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## Organisational Development of Parties and Internal Party Democracy in Croatia

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### Summary

The analysis of the organisational development of the Croatian parties and internal party democracy has showed several things. First, the organisational aspect of party life is poorly legally regulated and the attempts to change the situation by imposing some new and stricter regulations are not likely to succeed. Second, the Croatian parties do not depart from the common post-communist experience of party organisational life, with a rather rigid structure, their organisational uniformity and little substantial change through time. Third, internal party democracy is generally low, with the strong power centralisation, strong presidents, little participation of members and selection procedures highly controlled by the leaderships. Nevertheless, even within such uniform picture it is possible to draw some differences between the parties. By differentiating between the degree of internal party democracy and the type of internal party structure, the analysis paved the way to a more sophisticated strategy for political reform.

*Key words:* Croatia, political parties, party organization, party democracy, leadership



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### *Introduction*

Internal party democracy has never been a theoretically straight issue (Wright, 1971: 17-54). While some authors insisted on the importance of internal party democracy for functioning of the democratic system as a whole (Duverger, 1963: 134; Michels, 1990), the others stressed that the logic of party competition rather than the internal party democracy is the element that makes democracy functioning (Sartori, 1977: 54-56; Epstein, 1972). It is not only scholars who have had their doubts about internal party democracy. Equally indecisive are party members when it comes to internal reforms towards more democracy in their parties (Saglie/Heidar, 2004; Young/Cross, 2002).

Internal party democracy has not been particularly developed in the parties of the new post-communist countries (Biezen, 2003: 203-214). Their parties were mainly internally created, according to the “top-bottom” way of expanding their organisations and organisational development through limited penetration. Apart from the undemocratic communist heritage, that was another condition not conducive to the development of a more democratic organisational structure of the new parties. Since Croatia shares both conditions with the other transitional countries in post-communist Europe, one would expect to find a low degree of internal party democracy in Croatia’s major parties as well.

The aim of this paper is to describe party structures of Croatian parties and to compare them according to the criteria of internal party democracy. The first section presents the state of the legal regulations and restrictions concerning the organisational issues of Croatian political parties. In the second section the basic model of organisational structure of the parties is approached by differentiating among three faces of party organisations: party on the ground, party in the central office and party in the public office (Katz/Mair, 1995; Katz/Mair, 2002). The criteria for comparison and evaluation of the condition of internal party democracy as well as the comparative analysis are developed in the third section. Finally, the last section draws some conclusions and tentative recommendations.

The analysis is based on seven major Croatian parties. All the parties have existed since at least 1990 and have competed in national elections at least since 1992. These parties together regularly win the vast majority of the parliamentary seats and have been the main partners in the coalition governments since 2000, as coalition politics marks the political life in Croatia. Although some other smaller parties have also played a role in the coalition governments, their appearance and electoral success nevertheless do not qualify them as relevant parties. And conversely, HSLŠ, though problematic due to its extraordinary bad electoral performance in the last elections, is included in the analysis. For more on the parties included, see *Appendix 1*.

### *Legislation on Political Parties*

The main legal provisions that regulate organisational matters and activities of political parties in Croatia are given in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and the Act on Political Parties.<sup>1</sup> Article 6 of the Constitution of 1990 only stipulates that the parties should be territorially organized.<sup>2</sup> Later, as a part of the constitutional changes of 2000, the Article was amended so that the provision on the territorial organization of the

<sup>1</sup> Other formal rules that only indirectly affect internal party organization are Parliamentary Rules of Standard Procedure, which regulate activities of the parliamentary party, but in a way not to interfere with party autonomy, and legislation on electoral process, constituencies and electoral campaign.

<sup>2</sup> This was a direct reaction to the socialist practice of cell organisations at workplaces of the League of Communists. Apart from this the Article also proclaims freedom of party formation and responsibility of the Constitutional Court to forbid political party that actively works against state integrity and democratic order, but in the article I will consider only those legal elements that directly refer to internal party organisation.

parties (which anyway became part of the Act of Political Parties) was dropped, while the requirement that the parties should be internally organized according to constitutional democratic principles was introduced.

The legislation regulating the political parties was originally passed in 1990 as the Act on Political Organizations by the then socialist composition of the parliament, exactly between the first and the second round of the founding democratic elections in Croatia. On several occasions it was later minimally amended, so that its main provisions considering the organisational aspect of the political parties remained and mostly survived in the succeeding Act on Political Parties in 1993. The second law was also amended several times (last time in 2001), mostly in regard to the changes in the model of direct state financing of political parties.

As a consequence, the political parties in Croatia have been acting all the time under roughly the same legal restrictions regarding their organisational life. The most important of these refer to the registration procedure, membership, territorial organization and party subunits, and generally are rather loosely set. Thus, in order to register as a political party, at least a hundred citizens with the right to vote should organize a public meeting and pass the party program and the statute. This rather undemanding requirement resulted in the fact that during the last 15 years more than a hundred parties have been registered in Croatia.<sup>3</sup> The right to become a party member is also legally restricted only to adult citizens. Party activity is defined as public activity in principle, though with the right of the parties to exclude the public from their internal affairs under certain conditions. The parties should be organized strictly territorially, with a clear ban on establishing party organizational units in companies, institutions or any other type of legal subjects. The law stipulates that the party statutes must further regulate membership issues, the forms of internal organisation and party bodies, their terms and election procedures, but does not point to any specific type of internal party relationships, leaving room for the parties to freely choose how to regulate the issues.

The first Act of 1990 for some reason banned the establishment of youth organizations within the political parties, but the next Act of 1993 removed this ban. Also, the Act of 1993 clearly excluded the possibility for the party subunits to become legal subjects in themselves, enforcing in that way the existing pattern of party organisational development through penetration, and precluding the party diffusion (Panebianco, 1988: 50). Finally, the Act of 1993 introduced the principle that party leadership should be exercised by party members directly or indirectly, through elected representatives. In this way, the law obliged internal party organisation to follow some form of democratic principle though in very vague terms.

