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## THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SEE AND POPE JOHN PAUL II IN THE INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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### Abstract

On the basis of published archival material and literature, the authors analyse the political situation and diplomatic activities in Europe that led to the international recognition of Croatia in 1992. Particular attention is paid to the role played by the Holy See and Pope John Paul II in the process of international recognition of Croatia. The role of Pope John Paul II during the period of the Cold War, as well as overcoming the totalitarian and antireligious ideologies is also discussed.

*Key words:* Pope John Paul II, Holy See, international recognition of the Republic of Croatia, Homeland War.

### Introduction

The election of Cardinal Karola Wojtyła, the Archbishop of Krakow for the position of the new Pope on October 16, 1978, was a great surprise to many around the world. For the first time ever a Polish cardinal was elected to lead the Catholic Church, let alone a cardinal from the then Communist Poland. He was the first Slavic Pope in the history of the Catholic Church as well. The election of John Paul II was a decisive event of great importance to the world

politics, which became evident only later, during his pontificate. The Polish Pope played an instrumental role in overcoming antireligious and totalitarian ideology that had been dividing Europe for 40 years. In that context, his words on the first Sunday after being elected Pope were remarkable: »Be not afraid. Widely open the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development.«<sup>1</sup> These words were also crucial because communism, Marxism, and all totalitarian regimes ruled on the basis of fear.

During his first trip to Poland, on June 10, 1979, in a speech he clearly said that he would not adhere to the standard procedure: »It takes courage to walk in the direction nobody dared to walk before.« Dramatic events followed and Poland itself assumed the role of the leader in the processes of deep political, social and economic change of what seemed to be a firm structure of East-European socialist regimes. The year 1989 will be remembered as the year of the definite end of the cold war, the year of the final destruction of the Communist society utopia. The socialist political systems of Europe, built on the basis of class struggle and unimaginable violence directed against both nations and individuals, in spite of the detailed system of institutionalised repression, simply fell apart. Pope John Paul II was familiar with the totalitarian Communist practice, nature, and methods of the system which denied the basic human rights of the society and of the human being as an individual. The Pope stressed moral and spiritual values, as well as human rights and the rights of all nations, both great and small.

This is further confirmed by his words: »The precondition for an internal unity of any society or group, whether it be national or familial, is respect for the rights of each member. Likewise, the precondition for reconciliation among nations is recognition and respect for the rights of each nation. Primarily, it is the respect of the right to existence and self-determination, the right to culture and its development. A nation is only ever free if it can come together as a community determined by its unique culture, language, and history. A country is relatively sovereign if it rules the society and, at the same time serves to the common good of the society and allows the people to fulfil themselves in their own subjectivity, their own identity... The sovereignty of the state is inextricably linked to its ability to promote freedom of the People i.e. develop the conditions that will allow the people to express their entire

<sup>1</sup> Ines SABOTIČ – Željko TANJIĆ – Gordan ČRPIĆ (ed.), *Ivan Pavao II. poslanje i djelovanje (John Paul II Mission and Function)*, Zagreb, 2007, 9; <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1978.index.4.html>.

historical and cultural identity, to be sovereign with the help of the State.<sup>2</sup>« He believed that oppressed peoples have the strength to liberate themselves from the rule of the mighty Communist totalitarianism, a belief not shared by many in the West.

## 1. The Catholic Church in Croatia during the Communist Yugoslavia

After the Second World War, the Communist party came to power in Yugoslavia and in Croatia, which was its constituent part. In accordance with its atheist ideology, the Communist party disliked all religious communities, particularly the Catholic Church, which was accused for the alleged collaboration with the Ustasha regime. Following the war, the Communist regime started its open confrontation with the Catholic Church and it was particularly loath of the allegiance of the Catholic bishops in Yugoslavia to the Holy See. What followed were arrests and murders of bishops and priests, preventing and forbidding religious education in state-owned schools, seizures of Church property, bans of religious press, and other forms of suppression of religious freedoms. Catholic bishops, led by the Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, resisted such behaviour of the Communist regime and spoke out against it in an open and critical pastoral letter in September 1945. Instead of a reply, the Communist regime enforced even stricter measures, which culminated with the hard labour sentence for the Archbishop Stepinac in 1946. Following that, the Communist regime started a campaign to break up the unity of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia but met with fierce resistance by the Catholic bishops, supported by the Vatican. In 1952, when Archbishop Stepinac became a cardinal, Yugoslav government used this act as an excuse to break off all diplomatic ties with the Vatican. The Second Vatican Council that took place from 1962 until 1965 and heralded the opening of the Catholic Church to dialogue with atheists and atheist societies, thus facilitating the negotiations between the Yugoslav government and the Holy See.<sup>3</sup> Although these negotiations were long and difficult because neither the Yugoslav authorities nor the Catholic Church and particularly the bishops in Croatia were keen on giving up on their basic principles, the Holy See decided to sign the Protocol regarding the normalisation of the relation with Yugoslavia in 1966. What followed was a full reestablishment of diplomatic relations between

<sup>2</sup> Silvije TOMAŠEVIĆ, *Ivan Pavao II. (John Paul II)*, Zagreb, 1994, 76.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Miroslav AKMADŽA, *Katolička crkva u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1945.–1980. (Catholic Church in Communist Croatia 1945–1980)*, Zagreb – Slavonski Brod, 2013.

the Holy See and Yugoslavia in 1970. That, in turn, led to Tito's visit to Pope Paul VI in March 1971 and the establishment of bilateral relations during the 1970s and 1980s. Regardless of that, the relations that were established and maintained at a diplomatic level did not reflect the social, political, or religious relations in the country precisely because the basic tenets of Communism never accepted any kind of religious persuasion. The relation between the Catholic Church and the government kept getting worse, particularly in the second half of the 1980s because the government used ever more frequently the accusations against the Catholic Church and the entire Croatian people for the crimes committed against the Serbs during the Second World War. The accusations went so far as to accuse the politics of the Holy See itself of being an accomplice to those crimes. Cardinal Franjo Kuharić replied to false accusations and statements made against the Church and the Croatian people by saying that such accusations might start a new wave of violence and injustice and that they are standing in the way of ecumenical and international relations in the area of the then Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup> At its meeting held in October 1989, the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia spoke about the desires and struggles to achieve a democratic transformation of the peoples oppressed by the Communist regimes in the countries of Eastern Europe, pointing out the decades of forcibly silenced national feeling in multinational Yugoslavia by the Communist authorities.<sup>5</sup> In this light, Croatian bishops welcomed the turning of the Croatian people to political pluralism and political dialogue, a process that at that time swept over the peoples of Eastern Europe.

## 2. Democratic Changes in Croatia in 1990

The fall of the Berlin Wall in October 1989 symbolically marked the beginning of a new period in European history in which the one-party Communist regimes in Communist countries in Europe (Poland, Hungary, East Germany...) were replaced by multi-party systems and democracy. The process of democratisation also swept Croatia, then one of the six republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ). Initiatives for political pluralism appeared in Croatia early in 1989. Because of the past differences in

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Velimir BLAŽEVIĆ, *Katolička crkva u Hrvata u službi mira i stvaranja samostalne Hrvatske* (*The Catholic Church in Croatia in the Service of Peace and Creation of Independent Croatia*), Zagreb, 2009, 59.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 71–74.

