
Political Parties and Government in Croatia

Izvorni znanstveni članak
328.132(497.5)"2000/2003"
Primitljeno: 25.svibnja 2004.

Coalition Governments in Croatia: First Experience 2000-2003

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Summary

The author analyzes the formation, functioning and termination of the mandate of the first coalition governments in the history of Croatia between 2000 and 2003. She suggests that the parliamentary system of moderate pluralism after the elections, as well as the pre-electoral coalition agreements, contributed to the building of coalition governments, but that this process was undermined by a lack of a developed coalition political culture among the creators of the coalition as well as among the public in general. The coalition governments operated on the basis of a written coalition agreement that identified the mechanisms for coalition management among the coalition partners and implicitly introduced voting discipline in the parliament and the patterns of the distribution of posts in ministries, parliamentary bodies and public companies. Its main drawback were sketchy public policies which means that these were policy blind coalitions. The first coalition government (2000-2002) was terminated due to the feuding among the key coalition partners, and the second coalition government (2002-2003) ended due to the regular parliamentary elections. Though the government of 2000-2002 was the first coalition government in Croatia's history and an oversized coalition government to boot, it nevertheless lasted longer than the average similar governments in other European countries.

Key words: Croatia, coalition government, moderate pluralism, oversized coalition, policy-blind coalition



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Building coalition governments

After the fourth parliamentary elections in January of 2000, Croatia was for the first time faced with the need to form a coalition government; it was confronted with the same challenge after the fifth elections in November 2003. In both cases the main insti-

tutional/political conditions for building coalition governments were relatively favourable. After the elections a moderate pluralist system was established in the parliament, i.e. the effective number of parties immediately after the elections was not bigger than five. The parliamentary party system at the end of the mandates of the first two coalition governments in 2003 was somewhat more fragmented due to the factioning within the biggest opposition party (HDZ) and the second strongest party of the ruling coalition (HSLs). The MPs who quit the HDZ or were expelled from it, formed as many as four new parties; consequently, out of its 40 seats of the regular assembly, the HDZ lost ten or 25%, and out of its initial 46 seats in the general assembly it lost as many as 13 or 28%.¹ Following the split within the HSLs, caused by this party's leadership's decision in 2002 to step out of the coalition, a sizable faction of ten representatives split off and later constituted the *Libra*, a new liberal party. In this way, at the end of the four-year legislative mandate the nominal number of the parties in the Sabor increased from the initial 13 to 18, and the effective number from 4.5 to 5.9. This factioning probably affected the functioning of the parliament, and the HSLs factioning surely had an impact on the activities of the first coalition as it weakened the parliamentary support the coalition enjoyed at the beginning of the mandate. Coalition theories have always emphasized the importance of intraparty factioning since neither coalitions nor their member-parties are homogeneous political actors (see Laver and Schofield, 1990).

The effective number of parties in the Croatian Sabor after the fourth and the fifth cycle of parliamentary elections was smaller than in most European postcommunist democracies after their third or fourth parliamentary election cycle organized according to the proportional electoral system (see Shvetsova, 2002, 76). This moderate fragmentation of the parliament was largely a consequence of the Croatian type of the PR system that prevented a replication of an extremely fragmented electoral party system in the Sabor. Two mechanisms were pivotal in this: the magnitude of the electoral districts and the legal electoral threshold.

Although the critics of the Croatian electoral system claimed that the five-percent legal electoral threshold is too low and consequently impractical in 14-mandate electoral districts,² their fears were not confirmed because of the large number of political actors that vied for the votes in all electoral units. In a moderately fragmented electoral party system, the theoretical threshold of exclusion in the 14-mandate districts should really be higher than 5% (around 6.7% of the votes).³ However, since between 23 and 31 electoral lists competed in the electoral districts in 2000 (i.e. on the average more than 26 lists per electoral district), the natural threshold of inclusion was lower (between 2.3 and 2.8% of the votes). In the 2003 elections, the competition was even more atomized: between 31 and 40 electoral lists or about 34 lists on the average, while the natural threshold of inclusion ranged between 1.9 and 2.3% of the votes. Thus the 5% legal

¹ By the regular assembly of the unicameral parliament we refer to the 140 representatives elected in the proportional national elections in ten equal-size constituencies; the full assembly also includes the representatives of the ethnic minorities (five in 2000 and eight in 2003), elected in plurality elections, and the representatives of the "Croatian diaspora" (six in 2000 and four in 2003), chosen by plurality elections in a single worldwide electoral district. Thus in the fourth mandate there was a total of 151 representatives, and in the fifth mandate 152 representatives.