After Article 6 of the Constitution of 2000 prescribed democratic norms and principles for party organisation, the question of the further legal development of the constitutional article arose. The pressure from the public and civil society on the party leaderships to pass a law that would regulate the party activities in a more detailed manner,

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, for some independent candidates in the last two elections for the Sabor (Croatian parliament) it was easier to register as a political party than to collect 500 signatures needed for their candidacy as independents to be officially accepted.

particularly with regard to transparency, internal party democracy and party financing, provoked a negative response from the parliament.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, the political parties in Croatia are still operating under a rather tiny set of legal rules.

### *Organisational Structure and Development of Parties*

Roughly speaking, all Croatian parties could be classified under the same organisational type. The differences between the parties concerning their membership, local organisation, ancillary organisations, the number of organisational levels, the number and type of party organs, selection procedures, and the relationship to the parliamentary party, though present, are barely visible and do not allow for detection of more than one organisational model. In this way the Croatian parties fit the theory that the organisational similarities in European parties can be best explained by national traditions. However, these similarities are far more pronounced in the Croatian case than in the case of West European parties (Scarrow/Webb/Farrell, 2000), or even parties in some post-communist countries, such as Hungary and Czech Republic (Biezen, 2003; Deegan-Krause 2005).

The organisational model can be best described through several characteristics: a very limited (if any) role of non-members in party affairs, a very limited direct role of party members in the decision-making process, a lack of party factions, a weak influence of functional groups (youth, women, retired persons, etc.) within parties, a lack of affiliated organizations; the hierarchical internal order, simple organisational patterns copied at all levels, indirect elections of central party bodies, the significant overlapping of the party in the central office and the party in the public office, the limited autonomy of the parliamentary party, party presidents also hold the most influential public positions (president, prime minister, president of the parliamentary party), the selection procedures incorporate only the central bodies with a prominent role of the party president. It is obvious that internal party democracy in all the parties does not have high priority. Just the contrary: the party organisation is subordinated to the aims of efficient management of the party activities by the party leadership. Moreover, organisational uniformity in a way has erased the differences that have marked the specific developments of some parties, so that today it is not easy to find the traces in party structure of the specific intermingling of the party and the movement that characterized the HDZ during

<sup>4</sup> A group of university professors and experts for political science and law around the NGO Croatian Law Centre prepared a Draft Proposal of the Law on Political Parties (Prpić, 2004). The Draft was inspired by the German Law on Political Parties and provoked criticism for being rather detailed and unnecessarily restrictive (109 articles). Nevertheless, the Parliamentary Committee on Constitution and Political System adopted the Draft and put it in motion. The motion was rejected by the parliament during the preliminary discussion. Since 2000, the political parties in Croatia have been heavily criticised for their non-transparency, corruption, excessive money-spending, politicization of the public sphere, inefficiency in governing, non-democratic internal practice, destructive effects of party discipline, exclusion of experts from decision-making, etc. More radical demands challenge the existing model of political representation and suggest new forms of representative bodies, composed of intellectuals, representatives of social classes and groups, representatives of NGOs and moral individuals.

the 1990s, or the SDP's communist heritage, or the elitist beginnings of liberal parties, such as the HSLS or the HNS.

Another common feature of the Croatian parties are the relatively frequent changes of their statutes, which were not related to the rather limited real organisational changes that the new sets of rules had introduced. Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of party conventions ended by some amendments of the statutes, the larger-scale changes, particularly those that changed the initial organisational models, rarely occurred. One of these larger-scale changes refers only to the HSS, which through several subsequent amendments of the statute during the 1990s completely changed the structure and the manner of electing the central bodies, the Presidency and the Main Board, but yet without any innovation regarding the existing practice.

Most organisational changes in Croatian parties can be classified under the evolutionary (Panebianco, 1988: 239-250) or "life-cycle" (Harmel, 2002: 121) approach. The parties changed their statutes simply as they were maturing and becoming more complex organisations, in most cases simply to regulate the issues that initially had not been regulated or to adapt some rules that would make them more flexible or stricter, depending on the management problems they experienced. Another incentive for organisational changes were the crises in maintaining internal party discipline, open disobedience of party factions or attempts of group of party activists to challenge the existing leadership. These "discrete changes" (Harmel, 2002: 125-128) usually led to the solutions that facilitated the control of internal dynamics for the party leaders and eventually additionally centralised the parties. The remarkable "system-level" changes (Harmel, 2002: 122-125) due to legal, technological or competitive influences, apart from the organisational adjustment of the parties to the newly introduced system of local self-government in 1992, were virtually absent. Also it seems that Janda's proposition on electoral defeat as "the mother of party change" (Harmel, 2002: 126) can be applied to the Croatian parties only to a point, since some changes happened just after electoral successes.

The sources of the above mentioned uniformity in the organisation of Croatian parties, as it is obvious from the first section, should not be sought in legal influences but rather in the way the Croatian political parties were established. All of them originated in the similar manner: they followed the "top-down" model, with the prominent role of the national party elites in establishing and developing party organisation. Furthermore, these elites had been socialised, regardless of the dissident position of some individuals, within the same socialist organisational culture and inherited the same organisational patterns. Without a broader insight into the variety of party organisational forms, without the remarkable pre-communist tradition and in the transitional "lack-of-time" conditions, these elites naturally tended to develop similar organisational styles and probably mutual copying as well. The absence of later outside incentives and the fact that the party leaderships did not consider the organisational issues and style as a means in the competition for voters, resulted in the uniform organisational model, with the inherited distinctive features of each party unchanged from the beginning.

The internal structure of the Croatian parties includes at least three (HNS, HSLs, HSP, IDS, SDP) and in some parties (HDZ, HSS) four layers.<sup>5</sup> Regarding the party on the ground, the members are organized in branches or local organisations where, depending on their membership size, they can or cannot directly participate in local conventions. The executive bodies, elected by the conventions at the local level, make most local party decisions, design the activities and encompass the bulk of active party members. The intermediate (county) level, usually a structural copy of the local level, consists of the representatives from the local level and is of secondary importance in most parties, with the exception of the regional IDS in which the county level is actually the highest party level. At the national level, the parties organise regular national conventions consisting of the representatives from the local level (HNS, HSP, IDS, SDP), from the intermediate level (HSS) or from both levels combined (HDZ, HSLs). Besides, national conventions regularly include *ex officio* members of national bodies, MPs and sometimes also presidents from the intermediate level. The national conventions meet annually (HDZ, HSS, SDP), every two years (HSLs, IDS) or every four years (HNS, HSP), but the electoral conventions are, in principle, organised every four years. The main functions of the national conventions are to discuss political issues, pass party programs and statutes and elect the members of the central party bodies.