terms of standards and freedoms in Croatia as compared with countries of the former Eastern bloc, the process of democratisation was characterised by certain specific features. However, a civilized and, in the first place, peaceful development of democracy was opposed by the Great Serbian project, conceived in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. According to it, the western boundary of the Serbian state – the so-called Greater Serbia – was planted deep in the Croatian territory, along the Virovitica-Pakrac-Karlovac-Ogulin and part of Gorski Kotar – Karlobag lines. That was, approximately, the boundary of Ottoman conquests between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century. A media campaign focused on mobilising Serbian population for a nationalist or, rather, imperialist policy. Having created the conditions for its implementation, the plan was set in motion with the publication of a part of the draft Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in the Belgrade daily newspaper *Večernje novosti* (*Evening News*) late in September 1986. The Serbian nationalists alleged that Serbs and Serbian culture in Yugoslavia, especially in Kosovo and Croatia, were in grave danger while actually aspiring to a greater centralisation of the state and Serbia's domination over other Yugoslav republics.<sup>6</sup> The development of a multiparty system and democratisation of society have led to democratic elections in the Socialist Republic of Croatia (SRH), in April and May of 1990, which were won by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). After the election, there was an interruption in the political dialogue between the leadership of Serbs in Croatia and the Croatian governmental institutions and their democratically elected representatives. The attitudes of Serbs have become even more radicalised, especially in areas where they represented a majority, or where they made up a significant percentage of the population. Faced with the results of the elections in Croatia, the SFRJ military authorities started disarming Croatia. The disarmament was planned and rapidly conducted before the transfer of duties and the establishment of a new government in Croatia, that was to be formed according to the results of the elections. Military authorities confiscated practically the entire cache of weapons belonging to the Croatian Territorial Defence (estimates range from 80.000 to 200.000 pieces of weaponry) and placed it in warehouses under the control of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). By disarming Croatia the JNA ensured total dominance in case of an ever more certain armed resolution of the crisis in Yugosla-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ante NAZOR, *Velikosrpska agresija na Hrvatsku 1990-ih* (*Greater-Serbian Aggression on Croatia in the 90's*), Zagreb, 2011, 19–21.

via. The rebellion of Croatian Serbs was a response to the democratic changes in Croatia and can be viewed as the beginning of the armed rebellion of Serbs in Croatia against Croatian democratically elected government. The ultimate goal of the rebellion was the annexation of a part of the Croatian territory to the Republic of Serbia and the creation of an integral Serbian state that would include most of former Yugoslavia.

Armed actions of rebellious Serbs were at that time limited to ambushes and terrorist actions. Later, this escalated into an open aggression of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army joined by the rebellious Serbs against Croatia. Because of such unacceptable situation, Croatian and Slovenian leadership proposed a reorganisation of Yugoslavia into a confederation of states. However, Serbian leadership rejected such restructuring of Yugoslavia, and Croatia and Slovenia started working towards independence.

On the basis of the referendum, held on May 19, 1991, the Croatian Parliament adopted the *Declaration on the Establishment of a Sovereign and the Independent Republic of Croatia* as well as the *Charter of Rights of Serbs and Other Minorities in Croatia* (Official Gazette No 31, June 25, 1991). The entry of the Declaration into force was postponed for a period of three months to facilitate the continuation of negotiations on the peaceful resolution of the Yugoslav crisis. To help find a peaceful solution, on July 7, 1991, Croatia and Slovenia agreed to the Brijuni Declaration and the three-month postponement of the implementation of the Declaration of June 25. However, instead of seeking a peaceful solution, the terrorist actions performed by Serbian rebels in Croatia during the summer turned into an open aggression by the SFRJ Armed Forces (JNA) against the Republic of Croatia. Rebellious Serbs and the Serbian leadership in Belgrade rejected all attempts made by the Croatian Government and the international community to peacefully resolve the Yugoslav crisis. At the beginning of October 1991, the JNA and the Serbian paramilitary units launched a general attack on all fronts, aiming to break Croatia's defences in 20 days. When a JNA aircraft bombarded the Viceroy's Palace (the seat of the Croatian Government) in the centre of Zagreb on October 7, 1991, it became obvious that the Republic of Serbia does not even intend to consider a peaceful solution to the Yugoslav crisis. In such circumstances, the Sabor (Parliament) of the Republic of Croatia proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Croatia. The members of the Sabor enacted the *Decision on the Separation of the Republic of Croatia from the SFRJ and Its Independence*. By doing this, the Republic of Croatia severed all state and legal ties with the other republics of the SFRJ. Croatia had to defend its newly pro-

claimed independence in a bloody war.<sup>7</sup> The JNA and Serbian units furiously and simultaneously attacked many Croatian towns and villages: Dubrovnik, Šibenik, Zadar, Karlovac, and especially Vukovar. Parallel to waging a defensive war, Croatia also fought a diplomatic battle for international recognition. Its positive outcome was contingent on the opinion of the international Arbitration Commission, founded to provide legal advice to the Peace Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, which started in The Hague in September 1991. Also known as the *Badinter Arbitration Committee* (after its president, the Frenchman Robert Badinter), in December 1991 and January 1992, the Commission determined the following: the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia is in the process of dissolution; the Serbian population in Croatia is entitled to all the rights attributed to minorities and ethnic groups under international law and under the provisions of the *Convention of the Conference on Yugoslavia* of November 4, 1991; all external boundaries must be respected in all cases; the authorities of the Republic of Croatia should, therefore, supplement the Constitutional Act in such a way as to satisfy these provisions. Subject to these reservations, the Republic of Croatia meets the necessary conditions for its recognition by the Member States of the European Community in accordance with the *Declaration on Yugoslavia* and the *Guidelines on the Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, adopted by the Council of the European Communities on December 16, 1991.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Call to Negotiations and Agreement within the Confederate Union

It is necessary to provide the context in which the international recognition of Croatia and the role played by the Holy See should be seen.

For many peoples of former Eastern Europe, Saint Peter's square in the Vatican represented a place where they could point out their uniqueness by presenting their national flag. Croatian flag was frequently seen there as well, even during the time of former Yugoslavia. The flag was brought mainly by the Croatians living in diaspora. As the crisis in the former Yugoslavia grew, the number of Croatian pilgrims in the St. Peter's square who came to listen to the words of John Paul II during his Sunday mass or general audience also

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ante NAZOR, *Velikosrpska agresija na Hrvatsku 1990-ih* (Greater-Serbian Aggression on Croatia in the 90's), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Vladimir Đuro DEGAN, *Hrvatska država u međunarodnoj zajednici. Razvitak njezine međunarodne osobnosti tijekom povijesti* (Croatian State in the International Community. The Development of its International Personality throughout History), Zagreb, 2002, 334–379.

increased.<sup>9</sup> The number of Croatian pilgrims in the Vatican was on the rise and visit to the Pope had a political significance for Croatians. Such visits and papal messages show the relationship between the Holy See and Croatia during the key days for Croatia, in the course of aggression against Croatia and its struggle for international recognition. During 1990, the key year for Croatia when democratic freedoms were instituted, on multiple occasions in his sermon to Croatian pilgrims the Pope mentioned that the return of freedom is the sign of new time and that freedom itself demands total dedication to the good of an individual and the society. He stressed the need to build a social system based on moral and spiritual values in accordance with God's call to freedom.<sup>10</sup> Until 1991 Papal pronouncements were of religious character. However, early in the beginning of the next year, during the Sunday Angelus on January 27, 1991, Pope spoke to Croatian believers, wishing them and praying with them for peace.<sup>11</sup> During the Audience on January 30, 1991, the Pope read his salute to Croatian believers, which contained not only a religious message but a political message as well. In this salute, the Pope advocated peace and dialogue and spoke against war and the use of force. The following sentence was key: »In these dramatic moments of suffering and fear in certain parts of the world and also in your homeland, I encourage you to pray for peace, to renounce distrust and rivalry and to respect basic human rights and the rights of the peoples.«<sup>12</sup> Up until that point such messages referred to the Middle East, Israel and Baltic states. From January 1991, due to the possible use of force and an outbreak of war, Yugoslavia became one of the sore spots of the world. At that time, the Pope refused to speak about the territorial or state integrity and future relations between the peoples of Yugoslavia but, depending on the development of the situation in Yugoslavia, he expressed his concern through a prayer for peace and an all-encompassing opposition to a military intervention. He spoke in favour of civil and religious rights as well as the respect of rights of individual peoples. At the beginning of 1991, the official position of the State Secretariat of the Holy See supported the idea of some sort of a Yugoslav union, which would be acceptable to all peoples

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Silvije TOMAŠEVIĆ, Ivan Pavao II. (*John Paul II*), 63.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, in: Sunday, January 27, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19910127.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19910127.html) (17. 01. 2018).

