
The Spectre of Communism Is Haunting Croatia. The Croatian Right's Image of the Enemy

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Summary

This article analyzes the image of the enemy firmly held by the Croatian Right and the consequences of this image for democratic political institutions in Croatia. The first part of the text reconstructs a) the public discourse of the former HDZ leader, Tomislav Karamarko, as well as b) the public discourse of the Catholic Church. With the help of theories of cultural trauma, as well as discourse analysis, the second part of the article demonstrates how the Croatian Right in fact interprets any kind of liberal attitude as a specific communist one. In that sense the proposed thesis is that in its campaign against imaginary communists the Croatian Right actually tries to oppose liberalism itself. In other words, this paper tries to answer the question, why the Croatian Right does not name its real enemy – liberalism, instead of repeating the buzzwords about the spectres of communism? The third part of the article analyses Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy, arguing its limits in the context of post-communist states. This paper shows that in deeply divided societies like Croatia the reduction of politics on the friend-enemy relation endangers the main liberal values of democracy.

Keywords: Enemy, Trauma, Croatian Right, Anticommunism, Liberal Democracy

“We are walking in a small, tight group along a steep and difficult path, firmly joining hands. We are surrounded by enemies, and must continue almost always under their fire.”

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to Be Done?*¹

¹ English translation taken from http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/world_civ/worldcivreader/world_civ_reader_2/lenin.html [accessed on 10 June 2016].

Introduction

The Spectre of Communism Is Haunting Croatia. This is the image of the enemy that the Croatian Right firmly holds. There is something ironic about the fact that the Croatian Right, albeit mostly in a governing position, feels as if it is being surrounded by enemies, exactly as it is described in Lenin's quotation. The right-wing party, the HDZ and the Catholic Church have joined forces against communism. The former leader of the right-wing HDZ Tomislav Karamarko² has declared that "the one who is against the HDZ is also against the Croatian nation". Why is it so that the Right is convinced that the spectre of communism is haunting Croatia? Why have the "communists" been equated with the Yugoslavs and Serbs? What are the consequences of this image of the enemy for the democratic political institutions? Searching for answers to these questions, one comment published in *Foreign Policy* begins with the title: "Croatia's Far Right Weaponizes the Past. The new government includes an outspoken apologist for the country's World War II-era fascist regime".³ The text ends with: "The European Union's newest member, Croatia, has an unabashed and strong-willed fascist in its new cabinet – one who makes the right-wingers in power in Hungary and Poland look like wimps. The contested figure is Zlatko Hasanbegovic, a 42-year-old historian who became culture minister in late January after the country's latest election produced a new right-wing ruling coalition." The author, Paul Hockenos, claims that the goal of the Croatian Right "is to lay the groundwork for an eventual assault on the country's liberal democracy" (*ibid.*).

Is liberal democracy in Croatia really in danger? Has Croatian politics been reduced to the friend-enemy relation? How does the Croatian Right form the image of its enemy? These are the questions discussed in this article. I will use the method of the critical discourse analysis by Ruth Wodak (2015) which I consider to be suitable for the analysis of right-wing populist discourses. The first part of the text presents the basic features of Croatia's democratic transition and the ideological divides in Croatian politics. The second part features a discussion on the main characteristics

² Karamarko was elected president of the HDZ in May 2012 after parliamentary elections. The HDZ formed the government with the right conservative party Most. The head of the government was Tihomir Orešković, a middle-range manager without any kind of political experience who did not run in the elections at all. He also did not speak proper Croatian. That government was completely dysfunctional. The HDZ tried to achieve a parliamentary majority in order to form the new government without Most, but as they did not succeed, the HDZ and the opposition voted to disband the government. In June 2016 Karamarko resigned from the position of president of the HDZ.

³ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/06/croatias-far-right-weaponizes-the-past-ustase-hasanbegovic/> [accessed on 20 September 2016].

of the Croatian Right and reconstructs the image of its enemy. The final part provides an explanation of the consequences of the Right's image of the enemy on the liberal-democratic system in Croatia.

Croatian Ideological Cleavages

The analysis starts from the premise that the Croatian Right derives its image of the enemy from its central ideological narratives that are primarily determined by its interpretation of Croatian history, imbued by traumatic events turned into ideological cleavages (Đurašković, 2016). In this text I use the conceptual analysis of ideologies as developed by Michael Freeden. Freeden defines concepts as “complex ideas that inject order and meaning into observed and anticipated sets of political phenomena” (Freeden, 1996: 52), where ideology turns out to be “an ideational formation through which specific meanings, from a potentially unlimited and essentially contestable universe of meanings, are imparted to the widest range of political concepts they inevitably employ” (*ibid.*: 54). In addition to the analysis of ideologies, I will use contextual analysis to point out the specific features of the Croatian democratic transition, as well as the ideas of Chantal Mouffe in order to offer solutions to the current ideological battles.