² These objections may be dismissed theoretically. For example, according to Lijphart's formula $[75\%:(M+1)]$, in which M = average magnitude of electoral districts, the theoretical natural electoral threshold would be exactly 5%, i.e. would equal the legal electoral threshold (Lijphart, 1999., 153).

³ On the theoretical threshold of inclusion and exclusion see: Rae, 1971; Rae, Hanby and Loosemore, 1971; Lijphart, 1994; Katz, 1997: 126; concisely in Kasapović, 2003: 154-156.

electoral threshold played the key role in the prevention of the parliamentarization of a big number of parties; it also prevented atomized pluralism.

The second major reason for the moderated parliamentary fragmentation, despite a rather atomized electoral competition, was the very nature of electoral competition in which a huge number of irrelevant political parties participated: protoparties, weak electoral alliances and unprofiled local lists of independent candidates. In the elections of 2000, 53 parties took part; in 2003 even more - 58. Most of them enjoyed the support of a very small, even insignificant number of voters. However and despite repeated electoral failures both in the national and the local elections, they somehow manage to keep afloat, creating an illusion of their permanence. Also, many of them entered into loose, shifting, and doomed electoral alliances, additionally increasing the nominal number of electoral actors. In the elections of 2000, 14 electoral alliances took part; in 2003 their number increased to 21; they comprised between two and five parties. And finally, the atomized electoral competition was generated by a big number of the so-called non-party or independent lists: in 2000 there were 18 such lists, and in 2003 as many as 37. This explosion of independent lists cannot be explained by their political successes, since no independent list has ever won a mandate in the Sabor.⁴ In short, the electoral competition in Croatia is not only disturbingly atomized but this atomization is on the rise. Consequently, the electoral system ought to prevent an atomized parliament. It has performed this onerous task more or less with flying colours. A relatively high nominal number of parties in all the legislative periods so far, including the last two, is the consequence of the parliamentarization of several small parties owing to their electoral alliances with bigger parties. Without this, the effective and especially the nominal number of parliamentary parties would be smaller, which would facilitate the stabilization of the party system and the party landscape on the whole, and enhance the parliament's efficacy. The major parties in Croatia have not yet become aware of that problem and have not accepted the responsibility for stabilizing the party system and the political system in general. The electoral coalitions thus emerge as an "institutional designer" of a fragmented or, more optimistically, a somewhat fragmented parliament.

Another condition that was conducive to the formation of the first coalition government was its meticulous pre-programming by means of the preelectoral agreements of the opposition parties that came to power in 2000. The opposition competed in the elections in two electoral coalitions: the coalition of the SDP and the HSLŠ - in some electoral districts joined by two minor regional parties (SBHS and PGS) - and in the electoral coalition of the HSS, HNS, LS and IDS, occasionally joined by the ASH. All those parties, except the ASH, managed to get into the parliament, and after the elections formed the majority parliamentary coalition with 95 or almost 62.9% of the seats. The six leading parties of the two coalitions built the government on the basis of the signed preelectoral agreements (see Plećaš, 2000). As the number of the parties that would constitute the coalition government was preprogrammed by means of the pre-electoral coalition agreements, its formation went smoothly. The entire procedure lasted less than a month: the election was held on 3 January, President of the state nominated the government on 27 January, and the Sabor voted it in on 2 February 2000.⁵

⁴ This doubling of the number of independent lists may partly be perhaps explained by their marked success in local elections in 2001 (see Kasapović, 2004).