The party in central office is represented by the national executive called Presidency (HDZ, HNS, HSS, HSP, IDS), Executive Committee (SDP) or Minor Council (HSLs), the national committee that is the highest political body between two conventions (Central Board in HDZ and HNS, Main Board in HSP, HSS and SDP, Great Council in HSLs and Council in IDS), one or more bodies for supervision and internal control (Supervisory Boards, Courts of Honour, Statutory Commissions) and sometimes Advisory Councils (HNS, SDP) consisting of non-members as well. The national executive is the main political and operative body that helps party presidents to manage the parties, representing the most powerful group within the party, i.e. party leadership. Apart from the party presidencies there are, with variations from party to party, subordinated bodies of party experts, advisors and professionals, coordinated usually by the party secretary, who together make the central party office. The national committee is a broader body, consisting of 50 to 100 members or even more (HSS), which should act as the main political control of party leadership, with statutory powers of drafting political programs, of making proposals for amendments of the statute, of passing internal party rules, of preparing the conventions, (in some parties) of making the final decision in the selection process and, in various way, of electing or confirming the members of the executive body. Although the central party bodies should be accountable to the party conventions as the representatives of the membership, not even all members of the central executives and committees are elected by the national party conventions. In this the parties range from the HSP and the HNS, in which only the presidents are elected by the party convention, to the HDZ and the HSLs, in which roughly half of the members are

<sup>5</sup> Number of layers fits the size of membership for each party, so it is not surprising that the HDZ and the HSS, as the parties with biggest membership have also best developed their local organisation. In this respect, Croatian parties seem to be rather advanced in comparison with other post-communist countries, not only because of the HDZ's huge membership in the 1990s, but because of the other parties' membership as well (Čular, 2004: 101-108).

elected at the conventions, to the SDP in which the majority of the members of both bodies are elected by the convention.

A party in public office is, like in other post-communist democracies (Biezen, 2003: 214-218), very often indistinguishable from a party in central office, since MPs and ministers are regularly members of at least one body at the central level. However, it could be said that the parliamentary party is subordinated to extra-parliamentary leadership. Firstly, the party statutes and other internal acts stipulate that, in one way or another, the parliamentary party should be accountable to the central party organs. Secondly, financial resources, from membership fees, donations or the state budget, flow to the central office of the parties and not to the parliamentary party. Thirdly, the turnover in the parliamentary factions of all parties has been constantly high from one parliamentary term to another, which has created a thin layer of top party leaders and, at the same time, has made the only experienced MPs very dominant within the parliamentary party. All in all, parliamentary parties lack autonomy in designing party platforms, in coalition bargaining, in financial matters, and, in some parties, in election of the parliamentary party leader. On the other hand, the only evidence of reversed influence can be seen in the practice of most parties that the MPs are *ex officio* members of the organs at lower organisational levels, though it could be equally interpreted as controlling of the parties' central offices over the party on the ground.

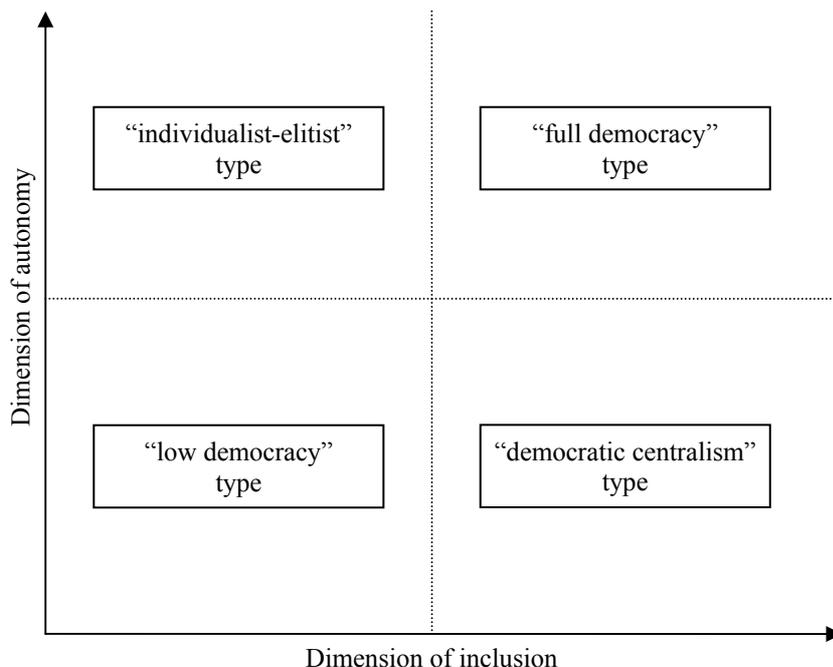
### *Internal Party Democracy*

Internal party democracy means that the party will should be formed “bottom-up” and that the internal distribution of power should be marked by dispersion at different levels, bodies and individuals rather than by the concentration in one organ. Unlike most definitions of democracy at the level of political system, the definition of internal party democracy does not mean a state that can be distinguished from other forms of internal party order. It is rather about the scale by which we can measure the extent to which a party is democratically organized and eventually compare parties. It goes without saying that, again unlike “big democracy”, internal party democracy should be taken as a neutral term and valued only if contributes to the quality of the “big democracy”.

Furthermore, internal party democracy is by no means a one-dimensional concept. For instance, while in some parties a stage in internal democracy can be achieved by decentralising the decision-making process, in other the same stage can be reached by the direct participation of its members in party conventions. Contrary to this, and sometimes for exactly the same reason, it is not easy to decide which configuration of power distribution is more democratic. Should we, for instance, value the autonomy of the parliamentary party more than its accountability to the bodies of party membership? Similarly, not all of the organisational features of parties are related to the concept of internal party democracy. The lack or existence of ancillary or affiliated organisations does not speak much about internal party democracy. These and similar cases should therefore be considered as indicators of different types of party organisation rather than the indicators of the level of internal party democracy.