<sup>12</sup> *La crisi jugoslava. Posizione e azione della Santa Sede (1991–1992)*, Quaderni de L'Osservatore Romano, Città del Vaticano, 1992, 29. (*The Yugoslav Crisis. Position and Action of the Holy See [1991–1992]*); Ivica MAŠTRUKO, *Sveta Stolica; Ambasador zemlje koje nema (The Holy See; Ambassador of the Country that does not exist)*, Zagreb, 2012, 162.



of Yugoslavia and would be achieved in a democratic and peaceful fashion.<sup>13</sup> The basic principles of the Holy See at that time were peace, cooperation, solidarity, human rights, and ecumenism.<sup>14</sup> Reconciliatory papal speeches, calling for peace and collaboration, fit the general agenda of European statesmen and international institutions that were in favour of the survival of Yugoslavia. The attitude of the Holy See was based on the development of the situation in Yugoslavia. According to Archbishop Nikola Eterović, who served at the Holy See State Department at the time, the Holy See followed closely the events in Yugoslavia. Via the apostolic nuncio in Belgrade, Monsignor Gabriel Montalvo and through its contacts with the bishops in Croatia, particularly Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, the Holy See knew very well what was happening in Yugoslavia.<sup>15</sup> On May 19, 1991, a referendum was held in Croatia and it confirmed that a great majority of Croatian citizens favour the creation of the independent and sovereign state of Croatia. That was the point at which the Holy See started thinking about the possibility of an international recognition of Croatia.<sup>16</sup> Still, the question of the reaction of major world powers to such a decision remained open. Thus, the visit of James Baker, US Secretary of State, to Yugoslavia was considered to be very significant. On June 21, 1991, he met in Belgrade with the representatives from all six Yugoslav republics, federal prime minister Ante Marković, federal minister of foreign affairs Budimir Lončar and representatives from Kosovo. During his talks with president Tuđman, Baker suggested a form of confederate Yugoslavia. According to Davorin Rudolf, the then minister of foreign affairs, president Tuđman never explicitly refused this suggestion but answered that it was the Serbs who refused all such suggestions up to that point and would not even discuss them. Tuđman asked for the support for the only realistic and historically based solution, state independence. This was the choice made by Slovenia and Croatia at the time. According to the Croatian president, this was the way to get rid of permanent instability, to confirm the idea of people's self-determination, and to stabilise the entire region. Baker answered by saying: »The United States support the unity of Yugoslavia but also stand against the use of force to maintain that unity.« He repeated those same words during all the talks he held on that day. Milošević and the generals supported the words

<sup>13</sup> Cf. HR-HMDCDR -18, DVD 3676, Interview with Nikola Eterović Advisor to the State Secretariat of the Holy See; Ivica MAŠTRUKO, *Sveta Stolica (The Holy See)*, 164.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Angelus*, Sunday, January 27, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. HR-HMDCDR-18, DVD 3676, Interview with Nikola Eterović.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

of James Baker. Unfortunately, as is reported by Warren Zimmermann, US ambassador to Yugoslavia, they understood those words in their own way.<sup>17</sup>

The Holy See acted on the basis of principles that it publicly supported and applied to the situation in Yugoslavia. The Holy See believed that the right of people to self-determination, the rights of individuals and national communities must be respected. It opposed the use of force in the resolution of issues and vehemently supported the dialogue between all interested parties. It championed the reestablishment of peaceful coexistence of the peoples of Yugoslavia based on justice and mutual respect.<sup>18</sup>

On May 25, 1991, Pope John Paul II received the Croatian president Franjo Tuđman. This meeting was of extreme importance for the entire process of Croatian emancipation. The meeting was preceded by the referendum on independence, whose results allowed Croatia to join the alliance of sovereign states and it also marked a change in the position of the Holy See. Up until that point, the Holy See made it clear to the Croatian church that emancipation and leaving the framework of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia is not an option. The Vatican and particularly Pope John Paul II understood and recognised in the Croatian actions the attempt to respect the final Helsinki Accord regarding the peaceful resolution of the crisis in a legal and democratic manner.<sup>19</sup> This understanding was by all means additionally bolstered by the first meeting of the Pope and president Tuđman, who, just before the meeting sent an official letter to Pope John Paul II. Following a short description of the historical experience of the Croatian people, President Tuđman pointed out that throughout its history, Croatia was able to maintain its allegiance to Catholicism. However, the official letter also points out that Croatia, which is currently without any true friends, is addressing the Chair of Saint Peter directly, while recognising Pope John Paul II as a person who foretold the European community of various peoples, which will never be divided by borders, a community where each person and each nation will be free and where there will never be any need or indeed possibility for humiliation or slavery.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Davorin RUDOLF, *Rat koji nismo htjeli; Hrvatska 1991. (The War we did not want; Croatia 1991)*, Zagreb, 1999, 251–252.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Nikola ETEROVIĆ, *Sveta Stolica i priznavanje Republike Hrvatske (The Holy See and the Recognition of the Republic of Croatia)*, in: Davorin RUDOLF (ed.), *Nastanak suvremene države Hrvatske i dvadeseta obljetnica njezina utemeljenja (The emergence of the modern Croatian state and the twentieth anniversary of its establishment)* Zagreb, 2012, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Franjo ŠANJEK – Božidar PETRAČ (ed.), *Ivan Pavao II. i Hrvati (John Paul II and Croats)*, Zagreb, 1995, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Pismo (promemorija) predsjednika RH dr. Franje Tuđmana Svetom Ocu papi Ivanu Pavlu II., 25. svibnja 1991. (Letter, Memorandum, the President of the Republic of Croatia

President Tuđman met Pope John Paul II and the state secretary of the Holy See, Cardinal Angelo Sodano. Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the secretary of the Holy See for the relations with states and Hrvoje Šarinić, the Chief of Staff of the President of Croatia were also present at that meeting. During the meeting, it was pointed out by the Croatian side that all burning issues and the process of emancipation must be resolved peacefully, through democratic negotiations, ensuring a just solution for all parties, establishing peace, cooperation, and stability in the South East of Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Thanks to numerous diplomatic and ecclesial sources, the Holy See understood that the Yugoslav federation was breaking apart and that it can, in fact, no longer be considered to be a single state. On July 21, 1991, during a general audience, the Pope said: »An armed conflict of greater extent between these two peoples (i.e. Croatians and Serbs) would actually represent a useless catastrophe for Yugoslavia and the consequences for entire Europe could be grave. [...] While your homeland is fighting for the defence of freedom and democracy despite terrible problems, save your human and Christian dignity. Therefore, fight the temptation and any form of provocation that represent the denial of humanity and civilization.«<sup>22</sup> Open support of the Pope John Paul II was also clearly visible from his words in Pecs, Hungary, in front of Cardinal Kuharić, many other bishops and a great number of believers. Although supportive, his words were uttered with a great deal of diplomacy: »Once again I assure you that I am close to your legitimate desires and reiterate my appeal to the international community to help you in these terrible, difficult moments of your history.«<sup>23</sup>

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Franjo Tuđman to the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, May 25, 1991), in: *Tuđmanov arhiv, korespondencija predsjednika Republike Hrvatske dr. sc. Franje Tuđmana od 1990. do 1999. godine, Prva knjiga, Godine stvaranja i obrane 1990. – 1991. (Tuđman's archives, correspondence Croatian President Ph.D. Franjo Tuđman from 1990 to 1999, First Book, Year of Creation and Defense 1990–1991)*, Zagreb, 2015, 216–218.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Franjo ŠANJEK – Božidar PETRAČ (ed.), *Ivan Pavao II. i Hrvati (John Paul II and Croats)*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Sunday, July 21, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19910721.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19910721.html) (10. 01. 2018).