⁵ At that time, Croatia had a semipresidential system of government, according to which the cabinet was appointed by the president and confirmed by the majority of votes in the Sabor. The government's mandate formally commenced on the day of its appointment by the president and not on the day of its parliamentary investiture. Since the president died in December of 1999, and the new presidential elections were held in

Unlike this, the process of building the coalition government in 2003 was not preprogrammed by any formal pre-election agreements, although based on the pre-electoral party consultations it was known who might take part in the future government. In the post-electoral talks on the composition of the government, initially five parties took part (HDZ, HSS, HSP, HSLs, DC), but two of them abandoned the negotiations in the initial stage: the HSS and the HSP; the HSP because the party leadership was not formally ready to enter into a coalition with the HDZ due to the differences in the economic policies and the general politics of these two parties; the HSS claimed that the HDZ did not have a clear-cut policy profile and that there was no serious policy platform of the future government. However, the HSS leadership overlooked the fact that the HDZ as a big party necessarily has an all-embracing policy orientation and is consequently weakly profiled. The HSS, as a minor party, must resort to the strategy of a more narrow policy profiling – and the HSS failed to do so – that might guarantee it a bigger electoral competitiveness and a more forceful coalition potential (see Bolleyer, 2004, 134 and elsewhere). But the real reason was the fear of the HSS leadership that the more dominant coalition partner might literally “devour” it. This fear was well-founded because the HDZ and the HSS are relatively ideologically affiliated parties and they competed for the largely same electorate; thus, the electoral failure of the HSS in 2003 was to a large extent caused by the fact that a number of its voters shifted their allegiance to the HDZ. The second party, the HSP, was for all purposes shut out from the talks because of an outcry by the international community regarding the ideological and political profile of that party.⁶ Later, due to the publicly still undisclosed reasons, the HSLs also abandoned the negotiations about the formation of the government.⁷ Eventually, the only HDZ’s coalition partner that remained was the DC, with a single seat in the Sabor. Thus a formally minority coalition government was formed because these two parties had 67 or 46.5% of the seats in the Sabor.⁸ However, the government en-

February of 2000, the president of the parliament – who, according to the Constitution, took over as president – appointed the prime minister and the cabinet on 27 January 2000, while the Sabor voted them in on 2 February 2000. The coalition government of 2003 was ushered in by a positive parliamentary investiture since the constitutional reform of 2000 replaced the existing semipresidential system with the parliamentary system. On the forms of government investiture in semipresidential systems – despite the author’s controversial definition of semipresidentialism – see Elgie, 1999.

⁶ In Croatia, there was a sort of a redux of the “Austrian syndrome”, though with a different outcome. Just as it negatively reacted to the coalition government of the Austrian Folk’s Party (ÖVP) that included the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ), the European Union strongly objected to the possibility of the creation of a coalition government of the HDZ with the rightist HSP. However, in Austria the contentious coalition government was formed regardlessly, while in Croatia the HDZ forswore the coalition with the HSP, primarily because they feared that the European Union might use this as a pretext to turn down the Croatian candidacy for the membership. It should be noted, however, that even prior to the elections of 2003 the HSP had already remarkably revised its ideological profile, political rhetoric and practice, and that it has continued in that direction after the elections of 2003, a shift from the ultra-right end of the Croatian political spectrum to the centre-right.

⁷ President of the HSLs, Mr Ivan Čehok, explained this by Prime Minister Ivo Sanader’s intention to have “at the ministerial level a one-party cabinet”, which did not happen since the Ministry of Justice went to the DC. The HSLs was eventually represented in the government at the level of ministerial deputies/secretaries. The president of the HSLs called the relationship of his party with the HDZ “an incomplete coalition relationship”: “On principled grounds this may not be the most fortunate solution, but from the point of view of the strength of the HSLs, this may be much better for us than a formal coalition” (*Večernji list*, 2 January, 2004).