In this paper I am going to try to determine the level of internal party democracy in Croatian parties according to two main dimensions. The first dimension refers to the vertical power-sharing, i.e. to the autonomy of different party units, whether members or local branches, and the measures of the extent to which the “party on the ground” can freely act and influence decision-making processes at different party levels. The dimension can range from very decentralised structures, party floor open to discussions and initiatives and central decisions heavily dependent upon local level to very centralised parties that arbitrary preclude initiatives from the bottom and the decision-making processes concentrated at the national level. It can further be broken down into three sub-dimensions: the rights of party members, the autonomy of local branches and the influence of lower organisational levels in central decision making bodies (see *Appendix 2*).

Picture 1: Two dimensions of internal party democracy and IPD types



The second dimension could be called participatory dimension or dimension of inclusion. It refers to the horizontal aspect of organisation, the measures of how many members the decision-making process includes and compares the prerogatives allocated to the wider party bodies with those given to the narrower circle of leadership. This dimension can also be broken down to three sub-dimensions: the direct role of members in the decision-making process, the prerogatives of the conventions of members or

delegates vs. the executive bodies and the concentration of power in the hands of the party president (see *Appendix 2*). While on the one end of the scale there is the party with most decisions passed by the membership assemblies, the direct elections and the constrained party president, on the opposite end there is the party with power mostly concentrated within the narrow circles of executives, the indirect system of representation and the powerful president.

The fact that these two dimensions sometimes refer to the same object, i.e. the members' rights, should not be misleading, since the individual rights of autonomous actions and attitudes and the rights of direct collective decision-making can easily be seen as different types of indicators. Furthermore, the two dimensions are held theoretically independent, meaning that combined they can produce different outcomes, depending on the place a party occupies on each dimension (see *Picture 1*). The results can differ according to the degree of internal democracy (if both placements of each party are low or high), but also according to the type of internal democracy (if parties have different placement on each dimension). In this way we can distinguish among four types of parties: "low democracy" parties, "individualist-elitist" type of party, "full democracy" party and party of "democratic centralism".

#### *Members' Rights and Protection*

All the parties introduced similar conditions for citizens to become party members as well as the general rights for them once they are party members. In general, citizenship, voting rights, the willingness to accept a party program, exclusive membership and confirmation by some party organ are the requirements for a citizen to become a party member. They have the right to participate in party discussions and decision-making, to elect and be elected to party bodies or to party lists and be informed about party activities. The only party that formally recognizes the right of its members to form a faction is the SDP, but up to now this right has not been exercised, partly also due to the expressed hostility to such attempts by the party leadership.

Disciplinary procedures against party members and officials clearly reveal the degree of freedom enjoyed by members. While all parties have disciplinary measure of exclusion from the party, some also have other measures such as reprimanding, suspension, ban on candidacy, etc. All the parties from the beginning introduced some sort of a two-step procedure of exclusion with the right of party member to complaints procedure. However, while at the beginning the executive bodies or even the party conventions mostly took part in the procedure, later the role was taken over by the supervisory bodies and the internal courts, and in some parties (HSLŠ, SDP) reached high standards. The exceptions are the HSS, in which executive bodies still decide in the procedure of the so-called "political exclusion", and the HDZ, where the final decision in the exclusion of the members of the central party bodies is made by the party presidency. After the present Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader had tightly won the HDZ presidency in 2002 and faced enormous opposition within the party, the HDZ added a special procedure of "erasing from the party register" the members that damage the party's political interests or reputation. This far the most restrictive procedure against the Croatian parties' membership is completely up to the executive bodies and

does not specify any sort of complaints procedure. These two parties also used the specified procedures most frequently, the HSS in mid-1990s and in the HDZ the newly introduced mechanism was massively applied after 2002. Other severe reductions of members autonomy is the HSP's statutory provision according to which an elected or *ex officio* member of a party body can be dismissed from the position by the decision of that body.

#### *Autonomy of the Local Level*

While some parties emphasized the general principles of local party autonomy (HNS), the statutes of other parties (HSS, HSP) are full of general statements of subordination of the local to the central level. It is the reflection of the fact that the local organisation not only serves as the framework for expressing the will of the membership, but also as the organiser of party work on the ground, particularly during electoral campaigns. Since all parties prescribe the organisational model to the local level, there are not many organisational variations from one local branch to another. Regarding important decisions, such as selection procedures for local elections or coalition strategy, local organisation are somewhat more autonomous in the HNS, HSLs and SDP than in the HSS, HDZ and IDS where such procedures include either hierarchical coordination or confirmation from the central level. Far most centralised in this respect is the HSP whose local bodies can only propose candidates for local elections, but the final decision is the president's prerogative.

Central party bodies in many situations can infringe upon local autonomy. First, local branches can be closed down, with (HDZ, HSS, IDS, SDP) or without (HNS, HSLs, HSP) the right to complaints procedure. Second, central bodies can organize local conventions, usually under certain conditions (HDZ, HNS, HSP, HSS), but also at any time (HSLs, HSP, SDP). Third, very often such interventions are covered by a very broad term of coordinating the local level by the central executive bodies, which is particularly developed within the HSS. Fourth, higher levels can sometimes take over local decision-making (HDZ) or send its representatives to the meetings of local executive bodies (HDZ, HSP, IDS). And finally, great influence on local decision-making is exercised through the *ex officio* members from higher levels. This principle is most strictly applied in the HSS, in which all party officials from all party or state offices are members of the party bodies in their branch or a local and county organisation.

Altogether, centralisation is most pronounced in the HSP and then in the HSS and HDZ. In these parties there is a strong "top-down" line of decision-making about internal party life and "bottom-up" principle of responsibility. The HNS, HSLs and SDP, on the other hand, are not characterised by any radical way of imposing discipline over local party organisation. However, the practice by the HNS and the SDP partly limits the proclaimed local party autonomy, since the central leaderships often choose informal ways to put pressure on local leaders. Somewhere in between these two groups is the regional IDS.