Croatia is the only post-communist country in Central Europe in which the process of democratic transition coincided with the nation-building process and war.⁴ These processes correlated in a specific way: transition enabled the formation of an independent Croatian state that led to the war, and the war brought into question the completion of both processes. The main cause of the particularity of the Croatian transition processes was the military insurrection of Serbs in Croatia, which was incited and directed from Serbia. This was the main source of undemocratic tendencies and the cause of the strengthening of the Croatian Right. It also confirmed the theory that war was a social phenomenon which favored the radical Right and endangered the democratic order.

War and Image of the Enemy

The war solidified the image of the enemy which the Croatian Right derived from the history of the country. And the war as such is one of the main cultural traumas. “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that left indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004: 1; Alexander, 2012). Similarly as

⁴ This was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this is a Balkan country. We defined the Balkans like Mazower (2000) as a part of Europe which was under the Ottoman rule.

in other post-communist countries, divisions in the society preceded the transition process. This means that the image of the enemy formed by the contemporary Croatian Right was determined by historic divisions that occurred just prior to World War II or right after the post-Yugoslav wars, and were based on attitudes towards Yugoslavia, affiliation with the anti-fascist/Partisan or the fascist/Ustasha side in World War II, and the opinion of postwar developments and trends in socialist Yugoslavia (Šiber, 1997, 2001). Those historical divisions left trajectories that can be followed up to recent times. The transition in Croatia therefore took place in circumstances in which the importance of symbolic and historic divisions was even more pronounced due to the Greater-Serbian aggression on Croatia, and in which the war consolidated the position of the Croatian Right.

The second thing that influenced democratic transition processes was the “domino-effect” of political events in Central European countries with which Croatia identified both culturally and historically. As a moderately developed Catholic country, Croatia had all prerequisites to be caught up in the “third” or “Catholic” wave of transition (Huntington, 1990: 76), and for its transition processes to resemble those in other Central European countries (Agh, 1992; Kasapović, 1996). In the beginning, the Croatian movement was fairly similar to the national and social movements in other Central European countries: it was a combination of anti-communism, nationalism, Catholicism and ideas about democracy, non-violence, etc. (Kasapović, 1996). The Croatian democratic movement differed from most other Central European movements in its distinct ties to one political party – the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* – HDZ). This is a party that has governed Croatia since 1990 – with the exception of two periods of leftist government led by the Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija* – SDP) from 2000-2003 and 2011-2015. The HDZ won the elections in late 2015 and the last, early elections after the failure of the HDZ and Most government in 2016. The HDZ was established during the breakup of Yugoslavia as a political movement with a charismatic leader and a clear goal of an independent Croatia. Upon attaining power, the HDZ managed to become synonymous with Croatia’s secured independence in the eyes of its followers, and later also with the Croatian victory in the war. The triangle of the HDZ-church-state had no clear boundaries: the party basically functioned as a loose political and organisational intermediary between the movement and the state. It seemed that a new political pattern had been established: a combination of mass mobilization and the stability of the system (Kasapović, 1996: 91) (data from the 1995, 2000, 2003 and 2007 election surveys shows that the percentage of voters who voted for the HDZ in previous elections was higher than 80% in all subsequent elections).

The transition process in Croatia was not limited to the introduction of democratic institutions and market economy, but primarily included the formation of a

national state. Croatia faced a situation in which a significant part of its Serb population did not accept its territorial borders, thereby creating a problem of stateness. The first elections thus primarily revolved around the right to define Croatian national identity and its borders. That was the reason why the HDZ's popular movement did not disintegrate after the 1990 elections and victory in the Homeland War (as was the case in other countries in Central Europe), but turned into a victorious national movement. The HDZ's success was primarily the result of its identity politics in which the image of the enemy played an important role.

Identity of the Croatian Right

Existing studies of the political identity of the Croatian Right gathered around the HDZ show that it is mostly defined on the basis of the attitude towards history and religion (Čular, 1999; Henjak, 2005; Jou, 2010). The way in which the Right views its identity also results in its image of the enemy. Similarly to the image of the enemy of the Croatian Left, that of the Right is largely shaped on the basis of a person's familial political history. The decisive fact, therefore, is whether someone's family belonged to the Ustasha/fascist or the Partisan/anti-fascist side during World War II, and from this point of origin stems a person's attitude towards socialist Yugoslavia and its political order. If a family fought on the side of the Partisans, its members tended to have a positive attitude towards socialism, Tito and Yugoslavia, and usually voted for the party that succeeded the League of Communists, the Social Democratic Party (SDP). If a family's ancestors fought on the side of the Ustashes, their descendants had a negative attitude towards socialism and Yugoslavia and a stronger connection to the Catholic Church, and so tended to vote for the HDZ; they strived towards the formation of an independent state, and viewed the HDZ as the party that made it possible (Šiber, 1998; 2001; Blanuša, 2013). An analysis undertaken by Blanuša demonstrates that there is a trans-generational transfer of traumas regarding the division between the Ustashes and Partisans, and that those traumas have been passed onto the attitudes and values of younger generations (Blanuša, 2015). Studies of Croatian parties and voters also show that Croatia's electorate has a dichotomous structure. On the Right are the voters of the HDZ and the HSP (*Hrvatska stranka prava* – Croatian Party of Rights), which have a “pronounced nationalist orientation” and are “religiously-traditionalist” in their cultural dimension (Zakošek, 1998). On the other side are the voters of the SDP and the HSLŠ (*Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka* – Croatian Social Liberal Party) who in their “cultural dimension have a secular-modernist orientation” and whose national identity is not their main identifier (*ibid.*: 48). Today the HSLŠ holds a completely marginal position and the secular-modernist values are represented by the liberally orientated Croatian People's Party (HNS). It has been shown that religious beliefs and

traditionalism are connected with a pronounced Croatian nationalist orientation and identity (*ibid.*: 47), which is why this article will also discuss the political views of the Croatian Catholic Church.