<sup>23</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Homily, Apostolic Journey to Poland and Hungary (August 13–20, 1991) Holy Mass for the faithful of the Diocese of Pécs, Pécs Airport – Saturday, August 17, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19910817\\_fedeli-pecs.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19910817_fedeli-pecs.html) (10. 01. 2018).

#### 4. Open Aggression against Croatia

When the Serbian aggression against Croatia started, the Holy See, in accordance with its mission, kept demanding a peaceful resolution of the conflict. John Paul II insisted personally and through his closest collaborators, international leaders, to stop the bloodshed and to protect those under attack. The Holy See understood that Yugoslavia could not last any longer and that »legal, constitutional reforms with a firm guarantee of human rights, cultural, religious, linguistic particularities are necessary and urgent« (Acta Diurna, August 28, 1991).<sup>24</sup> On June 29, 1991, during the Angelus prayer, the Pope said to the gathered faithful at St. Peter's square: »... I say once again, force cannot be used to stifle the rights and legitimate desires of the nations...«<sup>25</sup>

At that time, the Vatican still hoped for some kind of a peaceful agreement in Yugoslavia. Msgr. Jean-Louis Tauran, who was the Holy See's Secretary for the relations with states, gathered the ambassadors of the European Economic Union countries on July 29, 1991, and informed them that the Holy See respects their efforts to resolve the crisis in Yugoslavia and supports the initiative to send observers from neutral countries to Yugoslavia as quickly as possible to set up and supervise the upholding of the cease-fire. Msgr. J.-L. Tauran visited Zagreb and Belgrade from August 5 until August 7, 1991. In Zagreb, he met with the representatives of both the Church and the State, while the Croatian bishops reported to Archbishop Taurano, Msgr. Antonio Franco, Msgr. Nikola Eterović and the employees of the State Secretariat, who came with them, as well as to the Pronuncio in Yugoslavia, Msgr. Gabriel Montalvo, about the horrific suffering in some dioceses. Msgr. J.-L. Tauran met two of the representatives of the state, foreign minister Zvonimir Šeparović and Hrvoje Šarinić, the Chief of Staff of the President of the Republic of Croatia. The conclusion of these meetings was that the Yugoslav crisis must be internationalised in order to begin solving the increasing number of problems. The recognition of the independence of the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia would play an important part in the process. To better grasp the situation, Archbishop Tauran also spoke to George Marie Chenu, the then member in charge of the monitoring group of the European Economic Union

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *La crisi jugoslava. Posizione e azione della Santa Sede (1991–1992) (The Yugoslav Crisis. Position and Action of the Holy See [1991–1992])*, 39; Ive LIVLJANIĆ, *Od Svetog Grgura do Svetog Petra (From St. Gregory to St. Peter)*, Zagreb, 2017, 87.

<sup>25</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Sunday, 29 June 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19910629.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19910629.html) (10. 01. 2018.).

(CEE), who resided in Slovenia. Since there were no airline connections between Zagreb and Belgrade, the Croatian government made a plane available to the delegation of the Holy See to facilitate their meeting with the Church and State representatives in Belgrade. The Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, amongst others, spoke to Pavle, the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Budimir Lončar, the minister of foreign affairs of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. The talks revealed that the Yugoslav federal government was unable not only to resolve the crisis but also to decide on the actions to be taken to achieve a peaceful resolution of the current situation.<sup>26</sup> It was concluded that the federal government is not in control of the situation and is not strong enough to see their decisions through. It was also recognized that there was no chance of maintaining or renewing the federal organisation of Yugoslavia. The Holy See demanded the respect of legitimate rights and desires of all peoples of Yugoslavia who made their wishes regarding the state organisation known in a free and democratic manner. It also opposed the use of force and any violent imposition of solutions to the current problems. The papal emissary insisted that it was necessary to stop the violence immediately and recognised that as the first necessary move in order to achieve a political solution to the current problems.<sup>27</sup> By that time it became obvious that no »unity« was possible and that the so-called federal government is no longer in control of the situation. Informing the Pope about everything he saw and experienced, Monsignor Tauran said: »Holy Father, Yugoslavia no longer exists! In other words, it would be difficult to do anything else to preserve any kind of common country...«<sup>28</sup> After the talks with the Pope, sources say that the Pope made it very clear that every nation has the right to choose their own path and the kind of government they want for their country.<sup>29</sup>

The Vatican still insisted on finding a peaceful solution to the crisis through negotiation. Pope John Paul II sent a telegram on August 26, 1991 to the then President of the Presidency of Yugoslavia, Stjepan Mesić, in which he stated that »the news coming from Croatia are becoming ever more worrisome« and that on the basis of such news he concludes that an all-out war is a real possibility. The Pope expressed his solidarity with all those who suffer

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Nikola ETEROVIĆ, *Sveta Stolica i priznavanje Republike Hrvatske* (The Holy See and the Recognition of the Republic of Croatia), 38.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Velimir BLAŽEVIĆ, *Katolička crkva u Hrvata u službi mira i stvaranja samostalne Hrvatske* (The Catholic Church in Croatia in the Service of Peace and Creation of Independent Croatia), 166–167.

<sup>28</sup> Ive LIVLJANIĆ, *Od Svetog Grgura do Svetog Petra* (From St. Gregory to St. Peter), 87.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ivica MAŠTRUKO, *Sveta Stolica* (The Holy See), 177.

and called for a dialogue. He also supported all the efforts and all political and diplomatic peace initiatives. But, he also stressed: »Today, more than ever, it has become a matter of urgency for the governments of some of the Republics to honour the international obligations as signed by Yugoslavia and particularly the eight principles of the Helsinki final document, that refer to the equality in rights and the self-determination of a people.«<sup>30</sup> The Holy See still supports all the initiatives that might help find solutions to »current difficult problems«.

The State secretary, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, met with the then president of the Council of Ministers of the European Union, Hans van Den Broek in August 1991, and demanded that the violence be stopped and another effort made to establish peace »through political dialogue among all republics of Yugoslavia«. He also expressed his belief in an action that would »quicken the process of country's reorganisation«, respecting the principles of the final Helsinki act regarding »the equality of rights and the self-determination of the people«. Those were the last efforts to create some kind of confederacy.

However, an open aggression of the Yugoslav People's Army and rebellious Serbs against Croatia begun in the summer of 1991. In an attempt to stop the aggression against Croatia, President Franjo Tuđman turned to Pope John Paul II and wrote a letter, appealing for peace. In the letter, President Tuđman stated: »The Serbian and Yugoslav Army-sponsored war against the nation and democratic government of the Republic of Croatia has escalated to a frightening degree. Since the declaration of the cease-fire of July 7, 1991, over one hundred people have been killed (military and civilian), hundreds of others have been wounded, and more than one hundred thousand have left their destroyed or razed homes in fear of new massacres. The destruction of Croatian villages and the number of victims have increased, even after the signing of the cease-fire agreement on September 2, 1991. Judging from statements made yesterday by certain Serbian politicians and local commanders of the Yugoslav Army, it is clear that peace will be very difficult to achieve. The democratic government of the Republic of Croatia has done all in its power to reach a peaceful resolution of the crisis. We were and remain prepared to support a political resolution and an internationalization of the conflict, in conjunction with peace plans by the European community. Not only freedom and democracy are being defended on Croatian borders, but the dignity and exist-