### *Influence of the Local Level on the Central Party*

National party conventions consist of the representatives elected or appointed from lower party levels. While in the HNS, HSP, IDS and SDP only the local levels participate in this, in the HSLs and HDZ the representatives are combined from the local and the intermediate level. In the HSS the local party level is completely excluded from the direct election of the representatives in the national conventions. With regard to the right of the lower levels to elect or appoint their representatives in the central political and executive bodies, there is a big difference between the HNS and IDS on one hand and the SDP on the other. While the central bodies of the former parties consist of the majority of members from the intermediate and the local level, in the SDP the central level of decision-making is completely independent from the local level. The role of the local organisations and branches in the selection procedure for parliamentary elections is of secondary importance in all the parties. Only in some parties (HDZ, HNS, HSLs, SDP) local bodies can nominate candidates for the selection procedure, but even in those parties there is no guarantee that they will be accepted by the central selection bodies. Neither it is possible for local branches to nominate candidates for selection procedures at the level of constituencies, since no party organisationally operates at that level in any sense. Concerning the initiatives towards the national party level, the local bodies in the HNS, HSLs and IDS and the intermediate organisations in other parties can convene a special session of the convention and/or change of the statute.

The organisational structure of the HNS and the IDS gives to the local level the most room for designing their party politics. In that way, the role of the huge bodies of the membership representatives (conventions) is made secondary in comparison to the circle of party officials who at the same time hold the leading local posts and participate in the central party bodies. On the opposite end are the HSS, HSP and the SDP with the central level of decision-making virtually independent from the local level. However, while in the case of the SDP this is an obvious consequence of the “assembly” model of internal party democracy and in the case of the HSS a combination of the “assembly” model and stronger centralisation, in the case of the HSP it is an exclusive result of the overall centralisation of internal party power, which does not leave any room for genuine local impact on the party leadership. The HSLs and the HDZ are somewhere in between these two groups.

### *Direct Participation of Members*

In Croatia this indicator refers to the conventions of basic organisations, their size, prerogatives and the frequency of meeting. All other party bodies are established according to the indirect model of representation. Within these limits, the members of the HSS enjoy the greatest opportunity for direct participation, since all are the members of the branch assembly, they meet once a month, have autonomy in local matters, elect the executive bodies and their representatives for higher level conventions. Direct participation of the members of the HNS, IDS and the SDP depends on the size of their local branches. If a branch is small then the members can enjoy even more participatory rights than in the HSS, but if a branch or an organisation is huge enough, the only direct activity of the members is electing the representatives of the local convention. In the

HDZ, HSLs and the HSP, the members meet rarely and elect an executive body that takes over all the local activities between two electoral conventions. Only the HSLs allows for a possibility that a certain number of members initiate disciplinary exclusion of a member, call a national convention and each individually initiates amendments of the statute.

#### *Conventions vs. Executives*

This variable refers to power-sharing at the same organisational level. The first indicator is the extent to which the members of the central political and the executive bodies are elected by national party assembly. While only in the SDP and the HSLs the majority of the members of the main political body, and only in the HSS and the HDZ the majority of the members of the presidency are elected at the party convention, in the HNS, HSP and the IDS only a few members (e.g. presidents, vice-presidents, honorary president) are elected by the convention. Regarding the selection processes, no Croatian party requires the convention or any other representative body for the final selection (Kasapović, 2004: 73). While in some parties (HDZ, HSS) the final decision concerning the party lists is in the domain of the party presidency, in other parties the presidency or the president himself/herself propose the lists, which are then confirmed by the national political board. However, the strongest position of the executive is in the HSP, for the whole range of special prerogatives of the presidency and the exclusive control of the selection process by the president. Besides, narrow executive bodies in all the parties have different prerogatives, in dismantling the lower-level organisations (all parties), in coordinating the lower-level bodies (HNS, HSP), in coordinating and controlling the parliamentary factions (HDZ, HSLs, HSS, HSP), in confirming the party candidates for local and regional elections (HSS, HSP, IDS), or in confirming the standing procedures at local levels (IDS).

Local assemblies in all the parties regularly participate in the election of the executive and supervisory bodies at the local level. However, their power is severely restricted by the *ex officio* members in the executive bodies, particularly by the party officials from the local, regional and national level. Given the closed system of candidate selection in all the parties, the *ex officio* members of the party executives represent the will of the leadership rather than of the membership. In addition, the executive bodies in most parties are responsible for the local selection procedure for both the local elections and the internal party elections. The only party in which all those prerogatives belong to the branch assembly is the HSS. In some parties, the local conventions of the members are excluded even from electing the representatives for the higher-level conventions (HDZ, HSLs, HSP).

#### *Power of the President*

It is generally claimed that the power of the party presidents is much more pronounced in the post-communist countries than in the old European democracies (Biezen, 2003: 206). The Croatian experience is by no means an exception. Party presidents are regularly named in the statutes as distinct bodies of their own or with decisive preroga-

tives within the executive bodies. They enjoy the widest party support, particularly in those parties in which other officials are not elected at the conventions. They regularly hold the most powerful political positions within the state. They attract the most attention from the media and in a way personalise the parties they speak for. The institution of the party “boss” exists in all Croatian parties and most members and party officials are ready to admit it.

However, it is possible to distinguish between two groups of parties: the group in which presidential power has been also formally supported by a sort of statutory “presidentialism” (HNS, HSL, HSP) and the group in which presidents have been using informal influence in order to make up for somewhat smaller statutory prerogatives they enjoy (HSS, IDS, SDP). The main characteristic of the “presidential” parties is the “winner-take-all” principle according to which presidents are made fully accountable for the work of the executive bodies and parties on the whole. Once elected at the party convention, s/he forms the party “government” in order to act according to the party program approved by the convention, while other camps and opposition groups do not have much access to the leadership.