⁸ Technically, this was a minority coalition government, but substantially it might be said this was a minority one-party government, not only because of the symbolic presence of the DC in the government.

joyed the support of the absolute parliamentary majority since the HDZ, by means of a series of separate political agreements after the election managed to secure the support of the three representatives of the HSU, the two representatives of HSLŠ, the one representative of the HDSS, and the eight representatives of ethnic minorities, among them the three representatives of the SDSS.⁹ In this way the HDZ forged a majority parliamentary coalition that supported the formally minority coalition government: out of the 140 representatives from the regular assembly of the Sabor the coalition encompassed 63 or 45%, and out of the 152 representatives of the full assembly it enjoyed the support of as many as 81 or the absolute majority of 53.3% of the MPs. The talks formally lasted a month – from 23 November, when the election took place, until 23 December, when the parliament voted in with the absolute majority of the votes the minority HDZ and DC government – but actually they ended a few days earlier when the mandator announced the composition of the future government. The government was built without any glitches. However, the political agreements did not have the force of the real coalition deals, and the government was from the start exposed to the erratic and volatile behaviour of the legislature members who have constantly threatened to withdraw their support if the government fails to promote certain interests or make at least symbolic concessions in its policies – from the foreign policy to the minority policy, from the pension policy to the agricultural policy. The government's fate has depended on the will of the politically varied and consequently unstable parliamentary majority, which has been an impediment to its smooth functioning.

If the above mentioned conditions favoured the building of coalition governments, the general political/cultural setting was not favourable. Croatia had no previous experience of coalition governments or a developed coalition political culture. In Croatia's political history before 2000, there were no coalition governments. In the short period of parliamentary democracy between 1990 and 2000, all the governments were one-party governments (Table 2). One of the parties (HDZ) formed its governments three times in a row on the basis of the plurality of the votes (in 1990, 1992, and 1995). The government of democratic unity (1991–2) was not coalitional but a wartime all-party government that was all-dependant on the HDZ's absolute parliamentary majority and on the incumbent president (HDZ) in the existing semipresidential system. The political actors had no necessary knowledge of how to create and particularly how to manage coalition governments. The public political discourse, shaped by the media, was not permeated by the deliberative spirit; consequently, political negotiation and compromise were interpreted as "futile bargaining", "political trade-offs", "interparty bickering" and so on. This was not auspicious for the formation of a coalition government.

Namely, the DC was a faction of the HDZ after the elections of 2000 and for a time it was considered to be a more liberal HDZ's variant; journalists and political opponents called it the "HDZ light". It never evolved into a proper party, and after the liberalization of the HDZ in the second half of the legislative mandate 2000–2003 it lost almost all its *raison d'être*.

⁹ The HDZ signed separate agreements with the representatives of ethnic minorities who thereby promised to support the government in the parliament; the government, in return, promised interest concessions in their policies or in government bodies. For example, the government in its Agreement on Cooperation with the SDSS committed itself that by June of 2004 it would provide for the return of the occupied houses and other property belonging to the Serbs who fled Croatia during the final military operations of the Croatian Army in 1995, which have been occupied illegally ever since, and that by the end of 2004 it would see that the other property be returned to their rightful owners. The SDSS also got several secretarial and deputy ministerial posts in the ministries. The SDSS representatives commented on this agreement with the HDZ: "The agreement is a component of the Government's program and is not a coalition agreement" (*Večernji list*, 2 January, 2004).

Types of coalition governments' rule

How coalition governments rule in general depends on several elements: the coalition agreements, the mechanisms of conflict resolution within coalitions, the coalition voting discipline, the patterns of department allocation and appointments, and the agreements concerning the policy-content and the appointments to senior public offices outside the cabinet and the parliament (Müller/Strøm, 1997: 2000).

1. It has already been mentioned that in Croatia the first coalition government of 2000 was created on the basis of the pre-electoral coalition agreements of the six then opposition parties. In the two key documents – particularly in the Six-party Agreement (HNS, HSL, HSS, IDS, LS, SDP) on the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral cooperation signed in September 1999, the signatories highlighted three fundamental principles of its coalition policy: first, they pledged they would coordinate pre-electoral activities of the two electoral coalitions, i.e. they made a sort of a political non-aggression pact during the election; second, they emphatically and explicitly ruled out any possibility of the post-electoral coalition with the HDZ as their main political adversary in the past decade; third, they agreed to build the legislative and the executive government together if they won the election i.e. that they would create a parliamentary coalition and a coalition government in which each party would be represented proportionately to its in electoral results.