Who Are the “Commies”?

In Croatia’s right-wing ideology, the world is divided into good, nation-building Croats, HDZ voters, and the communists, alleged opponents of the formation of an independent Croatian state. The severity of that worldview was somewhat mitigated by the HDZ’s dominant ideology, the ideology of national reconciliation that was formulated by the party leader and the first president of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman. Its central premise is that, regardless of their ideological differences, all Croats should reconcile and fight together for an independent Croatian state. This was a distinctly nationalist attitude, but one which had the function of damping the ideological conflict and thus preventing all those who did not support the HDZ from being considered as insufficiently patriotic. At the beginning of the 1990s, the HDZ had its left wing that was made up of former Partisans, and its centre consisted of techno-managers who acquired their managerial experience during socialism, but the party’s right wing consisted of radical nationalists whose forebears often had ties to the Croatian fascist state established during World War II. After losing the 2011 elections, the HDZ changed its leadership and took a distinct turn to the Right. The HDZ leadership headed by Tomislav Karamarko, a man who had previously held important positions in the police and the secret service, began to blame “commies”⁵ for all of the problems that arose during the transition. Namely, right-wingers dreamt about a harmonious national community that never materialized. That was to be expected seeing how democracy and a market economy are in mutual conflict, but the Right blamed the process of social stratification, the weakening of family ties and traditional values (all caused by the market economy) not on the economic and political system but on actions of the “commies”. They believed that the communists abused the democratic transition, took over the reins of the cultural and business sectors and became Croatian tycoons. However, those tycoons were not criticized for being crooked capitalists, but for betraying the Croatian state.

According to the current worldview of the Croatian Right, communists are not just tycoons, but are connected with Serbs and corrupted by the Yugoslav ideology. But the question which should be asked is whether there are any communists in Croatia today? Namely, Croatia does not have a communist party and communist ideas such as the suspension of markets, the abolition of private property, the introduction of a one-party dictatorship and the subversion of democracy or the intro-

⁵ The Croatian term “komunjare” is of a far more spicy, offensive character.

duction of some new Yugoslav federation, are totally marginal.⁶ There are several small extra-parliamentary parties that espouse socialist ideas, but not communist ones. So the question is, do these parties represent an enemy fearsome enough that the fear of such political pygmies, who cannot even pass the electoral threshold, is capable of mobilising the right-wing electorate? Of course not. The enemy must therefore be contrived and made out to be much bigger and more dangerous than it really is. That is why Croatia is haunted by the spectre of communism. The right-wing idea of a Croatia threatened by a communist enemy is completely fictitious and characterised by irrationalism. The Croatian Right ardently claims that – although the process of transition has been ongoing for 25 years, and the war ended 16 years ago – communists, Serbs and Yugoslavs still pose a threat to the independence of the Croatian state. Right-wing protests organized from October, 2014 to April, 2016 around war veterans' associations and directed against the Social Democratic Minister of Croatian Veterans (Predrag Matić), claimed that they were fighting against communists and Yugoslavs. The protesters described themselves as being 100% for Croatia, thereby implying that those who disagreed with them were not. This was claimed in spite of the fact that the entire public knew that the Minister in question had fought in the war on the Croatian side, that he was a war hero who had been captured by the other side, and spent nine very difficult months in a Serbian concentration camp. His example clearly shows that the right-wing image of the enemy is completely made-up and irrational in its characteristics. This raises the question of how it was constructed and why it can still mobilize the Right. The construction rests on several premises. First of all, the Right claims that all those who used to be members of the Communist Party – regardless of their actual party affiliation and political beliefs – are still communists. Secondly, it is claimed that communism is like a hereditary disease which also turns Party members' children and grandchildren into incurable communists. If we look at it that way, communists are really all around us and democracy is doomed. Moreover, these postulates cannot rationally explain how democracy and a capitalist market economy were even introduced in such a context. The success of democracy and the market in Croatia would then really be a miracle since, for example, as many as 26 out of 30 members of the democratic Croatian government in 1991-1992 used to be members of the Communist Party (Tomic, 2008). What is interesting is that most former members of the Communist Party entered the main right-wing party, the HDZ. It is estimated