The system is most consistently applied in the HSP where the presidency selected by the president is not confirmed by any other party body. Besides, the president makes an exclusive recommendation of 5 members for the main political body, can call a meeting of the national committee or any other executive body at the local level and chair it, and has the right to initiate the suspension procedures for party members and officials. Especially striking is the role of the president in the selection processes in the HSP. Unlike any other party, the HSP president himself/herself decides on the party lists both for the national and the local elections. The level of power concentration is additionally backed by the rather wide prerogatives of the presidency which is completely subordinated to the president. This very centralised and autocratic form of internal party relationships is the consequence of the ideological fear that much autonomy and participation leads to anarchy and entropy and has been the reason behind the stable position of the party leadership in the last ten years.

A somewhat milder form of party “presidentialism” marks the organisational structure of the HNS and the HSL, since the president’s proposals/appointments of the party “government” should be confirmed by the national committee. A minor exception refers only to the vice-president in the HSL who is elected by the national convention, but with a counterbalance in the president’s right to initiate the vote of no-confidence for the vice-president before the national committee. Besides, the HSL is the only party in which the president has the veto power in the Minor Council (the executive body). While in the HSL the presidential prerogatives are limited to the appointment of the members of the executive body, in the HNS they also belong to the members of the national committee as well. The HNS president, apart from the members of the presidency, exclusively appoints up to 15 members of the national committee and the entire Advisory Council. Since the members of the presidency as well as of the party in the parliament and government are the *ex officio* members of the national committee, it is obvious that the presidential power increases to the extent that the president, through the appointment of the party officials, can in principle control a good deal of decision-

making processes in all central party bodies.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the presidents in these two parties can initiate the dissolution (HNS) or disbanding (HSLs) of the local branches and their representative bodies.

Executive bodies in other parties (HDZ, HSS, IDS, SDP) try to balance the demand for the efficient leadership and the demand for the representation of the main political/programmatic views. Almost all their members (especially vice-presidents) are elected by the national conventions or the national committee (SDP) and can be appointed by different actors (presidents, other central bodies, local level bodies, certain number of delegates at conventions, etc.). The right of the presidents to exclusively recommend the members of the executive bodies is restricted to the function of the main secretary who performs the organisational and technical rather than the political functions. Knowing that the presidents of these parties can neither control the election of the national committee members, it is clear that the composition of the central bodies can reflect the interests of different party groups to a much greater extent than in the first group of parties. A partial exception is the HDZ in which the president is also the *ex officio* president of the Central Board and has the exclusive right to appoint the members of the inner circle of the Central Board and the central supervisory bodies.

Table 1: Evaluation of Croatian parties according to six indicators and two dimensions

Dimensions of internal party democracy	HDZ	HNS	HSLs	HSP	HSS	IDS	SDP
<b>1. Autonomy</b>							
1a. members' rights and protection	0	2	3	1	1	2	2
1b. local level autonomy	1	3	3	0	1	2	3
1c. local level influence on central party	1	3	1	0	0	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Inclusion</b>							
2a. direct member participation	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
2b. conventions vs. executives	2	1	2	0	3	1	3
2c. presidential powers	2	1	1	0	3	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

Note: Higher numbers indicate more internal democracy. All the indicators follow the same pattern except "presidential powers", where the points are reversed – more powerful presidents, less internal democracy.

In order to evaluate internal party democracy across political parties more precisely, Table 1 ascribes to each party the position relative to the other parties, according to the presented indicators and analysis. These placements are then turned into points, with

<sup>6</sup> Of 103 members of the Central Board of the party in the 2000-2004 period, 22 members were elected following the recommendation of its president Vesna Pusić, whether as members of the presidency who are *ex officio* also the members of the national board or as directly co-opted members. Statutory, this number could increase to 32 or almost 1/3 of the national committee.

higher numbers indicating more internal democracy. The fact that the values within each group of indicators correlate fairly well confirms the claim about the consistency and independence of the dimensions. The values for each party on each dimension are created by summing up the values of the indicators that a dimension consists of. By transposing these values into coordinates it is possible to design a spatial configuration of Croatian political parties (*Graph 2*). The dotted lines, cross-cutting in the average position, divide the space into four parts as it is hypothesised at the beginning of the section. The full line divides the space into the “below average” and the “above average” area. The distance between the zero-point and the upper-right direction determines the grade of internal democracy a party has achieved. This grade for each party can be calculated so to sum up  $x$  and  $y$  ( $x, y$ ).

While the HSP and to a great extent the HDZ differ from the other parties regarding the degree of internal party democracy, other parties differ from each other primarily regarding the type of internal party democracy they lean to. The HNS and HSLS and in some way the IDS have developed the “individualist-elitist” type of internal party democracy based on a high degree of decentralisation and local autonomy, but they score low on the dimension of participation. These are the parties in which small circles of local activists and officials are bearers of local party activities and, at the same time, participate in the decision-making processes in the party’s central office. Together with the national party leadership these activists and officials practically make the party, while the membership is rather excluded from the decision-making process. The pronounced role of the party president and his or her exclusive responsibility for the party once s/he is in the office are another expression of the “elitist” lack of confidence in participatory but also in pluralist internal democracy. The HNS is certainly the best example of this type of internal party democracy. In the HSLS (until recently) the national party elite was rather isolated from the local level, but consisted of a great number of nationally recognised individuals, confining itself to the typical post-communist developmental model of the “party of honourables”. On the other hand, the IDS has a more balanced internal structure which somewhat blurs its “individualist-elitist” development.