Due to the electoral outcomes, this as a matter of fact meant a creation of some sort of the oversized coalition government.¹⁰ The ruling parliamentary coalition included 90 representatives from the regular assembly and five representatives of ethnic minorities, which means that the government could count on the 62.9% support in the legislature. From the perspective of the theory of the minimal winning coalition, which holds that an advantage of the coalition politics lies in maximizing its members' benefits, this was an uneconomical coalition with surplus parties which decreased the political benefits of the biggest electoral winners (the SDP and the HSL), increased the costs of negotiations and decision-making, expanded the ideological and policy scopes of the coalition and increased its conflict potentials. This almost cost the coalition its survival: because of the ideological and political disagreements the IDS was the first to quit the coalition though it remained in the parliamentary coalition. It was soon followed by a faction of the HSL that stepped out of the coalition government and the parliamentary coalition. At that moment, the initial shortcoming of the ruling coalition became its major advantage. Namely, despite the departure of 10 out of 24 HSL representatives, the government obtained the support of the majority of the representatives even in this altered political legislative composition. Also, the initial oversized coalition was appropriate because of the nature of the new government's politics. Its essence were comprehensive reforms of the political and economic system that required a broad social and political

¹⁰ An oversized coalition is defined by Arendt Lijphart as "any coalition cabinet based on a large supermajority of four-fifths – 80 percent – or more of the seats in the legislature" (1999, 106-107). Lijphart distinguishes between the oversized coalition in the substantive and the technical sense. The substantively oversized coalition is based on the absolute majority of the electoral votes and not only on the absolute mandate majority, whereas the technically oversized coalition is based on the absolute mandate majority but not on the majority of the electoral votes. An example of the oversized technical coalition is the French Gaullist-republican government in France in 1993 which had 81.8% of the seats, but only 39.9% of the votes won in the first electoral round. That oversized artificial mandate majority was a consequence of the two-round majoritarian electoral system. If we apply these measures, then the Croatian coalition government of 2000 was nearer to the substantively than the technically oversized coalition as it was based on the absolute majority of the votes and on almost two-thirds of the mandates.

consensus. The ruling coalition parties represented the majority of the electorate – in the 2000 election they secured the absolute majority of the votes – which also meant the popular support for the reformist policies. And finally, the constitutional reforms formally required the two-thirds majority in the Sabor, which the first coalition government relatively easily obtained owing to a few votes of the opposition HSP.

After the election, the six parties signed the Coalition Agreement stipulating the manner in which the cabinet was to be formed and the House of Representatives managed. This was a pilot example of a coalition agreement which neglected the policy dimension of the coalition politics and pushed the new coalition in the direction of policy-blind coalitions.

2. The Coalition Agreement of 2000 in Croatia established two outside bodies for settling the disputes within the ruling coalition. The chief body was the Coalition Coordination, made up of the head of government and the coalition parties' presidents. This was not a cabinet body since at the beginning the presidents of four coalition parties – HSLŠ, HSS, HNS and LS – were not cabinet members; later and only briefly, the HSLŠ president was included in the first coalition cabinet (2000-2002), while in the second coalition cabinet (2002-2003), the LS president was a minister for a brief period. This turned out to be an unfortunate solution since the presidents of the parties that were not cabinet members complained about some sort of an information blockade, which additionally widened the gap between the cabinet members and the non-members and eventually caused major tensions, conflicts and cleavages in the HSLŠ. The disputes were supposed to be settled consensually within the Coordination. If no consensus had been achieved, the disputes were decided by voting, each party having as many votes as the seats in the House of Representatives. The other body was the Coordination of the Representatives' Clubs made up of the clubs' presidents, and chaired by the president of the club of the strongest coalition party. The Coordination was tasked with coordinating the policies of the coalition partners in the legislature. The decisions were made in the same way as the decisions of the Coalition Coordination. In special situations, "when the stability of the parliamentary majority may be jeopardized", the decisions were made by the two-thirds majority. Also, a meeting of all representatives of the parliamentary coalition parties might have been convened if necessary.