⁶ According to the last census from 2011, 3,879,321 Croats live in Croatia. Only 331 inhabitants declared themselves as Yugoslavs. For comparison, there are 672 Poles, 350 Bulgarians, 9,641 Czechs. http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/census2011/results/htm/H01_01_05/H01_01_05.html [accessed on 28 October 2016]. In the national representative survey of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb, only 1.8% citizens identified themselves primarily with Yugoslavia.

that “27 000 former communists became members of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) prior to March 1990, and 70 000 in total during the entire year of 1990” (Pickering, Baskin, 2008). This fact was not known to HDZ voters or it was simply not considered important. Anyway, the HDZ was headed by a former communist and general of the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) Franjo Tuđman. In spite of this, religious and ideologically conservative voters with ties to the Catholic Church voted for the HDZ (Sekulić, Šporer, 1997). So, this article postulates that the present cannot be fully determined by the past, and that the image of the enemy constructed by the Croatian Right and the Catholic Church is completely *fabricated* – they have invented an enemy that in reality does not exist. It is precisely this irrational portrayal of the enemy that enables the Croatian Right to represent the “commies”, Yugoslavs and Serbs not only as a threat to their political position, but to the Croatian people in general. This enemy naturally possesses only negative characteristics and is to blame for all the mistakes and negative consequences of the country’s transition and privatization. It is therefore intriguing that the image of the “communist enemy” still has the power to homogenize conservative voters in Croatia. Before trying to clarify the reasons for this, this text explains the function of the image of the enemy.

First of all, the image of the enemy serves to gather supporters around those who form it, and to develop and consolidate their common identity. Us against those Others. This is the basic formula of the identity $A = A$ because it is not B. Secondly, constructing the image of the enemy serves to create a sense of threat. If there is a threat of “commies” who control the economy and government institutions, it is easier to mobilize supporters in order to resist them. The third point is that the image of the enemy serves to find someone to take the blame for the economic, political and social problems. With the existence of a “real enemy”, errors of the ruling party seem less grave because they were not committed by them, but are the fault of the “enemy”. The discontent is focused on the enemy, which means that the real reasons for failure remain unexamined, real culprits will not be denounced nor will objective causes be identified.

Commies as Yugoslavs and Serbs

The identity of the Croatian Right has actually been constituted between two opposing notions: triumph and trauma. At the first glance one excludes the other, though both are firmly intertwined (Giesen, 2004). The Croatian Right attributes to itself the victory in the Homeland War, i.e. the defense of the country against the Great-Serbian aggression. That is the triumph. The trauma of the victim is represented by communist atrocities committed by the Partisans under the communist leadership against members of the NDH quisling army and civilians. Therefore, communists have been included in the trauma as the perpetrators, but they are

excluded from the triumph as the Croatian Right falsely insists that “commies” (from the left centre party SDP) have never wanted an independent Croatian state at all. Still, there is also the trauma of the perpetrator, which disrupts this right-wing narrative: it is represented by the crimes that Ustashes committed in Jasenovac, those the Croatian Right is not really willing to remember as they cannot be integrated into the positive image of itself. The construction of the enemy of the Croatian Right was therefore largely shaped by the Homeland War, which was caused by the Serb uprising in Croatia and was incited and managed from Belgrade. The war was an additional source of imbalance in the system of political values in the country. It contributed to a more long-term political and moral delegitimization of communists and the Croatian Left (as the main promoter of Yugoslav ideas in Croatian history) in general. “Since the Yugoslav idea turned out to be the ideological-political origin of the resistance to Croatian national independence, and Milošević’s Yugoslavia was the main agent of military aggression against Croatia, the Croatian Left was explicitly or implicitly held to be co-responsible for such a turn of events and constantly accused of being insufficiently patriotic” (Kasapović, 1996: 89). And while a number of East European countries saw successor left parties suffer heavy defeats in their first elections, but go on to win the second elections (Poland, Hungary) or significantly improve their results, in Croatia the situation was reversed: “the main left successor party, the SDP, was relatively successful in the first elections, but experienced a total dissolution of its electorate in the country’s second elections” (*ibid.*: 90). “Even though Croatia had almost the exact same social reasons for the political ascent of the successor Left, it happened slower than in other post-communist countries for reasons already mentioned” (*ibid.*: 93). The war made the image of the enemy construed by the Croatian Right convincing for many voters.

During the 1990s, Croatia faced a Serb insurrection which, incited and managed from Belgrade, led to war. And war is the natural space of the radical Right; it is for the Right what revolution is for the Left because it leads to the abolition of a normal society (Dahrendorf, 1991/1992: 12). War and revolution differ in that war is essentially controllable, while the outcome of a revolution is always uncertain; war affirms the position of the ruling group, while revolution destroys it. That is why war generally favours the political Right. During the war, the HDZ was in power and successfully led Croatia’s defense, which made it even stronger as a party and its image of the enemy as “commies, Serbs and Yugoslavs” more convincing (Kasapović, 1996: 94). The aggression came from Milošević’s “third” Yugoslavia, Milošević was a communist, and Serbs in Croatia revolted. At that point, the enemy was very real. But today, more than twenty years after the end of the war, the image of the enemy is completely imaginary. The characteristics of the enemy are attribut-

