an imposed war and the unwillingness of the international community to stop the escalating conflict. The example of Slovenia, which made optimum media use of the invasion of the Yugoslav People’s Army during its “ten-day war,” shows that the negative image of “nationalist separatists” can be turned into the notion of a “David vs. Goliath” confrontation overnight. While Yugoslav Army tanks lumbered down Slovenia’s roads and its warplanes with their red star insignia strafed its citizens (the most effective footage was nevertheless shot at the border crossing with Austria, where Turkish truck drivers were largely the victims of air strikes), Ljubljana Television alternated images of the JNA aggression with scenes of Soviet tanks entering Prague in 1968. The response by the international public was not long in coming. Even though Croatia was in a radically different position than Slovenia (geopolitical position, rebel Serbs, reprisals going back to the Second World War, etc.), the observations of Croatian Americans confirm the stance that emerging Croatian foreign policy did not choose the best approach to promoting Croatia’s interests abroad.

Commenting on the problems surrounding Croatia’s initial forays into foreign affairs, Mate Meštrović concludes: “The extent of Tuđman’s understanding the soul of our people and success in mobilizing them in the struggle for independence was matched by his inaptitude in contacts with the international community. And his envoys who came to the United States before the first democratic elections, and afterward, proved no more adept in their contacts with Washington and the American public.”⁷² Višnja Starešina also observed the poor organization of Croatian diplomacy in the United States and other important world centers in 1991 and the beginning of 1992: “Many Croatian politicians solemnly departed for so-called lobbying tours of European capitals, later characterizing them as their great contributions to recognition: they recounted the talks they held in the British Foreign Office, or what they said in the Quai d’Orsay. The impressions that they left were not, in fact, so brilliant. For example, Croatian émigrés in the United States who helped arrange meetings between Croatian politicians and even ministers and major officials from the U.S. administration were often astounded when they saw that all these Croatian ‘political lobbyists’ wanted was to be photographed with an ‘important person’ and then – leave. No talks! Later they realized the reasons for such photo opportunities, when they saw ‘mission accomplished’ photos in the Croatian press. This was a typical Croatian stunt. The main goal of diplomatic and lobbying efforts were to provide the Croatian public and Tuđman ‘proof’ of their own successful efforts. To show off for the domestic audience.”⁷³

⁷² Mate Meštrović, *op. cit.*, 276.

⁷³ Višnja Starešina, *op. cit.* 81.

Conclusion:

The public commentary by Croatian American intellectuals at the beginning of the 1990s was characterized by the dual Croatian-American perspective of observation, wherein (Croatian) patriotic feelings and the direct and open (“American”) approach to the problem of Croatia’s position in the United States and the world became intertwined. Criticism of the U.S. stance was increasingly accompanied by a tendency to more harshly criticize the Croatian authorities. This latter tendency deepened in the subsequent period, primarily because of the negative reception of Croatian policies toward Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Croatian authorities (especially President Tuđman) first ignored but then confronted a portion of the Croatian American intelligentsia, and this served as a vital indicator of misunderstanding, not just of the importance of incorporating the highest quality persons from Croatian émigré communities in the struggle for Croatia’s status in the United States and the world, but also of the American political milieu as a whole. The central themes of this confrontation during the period covered by this work pertain to criticism of the “partisan” approach to setting up diplomatic structures in the United States, wherein the most qualified members of the Croatian American intellectual elite, who were very familiar with American circumstances and institutions, were neglected.

This miscalculation by the Croatian authorities during this period primarily manifested itself in media and lobbying fiascoes. However, the more significant consequences of the failure to include, or even the outright marginalization, of Croatian Americans (and many other eminent Croatian émigré intellectuals such as Jakša Kušan, Chris Cviić, Neven Šimac or Tihomil Radja) were, over the long term, reflected in the problems of democratic and economic development. Croatia’s official policy toward Bosnia-Herzegovina, the absence of growth of civil society (which did not adequately accompany the process of national emancipation) and the problematic “economic transformation” resulted in a burgeoning deficit of democracy that was already, and frequently, observed by Croatian Americans at the beginning of the 1990s.