Such a practice of coalition management, and particularly the activities of the Coordination of the coalition parties' presidents, did not go down well with the public. It was thought that the real power of decision-making shifted from the formal state institutions to informal bodies. The coalition government's foes claimed that – partly because of their ignorance and the lack of experience with coalitions, and partly because of their political hostility towards the SDP as the key coalition party – that a "new Politbiro" was running the country.

3. The Coalition Agreement of 2000 explicitly regulated the voting procedure in the cabinet and in the coalition conflict-resolution bodies but not in the legislature and the legislative bodies. The political practice showed that there was an implicit coalition discipline, but it was uncodified by the Coalition Agreement. In the first half of the mandate, that discipline was quite strict, only to break down in the second half, to the extent that the voting of the coalition partners on the side of the opposition was quite common. This practice was most frequently employed by the representatives of the HSS.

4. In the distribution of the ministries and the cabinet appointments, a variety of patterns was followed. Several rules of the department distribution have been identified. Ian Budge and Hans Keman (1990: 101-104) suggest that the departments in coalition governments are distributed: 1. proportionally to the parties' share in the legislative

mandates and 2. proportionally to the coalition parties' clout within the coalition, measured by the pivotal position of individual parties.

In Croatia the first rule of the departmental distribution was applied. The Coalition Agreement precisely stipulated that the posts in the cabinet and the ministries were to be distributed "approximately according to the electoral results"; thus, the SDP would get 50%, HSLŠ 25% and the HSS, HNS, LS and the IDS together the other 25% of the posts. This rule was applied and implemented in practice, with negligible modifications.

The most important government posts – the premiership, the posts of two vice-presidents, the ministers of foreign and internal affairs, and the minister of finances – went to the SDP. The post of the deputy prime minister and the minister of defence went to the HSLŠ, partly in line with the rule according to which the strongest coalition parties share authority over the most important posts in the government. This rule is typically applied in the division of the ministries of the foreign and the internal affairs between the two parties in two-member coalitions or between the two strongest parties in multi-member coalitions; in Croatia it was employed in a somewhat modified form. Also, the rule of scrutiny among individual ministries was enforced: the deputy ministers were not from the same parties as the ministers.

The second criterion was taken into account as well, in several cases. First, the HSS, just like all agrarian parties in all European coalition governments, got the post of the minister of agriculture and forestry; the SDP, like all other socialdemocratic parties, got the post of the minister of labour and welfare, the HSLŠ, like many liberal parties, got the post of the minister of economy. A more marked deviation from the practice of European coalition cabinets, in which the ministry of education usually goes to liberal or socialist parties, was the fact that in Croatia that post went to the conservative HSS.

One of the aspects of the "departmental policy" of coalition governments, also regulated by coalition agreements, was the fashion of cabinet appointments. Two patterns can be applied. The first assumes that the coalition members have completely free hands when appointing and removing officials in the ministries assigned to them, whereas the second pattern curbs this freedom by requiring the approval of the prime minister or even other coalition partners. In Croatia the second pattern was adopted, so that all the appointments for ministers, deputy ministers and ministry secretaries required the "mutual approval" of the prime minister and the president of the party that the official is affiliated with. A minister's resignation was the prime minister's to ask, but ideally "the consent of all the coalition partners in the Coalition Coordination was to be reached". If the prime minister could not obtain the consent of the presidents of all coalition parties, the minister in question could nevertheless be removed if the prime minister managed to secure two thirds of the votes in the Coalition Coordination i.e. the support of at least three presidents of the coalition parties.