ed to all those who do not support the HDZ, and to members of the SDP especially. Croatian right-wingers not only invented the spectre of communism, but their imaginary world equated those “communists” with “Serbs and Yugoslavs”. So, according to the right-wing worldview, those who perpetrated the aggression on Croatia were to blame for the war during the 1990s, and therefore for all the victims of the war. That image does not match reality. Namely, it is perfectly clear that, during Croatia’s war of defence, Croatian military units consisted of all citizens regardless of their ideological affiliations, including numerous former communists and even ex-officers of the Yugoslav People’s Army, and that some Croatian defenders were of Serb nationality. This makes it even more important to see what is the true origin of the right-wing image of the enemy, and what is the function of its identity-based anti-communism. It has already been said that this image of the enemy was ideologically determined and connected with Croatian nationalist stereotypes of Yugoslavia. In the right-wing vision of the world, both the monarchist and the socialist Yugoslavia are thought of only as prisons of nations dominated by the Serbs. And the communist dictatorship – through the theory of totalitarianism – is condemned as even worse than the fascist one, as well as expressed as a collective trauma. With such a dangerous enemy, claims the Croatian Right, there can be no compromise, and those “commies” which constantly plot against the Croatian people should be defeated once and for all. The “commies” – claims the Croatian Right gathered around the HDZ – have infiltrated all institutions. Who are these people who allegedly control Croatia’s reality even though it is clear that the communist ideology is dead? In the perception of Croatian right-wingers, communists were essentially always the “Other” – Serbs and Yugoslavs, or rather pro-Yugoslav Croats – and not proponents of an ideology that envisioned a different organization of society and the economy, or a different political system. Opposing this ideology was too demanding for the Croatian Right; the right-wing ideology does not engage in real ideological arguments, it simply denotes the enemy. An opposing ideology is thus not criticized as an unsuccessful attempt of building an alternative social and political system, as something with a logic of its own, but as an irrational particularity of the “Others” who are not like us, who do not share our identity. Those “Others” are the enemy. The basic logic of Croatian right-wingers was to turn anti-communism into anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav prejudice. That is why it can often be heard that, for example, Nenad Stazić, an SDP member of the Croatian parliament who is vocal in his criticism of the HDZ, is a “commie and a Serb”.⁷ It seems that the Right really thinks that his criticism of the HDZ stems from an affiliation with the other, “wrong” nation, and not from ideological reasons. According to this “logic”, who

⁷ <http://www.vecernji.hr/josipovicev-poucak-o-vjernickim-glasovima-357068/komentari?page=1> [accessed on 9 June 2016].

else but a Serb would be that critical of the HDZ? It is a known fact that this person is a Croat (member of the 4th term of the Croatian Parliament). Right-wingers who are better informed about the nationality of this SDP parliamentarian also call him “orjunaš”⁸, which is a term for those who used violence to conduct the politics of unitarian Yugoslavism.⁹ This is claimed in spite of the fact that Yugoslavia has not existed for years and that nobody from the SDP, including Nenad Stazić, advocates for its revival. It is obvious that this SDP parliamentarian, like the rest of the Croatian left, is not viewed by the Right as its ideological opponent, someone who has different ideas about the development of Croatian society, but as the “Other”, “orjunaš”, “commie”, in a word – the enemy. The irony of the current situation lies in the fact that, even though communism is dead, anti-communism remains alive. Croatian anti-communism currently feeds on the phobia of Serbs and Yugoslavia. Its origins lie in a radical Croatian nationalism that defines the nation as an ethnic community someone is born into. If you are a real Croat, claims the Right, than you vote for the HDZ, and everyone else is a traitor, a follower of Tito and an “orjunaš”. In this, the HDZ’s position changed over time: during the time of Tuđman, the first party and country president, the HDZ’s ideology and the official communist history presented Tito as not only a communist dictator, but a great statesman who advocated for Croatia’s interest. “Tito was undoubtedly one of the greatest European statesmen during the Second World War. He was a communist, a Marxist, but also a pragmatic politician who wanted to achieve the equality of the Croatian people within Yugoslavia, just like he wanted his Yugoslavia to be equal to the Soviet Union”, said Tuđman and added that Tito’s merit lay in the fact that “the antifascist movement brought the Croatian people on the side of the victorious democratic forces of the anti-fascist coalition, which enabled the formation of the Federal State of Croatia in accordance with the Constitutions of 1945 and 1971, which in turn was a legal prerequisite for Croatia’s self-determination”.¹⁰

Unlike Tuđman, Tomislav Karamarko is of the opinion that the two totalitarian systems were equally evil. This led him to have a different opinion of Tito. “If I was the Croatian president, I would throw out Tito’s bust. I could not keep a criminal in

⁸ ORJUNA was the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (*Organizacija Jugoslavenskih Nacionalista*) which didn’t acknowledge Croatian and other national identities and which fought its opponents by violent means.