<sup>30</sup> Ivo LIVLJANIĆ, *Od Svetog Grgura do Svetog Petra (From St. Gregory to St. Peter)*, 87; *La crisi jugoslava. Posizione e azione della Santa Sede (1991–1992) (The Yugoslav Crisis. Position and Action of the Holy See [1991–1992])*, 31.

ence of the Croatian nation, which represent the interests of the free world, as well as the ecumenical harmony of nations and members of different religious faiths. Formal diplomatic recognition of the Republic of Croatia by the Vatican would enable former borders of republics to become international borders and would allow implementation of the mechanisms of CSCE to defend them.«<sup>31</sup>

At the beginning of September, the Pope sent a telegram to Cardinal Kuharić and the State Secretary, Cardinal Sodano, sent a letter to all pontifical delegacies. In the telegram, the Pope speaks about the war, disrespect for the cease-fire agreement and expresses concern for the »destiny of the Croatian people and all the inhabitants of Yugoslavia«. In his telegram, the Pope bitterly rejects the use of armed force and speaks in favour of peaceful initiatives. He also informs Cardinal Kuharić that he invited all the faithful of the Catholic Church in the world to unite in prayer »for peace and unity of all the peoples of Yugoslavia«. On September 4, 1991, the Pope asked all the bishops around the world to join him in the prayer for peace in Croatia. The form of prayer as suggested by John Paul II had a particular political weight for the Italian public as well. On that day (September 8, 1991), the Pope spoke in Vicenza, where he mentioned that the number of armed incidents in Croatia is on the increase and that the violence is growing. He spoke of the destruction of civilian objects and churches, about a large number of dead, wounded and refugees exiled from their homes. He spoke in favour of the cessation of the conflict, ensuring freedom and dignity of all peoples of Yugoslavia, who must be allowed the freedom to choose their own future.<sup>32</sup> On that same day, the Archbishop of Zagreb, Cardinal Franjo Kuharić gave a sermon at the mass for peace in the Zagreb cathedral and in it he said: »A legal defence of the homeland, family, freedom, and liberty represents a right and an obligation, a moral act, but this defence must never transgress legality at the expense of dignity and the right of others, this defence must never turn into hatred and revenge.«<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Pismo predsjednika RH Franje Tuđmana Svetom Ocu papi Ivanu Pavlu II., 30. kolovoza 1991. (Letter from the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman to the Holy Father JOHN PAUL II, August 30, 1991), in: *Tuđmanov arhiv, korespondencija predsjednika Republike Hrvatske dr. sc. Franje Tuđmana od 1990. do 1999. godine, Prva knjiga, Godine stvaranja i obrane 1990. – 1991. (Tuđman's archives, correspondence Croatian President Ph.D. Franjo Tuđman from 1990 to 1999, First Book, Year of Creation and Defense 1990–1991)*, 304–305.

<sup>32</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Pastoral Visit to Vicenza, Angelus, Sunday, September 8, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19910908.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19910908.html) (10. 01. 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Velimir BLAŽEVIĆ, *Katolička Crkva u Hrvata u službi mira i stvaranje samostalne Hrvatske (The Catholic Church in Croatia in the service of peace and creation of independent Croatia)*, 179.

At the same time, the president of the German Conference of Bishops, Karl Lehmann, wrote a letter to Helmut Kohl asking for the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia.

John Paul II said: »The peoples of Croatia and Slovenia have, of their own free will, decided to establish their own democratic legal states. Their legitimate right to self-determination must be recognized. The credibility of the freedom-loving and democratic basic order of Europe is at stake. The violence and the right of the one who is stronger must not continue to rule.« On September 22, 1991, the Pope said: »The time has come to determine that what is happening in those countries is unworthy of the human being, is unworthy of Europe. I pray for the victims, I am close to the families weeping for their loved ones and those who have been exiled from their homes. I share the deep pain of honourable Croatian bishops who watch their flock disperse, churches being torn down and cultural institutions being destroyed.«<sup>34</sup>

A great part in German recognition of Croatia was played by the Monsignor dr. Josip Uhač, a Holy See diplomat and the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. Pope John Paul II named him Papal nuncio in Germany (1984–1991). His efforts regarding the recognition of Croatia were twofold: he worked through the Holy See and through the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

Together with Monsignor Milan Simčić, who was at the time the under-secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy at the Holy See, Monsignor Uhač personally delivered the Memorandum to the Pope John Paul II, in which he explained the need for an urgent international recognition of Croatia and pointed out that this is the only way to stop the war and open aggression against Croatia. At the same time, he contacted both Kohl and Genscher, spoke and wrote to them, convincing them of the need to urgently recognise Croatia. One of the most dramatic conversations, as described by Monsignor Simčić, was a telephone call from Uhač to Kohl in November 1991, when Uhač pleaded with Germany to recognise Croatia, especially pointing out that Germany will not be left alone if it undertakes such a step, because he already knew that the Holy See would recognise Croatia. At the same time, Monsignor Milan Simčić greatly influenced both public and political opinion in Italy.

He spoke to Italian politicians, the then – Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, as well as the representatives of the Democratic Party in the Parliament,

<sup>34</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Sunday, September 22, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19910922.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19910922.html) (10. 01. 2018).



Flaminio Piccoli and Emilio Colombo and tried to break down the prejudices and misinformation regarding Croatia, as well as to point out historical and legal bases for its independence.<sup>35</sup>

In October 1991, when it became clear even to the most ardent supporters of »unity« that the disintegration of Yugoslavia is imminent and irreversible, the Vatican became convinced that negotiations between the warring parties for the purpose of maintaining Yugoslavia are out of the question. In his public speeches, the Pope does not speak as much about negotiations anymore, his appeals for peace, cessation of war, which was by that time in full swing, became more frequent. President Tuđman turned to the Holy See and the Pope on many occasions, asking them to »... take effective steps to stop the destruction of Croatia. My plea is particularly addressed to You, Your Holiness, because of Your understanding and compassion for the suffering of the Croatian people. In spite of the fact that Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic and Yugoslav army general Veljko Kadijevic, who stand behind the coup in Belgrade, agreed to a peaceful resolution of the crisis at The Hague Conference on October 4, 1991, Yugoslav Army has launched overnight and today an all-out offensive in Croatia. Land, air, and sea forces are attacking the cities of Šibenik, Zadar, Dubrovnik, Vukovar, Vinkovci, and Pakrac and are threatening Karlovac and Sisak, cities at the outskirts of Zagreb. The assaults are directed towards civilian population, hospitals, churches, and historical cultural monuments of great national and international significance. Your Holiness, please do all you can to stop the war that threatens to destroy both Croatia and peace in this part of Europe through the actions of the Serbian imperialist politics and Yugoslav communist army.«<sup>36</sup>

On October 3, 1991, President Tuđman met with the Pope for the second time. After the meeting, the President expressed his impression that the Holy See is very well acquainted with the goings on in Croatia. »They know who the aggressors are, they know how and why the Croatian people are fighting. I was particularly pleased with the express statement that the Vatican does not only pray for peace. It is of greatest importance for the Holy See, the Holy

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Milan SIMČIĆ, Uspomena na doživotnog prijatelja i njegova uloga u priznanju Hrvatske sa strane svete Stolice i Njemačke (The memory of life-long friend and his role in the Croatian recognition of the Holy See and Germany), in: *Mons. Josip Uhač, Život i djelo (Mons. Josip Uhač, Life and Work, Proceedings from Study Days)*, Rijeka, 2008, 98–100.

<sup>36</sup> Pismo predsjednika RH dr. Franje Tuđmana Svetom Ocu papi Ivanu Pavlu II., 5. listopada 1991. (Letter from the President of the Republic of Croatia Dr. Franjo Tuđman to the Holy Father John Paul II, October 5, 1991), in: *Tuđmanov arhiv, korespondencija predsjednika Republike Hrvatske dr. sc. Franje Tuđmana od 1990. do 1999. godine, Prva knjiga, Godine stvaranja i obrane 1990. – 1991. (Tuđman's archives, correspondence Croatian President Ph.D. Franjo Tuđman from 1990 to 1999, First Book, Year of Creation and Defense 1990–1991)*, 395.