From the second half of 1992 until President Tuđman’s death in 1999, relations between Croatia and the United States were generally strained, despite close political cooperation and military alliance in 1994-1995 (from the Washington Agreement to the Dayton Accords). One of the best-informed experts on the attitude of the U.S. media (public and politics) to the collapse of Yugoslavia and Croatia, the author of the book *The U.S. Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995*, historian James J. Sadkovich (also of partial Croatian descent), made the following observation in 1997: “In a word, President Tuđman has a poor image because he hasn’t changed for the better. He is often portrayed as a rigid personality, rooted in nationalist ideology and a party that wants to rejuvenate the Ustasha state and its symbols.”⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Bartol Letica, “Slavenka Drakulić najutjecajnija je hrvatska novinarka u Americi!” *Globus*, 4 July 1997.

Regardless of their different political backgrounds, most critically-oriented Croatian Americans agreed about the importance of Croatia's democratic and economic development, where relations between Croatia and the United States were seen as vitally important, especially in the first half of the 1990s. In this sense, the question of understanding and establishment of a dialogue between the Croatian authorities and that segment of the émigré community and the latter's potential active involvement in social processes and Croatia's affirmation in the U.S. and the world in general was exceptionally important to the development of Croatian-U.S. relations during the 1990s. The significant involvement in Croatia's public life by intellectuals whose views on life and politics were formed in a country that was for many Croats at the beginning of the 1990s the "world's top democracy," heralded the historical possibility of accelerating the process of overcoming stagnant one-party intellectual uniformity and a heritage of historical controversies and adopting the precepts of democratic culture. In mid-December 1992, Ivo Banac made the following point at the Assembly of the cultural and literary association Matica Hrvatska: "I am at liberty to say that Croatian Americans, particularly our intelligentsia, see the culture of openness and freedom, the culture of truth and democracy, as the only real option..."⁷⁵ In May 1995, similar sentiments were expressed by Ante Čuvalo: "I believe Croatia has no choice. Croatia must create a democratic legal and economic system – the sooner, the better."⁷⁶

Translated by Edward Bosnar

⁷⁵ *Pozdravna riječ na Saboru Matice Hrvatske*, 19 Dec. 1992; See: Ivo BANAC, *Cijena Bosne* (Zagreb: Europa danas, 1994), p. 46.

⁷⁶ *Međunarodni znanstveni skup "Jugoistočna Europa 1918.-1995."* – Dubrovnik, 23-25 May 1996 (Zagreb: Hrvatski informativni centar, 2000), p. 194.

KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid!
Kritische Bemerkungen von kroatischen Intellektuellen in Amerika während der Herstellung politischer Beziehungen zwischen Kroatien und den Vereinigten Staaten, 1990-1992

Zusammenfassung

Mit der Internationalisierung der jugoslawischen Krise in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahre 1990 und in 1991 beginnt sich Kroatien als selbstständiger Akteur der internationalen Politik zu behaupten. In diesem geschichtlichen Kontext drängte sich das Problem der institutionellen Vorstellung der kroatischen Interessen und Ziele im Ausland auf. Ende 1990 und Anfang 1991 kommt es zur Verschärfung der Beziehungen zwischen den pro-demokratisch orientierten Teilrepubliken Slowenien und Kroatien einerseits und Slobodan Milošević andererseits, der eine immer größer werdende Zuneigung von JNA (Jugoslawische Volksarmee) gewinnt. Durch die Verkündung der staatlichen Souveränität und Initiierung des Verfahrens der Auflösung von Jugoslawien am 25. Juni 1991 wurde eine neue Phase der jugoslawischen Krise eröffnet. Nach Angriff der JNA auf Slowenien, der von kurzer Dauer war, und nach Aggression auf Kroatien, die danach erfolgte, wird die internationale Propaganda zu einem wichtigen Bestandteil des kroatischen Befreiungskrieges und des diplomatischen Kampfes um internationale Anerkennung der staatlichen Souveränität.