⁹ <http://www.hrvatski-fokus.hr/index.php/unutarnja-politika/4289-oevi-i-djeca-ivo-josipovi-spada-u-djecu-komuniste>; <http://www.braniteljski-portal.hr/Novosti/DRUSTVO/NAMJESTENE-I-SRAMNE-ANKETE-Stazic-zeli-poniziti-hrvatske-stradalnike-i-biti-voda-sramnih-pretorijanaca> [accessed on 9 June 2016].

¹⁰ <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/sto-danas-o-titu-govori-karamarko-a-sto-je-nekad-govorilo-dr-Tudman-947318> [accessed on 9 June 2016].

my hallway” – Karamarko stated unequivocally and added that “Tito was responsible for hundreds of thousands of victims”.¹¹ “The tragedy, the absurdity is that we in the Republic of Croatia view totalitarianisms through different glasses. Of course, I am not talking about us in the HDZ, but about a part of the ruling nomenclature from the so-called left political structure, which calls itself socialist. It is not a left political option, but a Yugonostalgic one; the proof is their obstinate and rigid defence of the life and work of the great criminal Josip Broz Tito. They would be happy to continue naming streets and squares after him, and keep his bust in their offices”, Tomislav Karamarko told the press. He also claimed that Croatian victims were not recognised. “We are sad and sorrowful because today we still cannot openly talk about communist crimes in Croatia. There are more than 900 pits filled with Croatian bones in the Republic of Croatia, around 600 in Slovenia and over 200 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That still cannot be discussed because the person who had command responsibility for those crimes still gives his name to hundreds of Croatian streets and squares”, said Karamarko.¹²

Theory of Totalitarianism as “Theory of Rehabilitation”?

The theory of equating the two totalitarian systems – communist and fascist – led to the *de facto* rehabilitation of fascism by parts of the HDZ and the Croatian hard-line Right. In their phobia of “commies” and “orjunaši”, the Right began to relativize anti-fascism and surreptitiously rehabilitate the Croatia fascist state, the NDH, an ally of Nazi Germany. Contemporary Croatian right-wingers thus establish a continuity with anti-communism prior and concurrent with the Second World War, which results in a public rehabilitation of the symbols of Croatian fascism. The Croatian version of “Heil Hitler” – “*Za dom spremni*” (For home(land) ready!) can often be heard in public, especially during football matches. Furthermore, there was an initiative for the decriminalisation of this salute and its introduction as the official salute in the Croatian military. This initiative was supported by several members of the Catholic clergy as well as radical Right intellectuals and politicians.¹³ The fact that the signatories of this extreme-Right petition included some high Church officials is especially interesting. This is one consequence of the conflict between the state and the Catholic Church which has been developed after the SDP gained power in 2000. Until then, the Church did not have a reason for a more serious disagreement with

¹¹ <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/karamarko-opozicija-nema-pojma-sto-se-dogada-u-ini-to-je-problem-vlade-947229> [accessed on 9 June 2016].

¹² <http://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/tomislav-karamarko-jugonostalgicarska-vlast-stiti-djelo-zlocinca-tita---349210.html> [accessed on 9 June 2016].

¹³ <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/ovo-su-ljudi-koji-zele-u-vojsku-vesti-pozdrav-za-dom-spremnim/838042.aspx> [accessed on 9 June 2016].

the state. Namely, prior to 2000 the country was run by the HDZ, a party considered by the Catholic Church as their political partner and protector, as well as the founder of the Croatian state. The HDZ made a promise to the Church that it would lead the “spiritual renewal of the nation”. This phrase denotes the fight against the communist spirit and socialist habits that have allegedly remained deeply embedded in people, even though the communist system was gone. But in reality, every desire for equality, fair wages, social solidarity – in a word, for a welfare state – was declared to be an undesirable remnant of the “dark communist past”, even though these rights were guaranteed by the Croatian constitution. This idea of the nation’s spiritual renewal was taken on by the Catholic Church with great zeal (Padjen, 2012). This led to the conflation of the Catholic Church with the state – priests were called to bless everything from newly opened schools to roads, took part in all public manifestations and held Holy Mass in schools, and religious education become an elective course in schools. The employment of religious teachers was no longer the responsibility of schools but of church authorities. The connection between the state governed by the HDZ and the Church was so strong and deep that it raised concerns even in some parts of the clergy. The long-time editor-in-chief of *Glas Koncila*, the main publication of the Catholic Church in Croatia, described the situation thusly: “A situation arose in which we have the people who feel, if not persecuted, than at least neglected on one side, and the government on the other side, and it seems that the Church is on the side of the government. This is the most tragic thing that could have happened to us, although nobody was aware of what was happening. The people today view the Church as part of the government, or its ally. This does not benefit the Church – because the government, no offence – has not earned the people’s trust (hope to God it will some day!), so that being the government’s ally means that you are not close to what the people want, what they strive towards. This is a tragedy for the Church. Maybe I am too old and not aware of everything that is happening, but I am afraid that this is a big problem for the Church” (Kustić, 2011: 9 in Padjen, 2012). The voice of Živko Kustić was one of rare critical opinions within the Church. His successor in the editor’s office of *Glas Koncila* leads a different editorial policy and blames all problems of the Croatian society on communists. The Church considers liberalism, consumerism, abortion, divorce, working Sundays – that is, all unfortunate by-products of modernisation – to be the result of undefeated communism. That is why Ivan Miklenić, the new editor of *Glas Koncila*, insists on people’s spiritual renewal and the fight against the spectre of communism that supposedly haunts Croatia. “Croatia is probably the only country in which there is a belief that it is possible to build a democratic society without getting rid of communist mentality, communist ideology and communist networks that have branched out into all pores of the society – and which disqualify all those who were not ‘comrades’