Father, to establish peace and he asks of us, the leadership of Croatia and the Croatian people, to do all in our power to end the war peacefully. He also expressly said that in the spirit of their politics of peace but also in the spirit of the recognition of the right of a people to decide their destiny for themselves and to resist aggression, the Vatican will do its utmost to reach the consensus of as great a number of countries as possible on the recognition of the Republic of Croatia. The Vatican will use its moral authority to win over the most important players in world politics to find the method to stop further escalation of war and find a peaceful solution.«<sup>37</sup> Not long after the visit, during the Angelus prayer on October 6, 1991, the Pope said: »From the bottom of my heart I greet all the pilgrims from Croatia. In these tragic days, I feel particularly close to the afflicted people of your homeland and all the victims of an absurd war.«<sup>38</sup> Active papal politics continued in October 1991 as well, when John Paul II sent a letter to the heads of two European countries regarding the war in Yugoslavia and suggested that they recognise the independence of the two republics. At the same time, the Pope sent a letter to Cardinal Kuharić and the Croatian bishops but also sent a personal letter to the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pavle. In his letter to Croatian bishops, the Pope writes about death, destruction, and suffering calls for the conscience of the people to take over and warns that wars will not solve the problems of the rights of the peoples and the rights of the minorities. He also points out that borders of any country cannot be changed through the use of force. The Pope particularly stresses that he appreciates the effort made during the meeting of the Catholic hierarchy (Cardinal Kuharić) and the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He said to the Croatian bishops that they should pray with him for peace and stated: »The Holy See especially supports the Peace Conference in The Hague in an effort to ensure the international recognition of Slovenia, Croatia and other republics whose request for recognition might follow, in concert with the principles of the final Helsinki document signed by the member states of the CSCE.«<sup>39</sup>

In his letter to Patriarch Paul, John Paul II first stated his desire to renew the relationship with the Patriarch, expressed his personal investment in the

<sup>37</sup> Franjo ŠANJEK – Božidar PETRAČ (ed.), *Ivan Pavao II. i Hrvati (John Paul II and Croats)*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Sunday, October 6, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19911006.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19911006.html) (10. 01. 2018).

<sup>39</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, Archbishop of Zagreb and to the Bishops of Croatia, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_19911010\\_cardinale-kuharic.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19911010_cardinale-kuharic.html) (10. 01. 2018).

pain of numerous Serbian families of Orthodox faith in these dramatic moments for all the peoples of Yugoslavia. He expressed his great appreciation for the Patriarch's appeals for peace and writes that he is aware that the clashes between the Catholics and the Orthodox are not based in religion but in politics. He was particularly appreciative of the ecumenical meetings in May and August of 1991 between the Patriarch and Cardinal Kuharić. The Pope said that the difficult legacy of the past gravely influences the minds of both peoples and makes finding the possible solution even more difficult. However, in order to build a future of peace, one must be brave enough to free oneself from the past and start finding lawful and just answers to the problems of the present. In conclusion, the Pope said that the Holy See will invest maximum effort to reach an agreement that will facilitate ending the crisis and that he will support the efforts of the international community to help the warring parties find a way out on the basis of the principles established in the Helsinki final act of the *Conference on Safety and Cooperation in Europe*.<sup>40</sup>

The Pope spoke to Croatian pilgrims on several occasions, expressing his concern and understanding for the »longing for justice and freedom«. To the people displaced from Vukovar, the Pope said: »... you know that the Pope is with you through his prayer and his love; that he is also close to all who suffer because of this senseless war in your beloved country.« On November 17, 1991, during the Angelus prayer, the Pope greeted a group of Croatian pilgrims who brought their handiwork for a charity exhibition,<sup>41</sup> and on Wednesday, November 20, 1991, during the General Audience, the Pope spoke to the displaced persons and the wounded from Vukovar: »I am touched to greet the present representatives of refugees in Croatia, particularly some of the wounded who come from the tortured city of Vukovar, people who visibly bear the sign of the drama that has been playing out there in the course of the last few weeks. Dear brothers and sisters, you know that the Pope is with you in his prayers and love and that he is also with all who suffer because of the meaningless war in your beloved country.«<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to His Beatitude Pavle, Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church (October 10, 1991) in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_19911010\\_patriarca-pavle.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19911010_patriarca-pavle.html) (10. 01. 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Sunday, November 17, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19911117.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19911117.html) (10. 01. 2018).

<sup>42</sup> JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, Wednesday, November 20, 1991, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1991/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19911120.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1991/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19911120.html) (12. 02. 2018).

The worse and more difficult the war was becoming and the more the number of casualties grew, the stronger the belief became that the international recognition of Croatia could be a guarantee of peace. Because of that, on November 26, 1991, the State Secretary, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, gathered the ambassadors of the member states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and presented them with a Memorandum referring to the principles of international law as well as the articles of the Yugoslav constitution from 1974, according to which individual republics were entitled to cede from the federation. Article one of the memorandum states that the events in Yugoslavia have caused great concern to the Holy See since such events clearly represent the breaking of both the spirit and the letter of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that acknowledges the right of European peoples to determine their fates freely, i.e. to decide on the structure of their internal and external political situations according to their own preferences. In the second article, the Holy See calls upon the international community to seriously consider the need for the respect of the right to independence of Croatia and Slovenia and anybody else who might want to refer to that right, particularly in view of the raging conflict on the territory of Croatia. In the third article, the Holy See states that it is certain that the time has come for the international community to recognize Croatia and Slovenia and to do so before Christmas. The peoples of these two republics have chosen freely and democratically the path of independence. The Memorandum goes on to explain why the Holy See is certain that the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia should be recognised. The Constitution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia provides for the possibility of secession of each republic, which is clearly stated in its introduction: »... based on the right of each nation to self-determination, including the right to secession, the peoples of Yugoslavia, together with the nationalities with which they live, have united into a federal republic of free and equal peoples and nationalities...« Keeping in mind the situation in Yugoslavia, it can be said that the current situation in Federal Yugoslavia no longer corresponds to its constitution, since the federal government no longer represents the entirety of political and ethnic reality of Yugoslavia. A formal recognition of independence might be stipulated to better ensure the fulfilment of obligations accepted in the scope of the CSCE, particularly with regard to the respect of the rights of national minorities present in the aforementioned republics. On the basis of everything that was mentioned, the Holy See believes that the process of recognition should begin:

a) through agreement of the CSCE member states, including Yugoslavia, which is its full member;

b) recognition should be a formal act so that such recognition might have effects;

c) to make possible the establishment of peace through the application of the principle according to which all people have the right to freely determine their destiny. To truly respect the rights of the national minorities the following conditions may be a part of the formal act of recognition: each republic formally takes it upon itself to respect all the principles of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference and the Paris Charter; each republic formally takes it upon itself to respect human rights and basic freedoms, those listed in international documents, particularly documents produced by the CSCE and the Council of Europe; each republic formally takes it upon itself to apply the instructions of the CSCE documents that refer to the democratic principles and institutions, making it possible for those institutions to meet the principles that have to be met in the process of acceptance to the membership of the Council of Europe; each republic formally accepts obligations arising from the CSCE documents voted in Copenhagen and Geneva regarding the position of national minorities; each republic accepts that the control of the application of rights of national minorities will be under the jurisdiction of the Commission of High Officials of the CSCE.