Laut Erwartungen der Akteure des Zerfalls von Jugoslawien sollten die Vereinigten Staaten die bedeutendste Rolle in diesem Prozess spielen. Während Slowenien und Kroatien vergeblich die Hilfe für die Realisierung ihrer Anforderungen nach demokratischen Reformen und Dezentralisierung Jugoslawiens erwarteten, fürchteten sich Milošević und JNA genauso unberechtigt vor amerikanischem Eingriff. Die USA unterstützen formell den Regierungschef Marković und sein Reformpaket, aber in der Praxis distanzieren sie sich allmählich von der aktiven Teilnahme an der jugoslawischen Krise. Nachdem Staatssekretär James Baker Anfang Juni 1991 Belgrad besuchte und nach dem Eingriff von JNA auf Slowenien, der gleich danach erfolgte, ziehen sich die USA aus Jugoslawien zurück, indem sie die Initiative für Kriegsbeendigung der Europäischen Union überlassen. Trotz Equidistanz verfolgen die USA aufmerksam die Ereignisse in Kroatien und revidieren allmählich ihre Standpunkte, wobei hinsichtlich ihres globalen Einflusses, eine bedeutende Rolle die einflussreichsten amerikanischen Medien spielen. Mit der Anerkennung von Kroatien, Slowenien und Bosnien und Herzegowina Anfang April 1992 beginnen die USA allmählich sich aktiver gegenüber den Kriegereignissen auf dem Balkan zu bestimmen, deren Fokus sich in der zweiten Hälfte 1992 nach Bosnien und Herzegowina verlegt.

Im ganzen Zeitraum, beginnend mit den demokratischen Verwandlungen 1990 bis zur internationalen Anerkennung 1992, war von außerordentlicher Bedeutung für das Fortbestehen Kroatiens und seine Affirmation in der internationalen Gemeinschaft die Frage nach erfolgreicher Legitimierung seiner Interessen. In Zusammenhang damit taucht die Problematik der Einbindung der kroatischen Emigration auf, insbesondere der hoch gebildeten Intelligenz, in die Vertretung kroatischer Interessen. Die kroatische Emigration spielte zweifellos eine bedeutende Rolle bei materieller Hilfeleistung, die von außerordentlicher Bedeutung für einen erfolgreichen Widerstand der serbischen Aggression war. Wenn aber vom intellektuellen Potenzial die Rede ist, in erster Linie in Ländern, die wie die USA von großer Bedeutung waren, bleibt die kroatische Intelligenz unter den Auswanderern bei Schaffung der Diplomatie und Gestaltung der Außenpolitik irgendwie am Rande.

Diese Arbeit verfolgt das Verhältnis der Schaffung der kroatischen Diplomatie in den USA und öffentlicher Auftritte amerikanischer Kroaten, die von einer ganz bestimmten Zielgruppe repräsentiert werden, und zwar von den Intellektuellen; in erster Linie handelt es sich um hoch gebildete Leute mit akademischem Doktorgrad und Universitätsprofessoren. Mit ihren kritischen Bemerkungen in Medien weist die kroatisch-amerikanische Intelligenz auf das Problem öffentlicher Auftritte in den USA hin und auf das Bedürfnis nach dem Lobbyieren, das für die amerikanischen Verhältnisse geeignet wäre. Es wird die Bereitschaft ausgedrückt, sich aktiv in Einbindung und Vertretung kroatischer Interessen einzugliedern. Die amerikanischen Kroaten machen sich sowohl um den erfolgreichen Widerstand der großserbischen Aggression verdientlich als auch um die Anerkennung der staatlichen Souveränität, aber genauso weisen sie auf die Notwendigkeit der Promovierung pluralistischer Werte und der Entwicklung der Demokratie in Kroatien hin. Mit Rücksicht auf die anspruchsvolle Aufgabe des Ausbaus eines diplomatischen Netzes, Kriegsumstände, aber auch auf den Mangel politischer Kultur der Offenheit, nutzte die neue politische Elite in Kroatien nicht auf die beste Art und Weise das kroatische intellektuelle Potenzial in Amerika. "Doppelte" Perspektive der Intelligenz aus den Reihen amerikanischer Kroaten wurde Anfang der 90-er Jahre nicht auf die beste Art und Weise für die Positionierung Kroatiens in den USA ausgenutzt; genauso wurde eine aktivere Einbindung der amerikanischen Emigrationsintelligenz in die Demokratisierung der kroatischen Gesellschaft verpasst, was erhebliche Auswirkungen auf die spätere internationale Lage Kroatiens zur Folge hatte.