and ‘sympathizers’ of covert neocommunists.”¹⁴ Although he admitted that “Croatia today is not governed by the communist regime and almost nobody publicly advocates for its return”, he emphasises that this “by no means rules out that it was precisely the ideological-political concept of communism – which in this region drastically governed not just the levers of state power, but also the entire public life for 45 years – that was the root of many problems and difficulties in the contemporary Croatian society, and this is something that today’s Croatia does not want to publicly acknowledge. (...) The inertia of the cadre and mentality from communist times which pervaded all political parties and almost all media is understandable – especially considering the fact that communism was not overturned with violence and shedding blood, thank the Lord – but what is not understandable is why contemporary Croatian society is not more aware of the fact that it cannot build a democratic society without a conscious break with the communist heritage...”¹⁵ “It should be said openly” – points out Miklenić – “that in the last 15 years, Croatia as a country, but also many processes in Croatian society, were governed by the spirit of partly transformed but actually continued, you could say soft, nationally not aware enough or almost unaware, up to anti-national or rather Yugophilia-imbued Croatian communist mentality and orientation, which was not legalised nor proclaimed in a political program of any party. The exponents of that spirit are members of a relatively small minority, some former members of the Communist Party, their children and sympathisers who were privileged during communism, and a large part of the secret service of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. This well-organised and tightly knit group, which never even tried to introduce itself to the public, took control of almost all important functions in the Croatian society and country, and managed to mislead a large number of Croatian citizens who would never give their vote to that option if they knew its true goals and intentions.”¹⁶ During the social-democratic government, bishop Košić also claimed that “today’s government promotes communism in Croatia”.¹⁷

¹⁴ http://www.glas-koncila.hr/index.php?option=com_php&Itemid=41&news_ID=7861 [accessed on 9 June 2016].

¹⁵ http://www.glas-koncila.hr/index.php?option=com_php&Itemid=41&news_ID=17611 [accessed on 9 June 2016].

¹⁶ http://www.glas-koncila.hr/index.php?option=com_php&Itemid=41&news_ID=25847 [accessed on 9 June 2016].

¹⁷ http://www.glas-koncila.hr/index.php?option=com_php&Itemid=41&news_ID=25404 [accessed on 9 June 2016].

Liberals as Commies

We can conclude that the Croatian right-wing image of the enemy stems from the Right's disillusionment with liberalism and capitalism.¹⁸ First of all, the Right feels that by encouraging individual rights and positioning the individual above the community, liberalism threatens two key communities – the family and the nation. And it is precisely this idea of a harmonious community that is the central place of every conservative ideology, including in Croatian politics. However, instead of addressing its complaint to the appropriate – liberal – address, the Croatian Right blames this promotion of individualism on the “children of communists”. The right-wing interpretation thus claims that the proponents of individual and LGBT rights are actually “communists”, even though homosexuality was illegal during the communist regime (until 1977) and legally prosecuted as a felony of “unnatural fornication”. Such accusations are made worse by the contemporary Left which often proclaims gay rights to be essential to their programme, while social rights come second. Secondly, although the Croatian Right accepts inequality as a natural condition in society, that acceptance does not include extreme effects of the market economy (which are the same as those of liberalism): namely, that market priorities threaten the harmony of the domestic and national community. The Right will not give up on its position, which refuses to acknowledge the structural reasons arising from capitalist means of production, but stubbornly repeats that “commies” took control of the most important companies. It can often be heard that the owner of one of Croatia's largest companies is a communist because his father was member of the Communist League – even though it is known that the Communist International did not exactly encourage their members to be private owners, e.g. of basketball clubs, as is the case here. All joking aside, the fact is that the Right creates its imaginary world filled with communist enemies, because in reality, the owners of Croatia's companies are either foreigners or Croatian citizens who became wealthy during the war and the first wave of privatization, and who were never members of the Communist Party. And while such interpretations of the communist danger

¹⁸ Croatia is an example of post-communist country that during the transition lost its advanced developing position and today is generally behind all Central European countries, members of the EU. Croatia, unfortunately, did not pay only the price connected to lagging behind in its GDP, but its population has also been significantly reduced.