It was also recommended that the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia as well as other republics, who might ask for it later, be joined, »harmonised and conditioned«. »Conditioned« implied that the new state had to accept a formal obligation to respect the principles of various documents of the Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe – CSCE, particularly in the areas of human rights, democracy and the protection of national minorities.<sup>43</sup> Finally, because of all of the aforementioned reasons, the Holy See believed that such formal recognition, which was agreed upon multilaterally, will help establish peace because it will lay the groundwork for the creation of conditions for the peaceful resolution of the conflict that will be controlled by the CSCE states. They would make sure that everyone's right is recognised and protected. Not long after that, on December 15, 1991, as a sort of an answer to this initiative,

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *La crisi jugoslava. Posizione e azione della Santa Sede (1991–1992) (The Yugoslav Crisis. Position and Action of the Holy See [1991–1992])*; [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/2003/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20031018\\_sodano-xxv-pontificate\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2003/documents/rc_seg-st_20031018_sodano-xxv-pontificate_it.html). See in: Franjo ŠANJEK – Božidar PETRAČ (ed.), *Ivan Pavao II. i Hrvati (John Paul II and Croats)*, 96.

President Tuđman sent a letter («An epistle of peace») to the Holy Father and foreign statesmen in which he stated: »Once again, the Republic of Croatia expresses its readiness to participate actively and to the best of its ability in all peace efforts of the international community. We are in favour of the continuation of the Peace Conference in The Hague that should serve as a means for legal and peaceful dissolution of the former state SFRJ, in accordance with the Vienna conventions regarding the succession of states. Croatia fully supports complete acceptance of the principles of The Hague Conference by all the interested parties and an international guarantee of the execution of decisions of The Hague Conference.«<sup>44</sup>

The initiative of the Holy See and the Memorandum that was sent had some effect. On December 16, 1991, in Brussels, a decision was made by the foreign ministers of the 12 member states of the European Union. They agreed on the procedure of recognition of all Yugoslav republics which might formally ask to be recognised and which will, of course, meet certain conditions. In their official statement from December 20, 1991, the Holy See welcomed and supported this position of the member states of the European Union. On that same day, December 20, 1991, they announced the upcoming diplomatic recognition of Croatia and Slovenia by a special document. After that, in his letter dated December 20, 1991, President Tuđman expressed his deepest gratitude for the decision of the Holy See to recognise the Republic of Croatia.<sup>45</sup>

## 5. International Recognition of Croatia and Slovenia

In his New year's address at the beginning of 1992, Pope John Paul II spoke quite frankly. He said: »The Croatian people are not alone; all people have the right to have their legitimate choices respected. Entire Europe should feel de-

<sup>44</sup> Mirovno pismo predsjednika RH Franje Tuđmana Svetom Ocu Ivanu Pavlu II., 15. prosinca 1991. (Peace Letter from the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman to the Holy Father John Paul II, December 15, 1991), in: *Tuđmanov arhiv, korespondencija predsjednika Republike Hrvatske dr. sc. Franje Tuđmana od 1990. do 1999. godine, Prva knjiga, Godine stvaranja i obrane 1990. – 1991. (Tuđman's archives, correspondence Croatian President Ph.D. Franjo Tuđman from 1990 to 1999, First Book, Year of Creation and Defense 1990–1991)*, 529.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Pismo predsjednika RH Franje Tuđmana Svetom Ocu papi Ivanu Pavlu II., 21. prosinca 1991. (Letter from the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman to the Holy Father John Paul II, December 21, 1991), in: *Tuđmanov arhiv, korespondencija predsjednika Republike Hrvatske dr. sc. Franje Tuđmana od 1990. do 1999. godine, Prva knjiga, Godine stvaranja i obrane 1990. – 1991. (Tuđman's archives, correspondence Croatian President Ph.D. Franjo Tuđman from 1990 to 1999, First Book, Year of Creation and Defense 1990–1991)*, 547.

vastated and humiliated because of the Croatian tragedy.«<sup>46</sup> He also spoke to the diplomatic corps on January 11, 1992, and said: »Horrrifying pictures show civilians who were literally overrun by the conflicts that tore Yugoslavia, but mostly Croatia, apart. Destroyed houses, people forced to become refugees, a devastated economy, churches, and hospitals are systematically shelled. Who would not be distraught by such acts that are condemned by the mind? You are aware of my many calls to reconciliation and dialogue. You are also aware of the position of the Holy See regarding the recognition of states born in Europe. Today I would like to limit my speech to stressing that the peoples have the right to choose their own way of thinking and coexistence. It is up to them to provide the means to help them fulfil their legitimate longings which were determined freely and democratically. Besides, the community of peoples created texts and legal instruments that determine the rights and obligations of each people and, at the same time, envisage various methods of cooperation to harmonise the necessary relationships between sovereign states both regionally and internationally. One definitely cannot shape the future of any country or any continent using bombs.«<sup>47</sup> This was a kind of an appeal of the Pope to the world to recognise Croatia and Slovenia. The Holy See recognised both Croatia and Slovenia on January 13, 1992. All of the important press agencies in the world published the news that the press office of the Holy See published in the form of an official notification stating, amongst other things:

»Today, on January 13, 1992, the Holy See sent notifications to the governments of the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia, informing them of the recognition of their sovereignty and independence.« In other words, the Holy See has let the world know, as well as the Croatian people and all citizens of Croatia, that it recognises the Republic of Croatia as a sovereign and independent county. Regardless of the fact that the Holy See is traditionally cautious in international political relations, Pope John Paul II had no doubts!

He was perfectly clear when he said that the historic moment has arrived and that the Croatian people are entitled to build their own future within the internationally recognised boundaries of the Republic of Croatia. Not only

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<sup>46</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Solemnity of Mary Most Holy Mother of God, World Day of Peace, Wednesday, January 1, 1992, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1992/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19920101.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1992/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19920101.html) (12. 02. 2018).

<sup>47</sup> JOHN PAUL II, The discourse to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Saturday, January 1, 1992, in: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1992/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19920111\\_diplomatic-corps.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1992/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19920111_diplomatic-corps.html) (10. 02. 2018).

did the Holy See influence the governments of European and other countries to stop the genocidal war and territorial conquest of Serbs, it also played a significant part in the awakening of the Croatian national awareness and in the creation of a critical mass of self-confidence and will of the Croatians to stand strong through all the trials and win their freedom and independence. The support to Croatia and Slovenia also had an ecumenical side. The official Church and Holy Father, in particular, tried very hard to make sure that the support is not biased or closely connected to a particular confession. They supported both the preservation of interests of the Catholic Church and the basic human rights and God's principles. During the entire duration of the war, the Vatican had been offering a reconciliatory hand to both the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people, praying for peace. This kind of ecumenical politics and doctrine were of great importance to John Paul II.<sup>48</sup> The Holy See frequently reiterated that the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia is not meant to go against anyone. In its statements dated December 20, 1991, and January 13, 1992, the Holy See stressed that it would like to maintain and improve its relations with all the countries of former Yugoslavia. Before recognising the Republics of Croatia and Slovenia, the apostolic nuncio in Belgrade, Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, handed in a diplomatic verbal notice to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia. In this note, the Holy See informed the Ministry of the upcoming recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, stressing that this is not an adversarial act directed against Yugoslavia. Quite the opposite, the Holy See stressed its desire not only to cooperate but also to improve its relation with Yugoslavia. It must be said that the diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Yugoslavia were never broken off, although some members of Yugoslav propaganda frequently named the Holy See as one of the countries that actively participated in the destruction of the unified country of Yugoslavia.<sup>49</sup> Aside from that, the Serbian public criticised the Vatican for being biased in favour of Croatia. The then President of France, Francois Mitterrand also spoke very sharply about the Vatican-German axis that was to blame for the disintegration of the federation. The Vatican, i.e. Msgr. Tauran, the Secretary of the Holy See for the relations with states, responded numerous times to such accusations. He said that the intention of the recognition of Croatia and

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Mario NOBILO, *Hrvatski Feniks. Diplomatski procesi iza zatvorenih vrata 1990.–1997. (Croatian Phoenix. Diplomatic Processes Behind the Closed Doors 1990–1997)*, Zagreb, 2000, 170–171.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Nikola ETEROVIĆ, *Sveta Stolica i priznavanje Republike Hrvatske (The Holy See and the Recognition of the Republic of Croatia)*, 43.