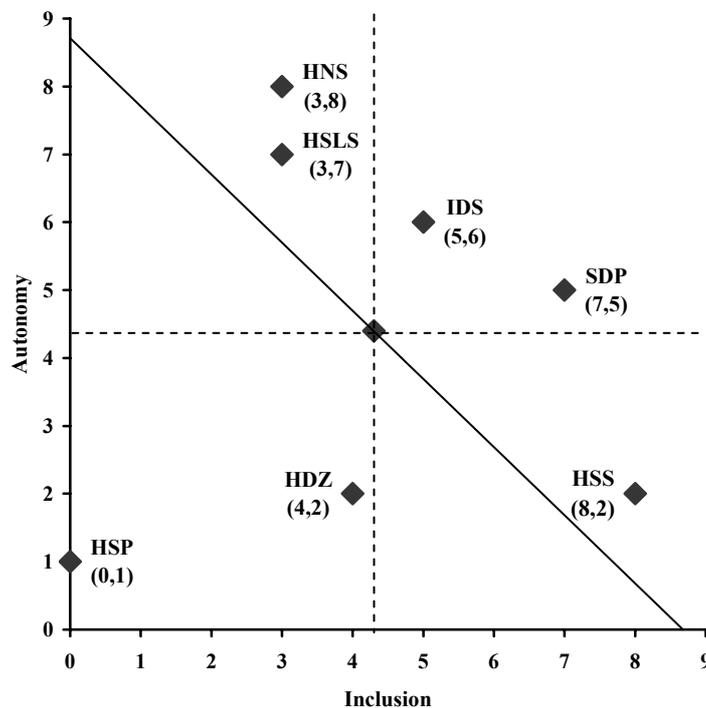
The other extreme is the HSS in which internal party democracy has been more of the “democratic centralism” type. In this type, direct participation in relatively frequent meetings of local conventions and the range of prerogatives of the local and national conventions are undone by a high degree of centralisation, low autonomy of individual members and local branches and hierarchical dominance of the upper party levels. Together with other characteristics of the HSS, such as the relatively large membership, the penetration of the local organisation and the dominance of the central office party over other two party faces, the “democratic centralism” type of internal organisation makes the HSS somewhat similar to the canonical model of the mass party.

The most balanced organisation regarding internal party democracy is that of the SDP. In this party rudimentary emphases on the participatory dimension as the historical communist heritage mixes up with the elements of later reforms. In the 1990-3 period, the SDP introduced several elements in its organisational structure that emphasised a radical turn to the electoral functions of the party. Some of the introduced reforms (the national convention as the final selectorate in the selection procedure for parliamentary candidates or the Electoral Board that replaced the national committee), were unique in

the short organisational history of the Croatian parties. Apart from being the most democratic elements ever, those organisational solutions departed from the dominant party organisational model and uniform organisational practice in Croatia. However, the SDP later adjusted its organisation and brought it closer to the common organisational model.

The HDZ and the HSP are below-average parties regarding the degree of internal party democracy, though there are some differences between these two parties as well. The formal internal structure of the HDZ reflects on the one hand a specific development of the party in the 1990s when the party functioned as a mechanism of the institutionalisation of a nationalistic movement into some sort of an autocratic regime within the democratic framework (Čular, 2001: 139). Its characteristics were its clientelistic and charismatic appeals to voters (Kasapović, 2001: 21-24), informal intra-party relationships and interconnectedness with the state structure. On the other hand, the structure is a result of the attempt of the new party leadership to reform the party and secure its own position after 2000. The new leadership expressed an ambivalent relationship towards the internal party democracy taking it as a means applied when in its interest and denied when not, rather than as a goal in itself, so that the democratic organisation of the party has been completely subordinated to the changes of the party's ideological and political image.

Picture 2: Positions of the parties in the IPD space



A similar conclusion could be drawn in the case of the HSP. Its shift towards a more moderate position within the political space and its transformation from the radical “anti-system” opposition to a party with certain coalition potential has not been followed by any attempts to democratise its internal structure. Moreover, in recent years this clearly autocratically organised party centralised the decision-making process even more. Because of this, the HSP is by far the least democratic Croatian party.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

The analysis of the organisational development of the Croatian parties and internal party democracy has showed several things. First, the organisational aspect of party life is poorly legally regulated and the attempts to change the situation by imposing some new and stricter regulations are not likely to succeed. Second, the Croatian parties do not depart from the common post-communist experience of party organisational life, with a rather rigid structure, their organisational uniformity and little substantial change through time. Third, internal party democracy is generally low, with the strong power centralisation, strong presidents, little participation of members and selection procedures highly controlled by the leaderships. Nevertheless, even within such uniform picture it is possible to draw some differences between the parties concerning the degree of internal party democracy as well as the type of internal party democracy a party leans to. However, the differences are so small that they do not produce significantly different impacts on the political process in general. This is particularly true for the overall drop of public confidence in the political institutions and the political elite. But when thinking which organisational changes of the parties could produce broader effects on the political system as a whole, one should not fall into the trap of arguing for more internal party democracy in general. By differentiating between the degree of internal party democracy and the type of internal party structure, the analysis paved the way to a more sophisticated strategy. The rest are very tentative recommendations based on the Croatian case.

In Croatia more than half of the present MPs are for the first time in the parliament and this figure does not become smaller with time. The only experienced MPs are only the top party officials who control both the parliamentary party and the selection procedures in the party. In this way, the members of the parliament are dependent and subordinated to the top party leaders of both sides. Moreover, in filling the parliamentary seats, the party leaders more and more prefer popular persons than their own party members. Although all the parties are financed from the state budget in proportion to the number of their parliamentary seats, rarely any party invests that money into some professional and financial support for their own MPs. The money is directly transferred to the central party offices and used mostly for the purposes of electoral campaign and regular party activities. All of this makes the parliamentary party very weak and incapable of fulfilling the function of effective political representatives.

Two decisive elements that mark the closed party structures in Croatia and affect the composition and the effectiveness of the political elite are the centralised selection procedures for the candidates in the national and the local elections and the lack of financial and organisational strength and autonomy of the parliamentary party. These two in-

stitutional elements taken together can largely account for the problems in the recruitment patterns of the political elite, the high turnover and the instability among the MPs and the low competence of the parliamentarians. Opening up the selection procedures by decentralising the process and including a broader electorate together with putting more power and financial sources into the hands of the parliamentary party would lead to the reduction of the party leadership power and the shifting of party power from the central office towards the parliamentary party. However, one should notice that while the first task completely fits the higher degree of internal party democracy, the other task leads in a quite opposite direction. The parliamentary party autonomy can only be interpreted as the reduction of internal party democracy, since a party group is not any longer accountable to the party membership or their representatives. In the latter case what could cause wider political changes is not internal democratisation but the change in the type of party. On the other hand, the internal democratisation of other aspects of party life (e.g. president elected directly by members, stronger connection with some collateral organisations, more local autonomy, liberalisation of party factions, etc.) are not so important, since they themselves do not necessarily have any positive impact on the political process and sometimes can have even negative effects.