At the start of its trip to independence Croatia had 4,784,265 inhabitants. In late 2015, Croatia, at the discretion of the Croatian statistical office had only 4,190,669 inhabitants. The importance of this indicator can be seen in the extremely low rate of employment. In the whole period from early 1990s onwards Croatia and its government failed to increase the employment of the active population. It continually varies around the level of 1.5 million people, keeping the level of employment of the active population at rates between 52 to 54 percent, which is one of the lowest rates among EU member states (Petak, Bartlett, Bönker, 2016).

seem typical for Central and Eastern Europe, the third accusation and the area in which the Croatian Right sees the enemy is a more specific Croatian phenomenon, and that is equating Croatian communists with those who are opposed to the very existence of the Croatian state, with Serbs and Yugoslavs. The tradition of the National Liberation War and the communist-led revolution has been revised in history books and turned into a totalitarian tradition. By describing Yugoslav socialism as totalitarian, the Right equated it with fascism. This was done despite the fact that communists played a big part in the fight against fascism, not just in Croatia but in the whole of Europe. The attempt to establish a cultural hegemony of the Right in Croatia resulted in the equation of the main adversaries from World War II. This also brought into question the anti-fascist consensus established in Europe after WWII, which was based on the idea that fascism was an absolute political evil. Today's right-wing and liberal politicians have abandoned this consensus by equating fascist, Nazi and communist crimes, claiming that the "two totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism – were equally criminal".¹⁹ There is no doubt that both regimes were dictatorships, but they were not the same. It may look cynical but the Communists have not claimed that some people are not people. The Nazis killed 60 million Jews, around 25 million Soviets, etc. While the DDR communist regime killed several thousand people. Is that the same? The situation needs to be viewed from country to country.

The essence of the currently very strong Central-European anti-communism is the full equalization of communism and fascism by means of the theory of totalitarian regimes. It is important to note that the Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, introduced by the EU, in most of the former communist states of Central Europe seems to have suppressed the Holocaust Remembrance Day in public discourse. Abandoning the anti-fascist consensus, based on the image of the enemy that is centred on allegedly undefeated communism, also brings into question the basic values of the democratic political order. The construction of the Croatian Right's enemy, which is centered on the "spectre of communism", is tearing down the democratic consensus on the basic values of a political community, the "common horizon of sense", and reducing politics to the friend-enemy relation.

¹⁹ Such theses do not pass without reaction. For example, as the former Latvian Foreign Minister and EU commissioner Sandra Kalniete, at the Leipzig Book Fair in 2004, equated both dictatorships with the well-known "mantra" "two totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism – were equally criminal", Salomon Korn as representative of the Central Council of Jews in Germany left the room in protest (Wetzels, 2017: 324).

Agonism or Compromise

I test this thesis by using Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy. In her work, Chantal Mouffe tries to maintain the conflict dimension of politics while also preserving the key ideals of liberal democracy – freedom and equality. In order to do so, she explains the need for transforming antagonism into agonism, and political enemies into political opponents. Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy emphasises the importance of democratic political conflict as the key feature of every effective democratic political system. But, the question remains: is the example of Croatian democracy which does not lack for political conflicts proof that her model of agonistic democracy can work? It is obvious that the starting point of contemporary Croatian politics is the politics of identity centred on the image of the enemy. But how can this antagonism be turned into agonism, which is the central demand of Chantal Mouffe's theory?

According to Mouffe, antagonism – conflict between enemies – should be replaced by agonism – conflict between political opponents. This would be a conflict in which opponents share the same symbolic space, which enables them to reach some sort of “conflictual consensus” (Mouffe, 2005: 69). She excellently points out that the dispute reflected in a certain tension between the liberal and the democratic principles was never really resolved (Schmitt, 1976 [1932]). While liberals put emphasis on the need to protect the freedom and rights of individuals, democrats insist on the guaranteed expression of the sovereign will of the people. Namely, democracy is not just an empty form of government that can be filled with any content, like Carl Schmitt claimed, but a government that is based on clear values which in their core have the freedom of individuals and citizens. However, it seems that antagonisms in Croatian politics would be very difficult to transform into agonism. The image of the enemy of the Croatian Right, which originates in radical anti-communism, brings into question those liberal-democratic values. On the other hand, it is clear that people primarily vote on the basis of their political identity. Namely, in order to have any interest in politics, people have to identify with some collective political identity, and those are based on symbolic politics that signifies the construction of the enemy. Parties are well aware that this is the way to attract potential voters. That is why HDZ paints a picture of the spectre of communism that haunts Croatia. So, it is plain to see that Croatian society is full of constant and perpetual conflicts which are primarily political. But the main question is how to turn that antagonism into agonism considering that the image of the enemy is built on a fictitious image of communists. That image portrays an essential evil that should be destroyed without hesitation, which leaves no possibility that the enemy, those “evil communists” as the Croatian Right defines them, could be turned into a political opponent as Chantal Mouffe's theory demands. Thus it seems that this approach

to democratic politics cannot work in Croatian society, and that, for the purpose of building a democracy, it is better to insist on reaching an agreement on the basic values of the democratic political system.

It follows that the main important landmark should be the anti-fascist consensus to which the whole of Europe, including Central Europe, should return to. The path to a new development of European democracy leads through its return to the anti-fascist past. Of course, this will not be easy to achieve because the aggressiveness expressed in the new media endangers the culture of dialogue which leads to compromise, and compromise is exactly what democracy needs the most.

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