Slovenia was to stop the Serbian aggression against Croatia and convince the international community to recognise its independence.<sup>50</sup>

Those were the moments of the long-awaited, understandable and immeasurable joy and celebration for Croatia. The Catholic Church, as a part of the Croatian people, also shared the joy of Croatian independence. The then Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, who tirelessly visited destroyed Croatian cities, burnt-down villages, destroyed churches, the wounded, the exiled and the ill and injured, expressed his gratitude for the international recognition of Croatia in a grateful letter to Pope John Paul II. He pointed out: »Holy Father! We are immensely pleased with the decision of the Holy See to recognise Croatia as a free and democratic state. In the name of the Church in Croatia, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to Your Holiness for constantly defending universal principles of human rights, national rights and peace among peoples by means of your high moral reputation. The recognition of the Holy See is in the service of peace and reconciliation among men for all the people to be free and maintain friendly relationships.« In conclusion, Cardinal Kuharić stresses: »Croatia, ever faithful...«<sup>51</sup>

The diplomatic relation between the Holy See and Croatia was established as early as February 8, 1992, and on May 11, 1992, the papal nuncio, Msgr. Giulio Einaudi presented his credentials to President Tuđman. That was the moment when the diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Croatia were established. On July 3, 1992, the first Croatian ambassador to the Holy See, Ive Livljanić, presented his credentials to the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II.<sup>52</sup>

Gratitude for the role played by Pope John Paul II in the international recognition of Croatia and stopping the Serbian aggression against Croatia was best pointed out by the Croatian president Franjo Tuđman during the Pope's visit to Croatia in 1994. The first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman, in his welcome speech, said that John Paul II was the first to rise in defence of the assaulted Croatian people and supported the Croatian people's desire for freedom and sovereignty. The Pope taught by example as well as cautioned the disinterested world. On November 20, 1991, the Pope received pilgrims from the destroyed Vukovar and on December 9, 1992, he protested against the

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Andrea RICCARDI, *Ivan Pavao II., biografija (John Paul II, Biography)*, Split, 2011., 359.

<sup>51</sup> Archbishop of Zagreb, Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, Telegram of Gratitude addressed to Pope John Paul II for recognition of the Croatian state, Velimir BLAŽEVIĆ, *Katolička Crkva u Hrvata u službi mira i stvaranja samostalne Hrvatske (The Catholic Church in Croatia in the Service of Peace and Creation of Independent Croatia)*, 237.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ive LIVLJANIĆ, *Od Svetog Grgura do Svetog Petra (From St. Gregory to St. Peter)*, 103.

bombing of Dubrovnik and the destruction of its priceless cultural heritage. Speaking at the synod of bishops (European department) in December 1991, the Pope warned against the barbaric violence and the destruction of cultural and religious monuments, devastation of churches and hospitals, persecution and killing of the population, as witnessed by the callous world in Croatia. The Pope stated that such events defile Europe and destroy the trust of people and peoples in the entire Western civilization.<sup>53</sup> The Croatian president Franjo Tuđman stated that »January 15, 1992, is that day that will be written in gold letters in the entire fourteen-century-long history of the Croatian people«. He also thanked the Pope in a letter, saying: »On May 25, 1991, when I was honoured by an audience in the Vatican as the head of the sovereign state of Croatia, I expressed my pleasure to once again be able to establish a permanent connection between Croatia and the Holy See, the connection that was not allowed during the Communist era...«<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

The Holy See monitored the changes that had begun in Yugoslavia and its member states with great concern. In the beginning, it had no objections to the current federal system that was decided upon freely by the peoples making up the federation. However, under new conditions, the Holy See thought it possible and appropriate that a new, confederate system be introduced among Yugoslav peoples and republics. After the referendum on independence in Croatia, and the armed intervention of the federal army in Slovenia that ensued, and particularly after the war spread to Croatia, when it became obvious that such a political solution is out of the question, the Holy See became one of the firmest and most determined supporters of the recognition of sovereignty and independence of Croatia and Slovenia, with a precondition of their acceptance of legal framework, which would guarantee national minorities all the rights that they have in other democratic countries. The Holy See believed that the recognition would lead to the cessation of war. By recognising the independence of the people under attack, the Holy See provided Croatia with international political and diplomatic protection. In conclusion, we can repeat the words of Nikola Eterović, who

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Welcoming speech of Franjo Tuđman during Pope John Paul II first visit to Croatia, Zagreb, September 10, 1994, Franjo ŠANJEK – Božidar PETRAČ (ed.), *Ivan Pavao II. i Hrvati (John Paul II and Croats)*, 78.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

stated that Croatia was lucky to have had at the helm of the Holy See a pope like John Paul II, who was brave and strong enough to apply the principles of international law on concrete cases of Croatia and Slovenia and who was well acquainted with the nature of Communism as a totalitarian regime. The pressure exerted by the Pope was a deciding factor in the recognition of the Republic of Croatia. He opposed any and all forms of denial of freedom and, at the same time, firmly stood in favour of understanding and reconciliation. Until his death, Pope John Paul II remained an advocate and friend of the Republic of Croatia in all political situations and through all social changes. He actively supported the fulfilment of the Croatian dream of an independent state and the cessation of wars in former Yugoslavia. His visit in 1994, when the war was still raging and one-third of Croatia was still occupied, left a deep mark in the collective memory of the Croatian people. He came among the faithful of Croatia and offered his support, comforted them, gave hope, and asked for the reconciliation of the warring parties.

### *Sažetak*

#### **ULOGA SVETE STOLICE I IVANA PAVLA II. U MEĐUNARODNOM PRIZNANJU REPUBLIKE HRVATSKE**

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*Uz obrambeni Domovinski rat Hrvatska je vodila i diplomatsku bitku za međunarodno priznanje. Snažnu potporu traženju mirnog rješenja u okviru međunarodno priznatih granica Republike Hrvatske pružali su vatikanska diplomacija i tadašnji papa Ivan Pavao II., papa koji je imao presudnu ulogu u prevladavanju totalitarne i protivjerske ideologije koja je četrdeset godina dijelila Europu. Uloga pape Ivana Pavla II. u traženju mira na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije vidljiva je u njegovim pokušajima ekumenske suradnje i vjerske tolerancije, i u otvorenu suprotstavljanju ratu i provođenju etničkog čišćenja. Potpora pravu Slovenaca i Hrvata na državnost i slobodu polazila je od*

poštivanja temeljnih ljudskih prava i Božjih načela. Papa Ivan Pavao II. zalagao se za ostvarenje hrvatske težnje za samostalnom državom i za prestanak ratova na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije. Među dokumentima kojima je vatikanska diplomacija reagirala na događaje u bivšoj Jugoslaviji posebnu težinu ima memorandum od 26. studenoga 1991., koji polazi od načela međunarodnog prava i od odredaba jugoslavenskog Ustava iz 1974. godine o pravu pojedinih republika SFRJ da se odcijepi od jugoslavenske federacije. Bez obzira na to što je Sveta Stolica u međunarodnim političkim odnosima tradicionalno oprezna, papa Ivan Pavao II. u ovom slučaju nije dvojio. U notama upućenim ministarstvima vanjskih poslova Hrvatske i Slovenije 20. prosinca 1991. godine Sveta Stolica izvijestila je o svojoj namjeri da prizna njihovu suverenost i neovisnost, što je i učinila 13. siječnja 1992. godine.

Ključne riječi: *Ivan Pavao II., Sveta Stolica, međunarodno priznanje Republike Hrvatske, Domovinski rat.*