Finally, even if we know what to argue for, it is still unclear how to push political practice into that direction. A direct legal intervention would hardly have a chance to be implemented. Yet, there are some small scale legal incentives that could work. For instance, preferential voting by which voters would have the right to intervene in the party slates could lessen the party leaderships' ambition to control the selection process, decrease the tension in the party struggle for the position in the slate and open up room for reform. Similarly, allocating more money to the parliamentary parties would probably eventually lead to bigger independence of MPs as well. But since these incentives are themselves dependent on the present party/parliamentary elite, we can only hope that an electoral defeat or some other contingency will push at least some parties to adopt the proposed reforms. The other parties would then certainly follow.

*Appendix 1: List of Party Acronyms with a Brief Description*

**HDZ (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica) – Croatian Democratic Union.** Founded in June 1989. The leading party of the right, with nationalist and conservative appeals. The ruling party in Croatia from 1990 to 2000 and again with the support of several smaller parties and independent MPs since 2003. Until his death (1999) the leader of the party was Franjo Tuđman, President of Croatia, later Ivo Sanader, the present Prime Minister. Splinter parties: HND (1994), DC (2000) and HB (2002). Party has 63 out of 152 seats.

**HNS (Hrvatska narodna stranka) – Croatian People's Party.** Liberal party, recently more to the left. Founded in October 1990 under the leadership of several prominent political leaders of the 1971 national movement in Croatia, who were non-partisan leaders of the Coalition of People's Agreement (KNS) in the 1990 elections. The party follows the political ideas of the KNS. Party of Croatia's President Stipe Mesić. Member of the governing coalition from 2000 to 2003. After 2004 the party merged with the minor Libra and turned to HNS-LD (Hrvatska narodna stranka-liberalni demokrati – Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats). President since 2000: Vesna Pusić. Party currently has 10 MPs.

**HSLs (Hrvatska socijalno liberalna stranka) – Croatian Social-Liberal Party.** A national liberal center party, but recently moving further to the right. Founded in May 1989 as the first established party within the so-called "democratic alternative". In 1990 it was the leading force of the KNS. After the breakdown of the coalition it remained the most successful party of the KNS. The party split in 1997. A faction formed LS in 1998, later member of the governing coalition in 2000. HSLs was a member of the winning coalition HSLs-SDP in 2000 and also a member of the governing coalition from 2000 to 2002, when the party split again and left the government. The rest formed a new party – Libra – which remained in the coalition government. Currently, the party is in the coalition with HDZ and has 2 MPs. Current president: Ivan Čehok.

**HSP (Hrvatska stranka prava) – Croatian Party of Rights.** Radical nationalist party, recently shedding radicalism and neo-fascism. Founded in 1990 as a political follower of the party founded in 1861. The party entered Parliament in 1992, but split in 1993. A faction established HSP-1861 in 1995 but with no success at the national level. In the present parliamentary mandate the party has 8 seats. President: Anto Đapić.

**HSS (Hrvatska seljačka stranka) – Croatian Peasant Party.** Centrist traditional party oriented towards agricultural and craftsmen interests. The only traditional Croatian party with organizational continuity since 1904, when the party was established under a slightly different name. After 1945 the party existed in exile. In December 1989 it was legally re-established in Croatia, and, after factional disputes, consolidated in 1991. It was member of the governing coalition from 2000 to 2003. Currently in opposition, with 9 parliament seats. President (since 1994): Zlatko Tomčić.

**IDS (Istarski demokratski sabor) – Istrian Democratic Assembly.** Founded in February 1990. Regional party acting on the territory of the region of Istria, where it controls all local governments. Member of the governing coalition from 2000 to 2001. Currently with 4 seats. President for more than 14 years: Ivan Jakovčić.

**SDP (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske) – Social Democratic Party of Croatia.**

The leading force of the centre left, with moderate social-democratic policies. The party is legal successor of the SKH (Savez komunista Hrvatske – League of Communists of Croatia), reformed and formally founded in November 1990 by the reformist wing of the SKH. Initially the party was called SKH-SDP and since 1992 SDP. In 1994 it merged with a small social democratic party (SDH), which was founded in 1989. A member of the winning HSL-SDP coalition in 2000 and the main pillar of the governing coalition from 2000 to 2003. The only president Ivica Račan. Today in opposition, with 34 MPs.

*Appendix 2: Indicators of two dimensions of internal party democracy*

1. DIMENSION OF AUTONOMY

**1.1. members' rights**

1.1.1. general rights

1.1.2. rights to form factions

1.1.3. protection of members against disciplinary measures

**1.2. autonomy of local organisation**

1.2.1. autonomy in decision-making:

- about local structure
- in disciplinary procedures
- in selection procedure for local elections
- about local coalitions

1.2.2. prerogatives of higher level in local affairs:

- in the procedure of disclosure of local organisation
- in election and replacing local leadership
- in calling local conventions
- in local decision-making
- in coordination of local activities
- party officials from higher levels *ex officio* members of local bodies

**1.3. direct influence of local bodies on the central level decision-making:**

- through election of representatives for party conventions
- through election of members of central political and executive bodies
- through role in the selection procedure for national elections
- through initiatives in calling national conventions and amending the statute

2. DIMENSION OF INCLUSION

**2.1. direct participation of members**

- in direct decision-making and elections
- in selection procedures
- in initiatives towards central level

**2.2. prerogatives of conventions vs. executive bodies**

2.2.1. at the central level:

- in passing statute and political program
- in election of members of central political and executive bodies
- in selection procedures

2.2.2. at the local level

- in election of members of local executive bodies
- in election of representatives for conventions at higher level
- in selection procedures

**2.3. prerogatives of the party president**

2.3.1. in personal matters:

- right to propose/appoint vice-president
- right to propose/appoint other member of the central bodies
- rights to suspend/replace/exclude a member

2.3.2. in selection procedure:

- at the central level
- at the local level

2.3.3. other prerogatives

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