Such a pattern is potentially contentious, as was demonstrated in a series of publicized feuds among the coalition parties, although surely there were many more that remained concealed. For example, the president of the LS publicly stated that their candidate for the post of the minister of environmental protection, after this position had been vacated, was not approved by the prime minister so that the president of the LS himself had to step in, an offer "that could not be refused". The HSS vetoed the appointment by the SDP in 2003 of a history professor for the minister of science, technology and sport; he was unacceptable to this rural party because of his public opposition to the clericalization of the educational system. In 2003, the HSS led a failed public campaign for the removal of the non-party minister of tourism from the SDP "quota" blaming her for the scandal surrounding the privatization of a hotel conglomerate on one Adriatic island.

Table 1. Distribution of ministerial posts 2000-2003¹

Government	2000-2002	2002-2003	2003-		
PM	SDP	SDP	HDZ	PM	Prime minister
DPM	HSL	Libra	–	DPM	Deputy Prime minister
VP	SDP, HSL	SDP, HSS	HDZ	VP	Vice president of the government
MF ²	SDP	SDP	HDZ	MF	Minister of finance
MD ²	HSL	SDP	HDZ	MD	Minister of defense
MI ²	SDP	SDP	HDZ	MI	Minister of interior
MFA ²	SDP	SDP	HDZ	MFA	Minister of foreign affairs
MPWC	HNS	HSN	–	MPWC	Minister of public works and construction
ME	HSL	SDP	–	ME	Minister of economy
MC ²	SDP	SDP	HDZ	MC	Minister of culture
MV ³	SDP	SDP	–	MV	Minister of war veterans
MAF ³	HSS	HSS	HDZ	MAF	Minister of agriculture and forestry
MSTC	HSL	Libra	–	MSTC	Minister of shipping, transport and communications
MJALG ³	SDP	SDP	DC	MJALG	Minister of justice, administration and local government
MEPUP	LS	LS	–	MEPUP	Minister of environmental protection and urban planning
MEdS	HSS	HSS	–	MEdS	Minister of education and sport
MLSW	SDP	SDP	–	MLSW	Minister of labour and social welfare
MT	SDP	SDP	–	MT	Minister of tourism
MH	HSL	Libra	–	MH	Minister of health
MST	HSL	SDP	–	MST	Minister of science and technology
MEUF ²	IDS	SDP	HDZ	MEUI	Minister for European integration
MCSME	HSS	HSS	–	MCSME	Minister of crafts, small and medium enterprise
M/wp	–	SDP	–	M/wp	Minister without portfolio
MFVIS ⁴	–	–	HDZ	MFVIS	Minister of family, war veterans and intergenerational solidarity
MEdSS ⁴	–	–	HDZ	MEdSS	Minister of education, science and sport
MHSW ⁴	–	–	HDZ	MHSW	Minister of health and social welfare
MELE ⁴	–	–	HDZ	MELE	Minister of economy, labour and enterprise
MMETTD ⁴	–	–	HDZ	MMETTD	Minister of maritime economy, tourism, transport and development
MEUPC ⁴	–	–	HDZ	MEPUPC	Minister of environmental protection, urban planning and construction

¹ The coalition cabinet of 2000-2002 started with 24 members: the prime minister, his deputy, three vice-presidents and 19 ministers. In the second mandate of 2002-2003, the number of vice-presidents increased to four; a vice-president, a woman, became the minister of defense. Also, a ministry without portfolio was established, so the number of ministers mushroomed to 20. The coalition government of 2003 abolished the post of the deputy prime minister and cut down the number of ministries to 14, so that the cabinet has 15 members. The functions of the two government vicepresidents have been taken over by the minister of health and welfare and the minister for Homeland War veterans, family and intergenerational solidarity. Some ministers in Ivica Račan's cabinets (2000-2003) were non-party figures, but were listed in the quotas for the parties that had appointed them to their posts. In Prime Minister Ivo Sanader's cabinet (2003), the non-party figure was only the minister of education, science and sport.

² After the organizational reform of the cabinet in 2003, only six ministries remained unchanged: the Ministry of Finances, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry for European Integrations.

³ Three ministries saw their competences formally limited or augmented: the Ministry of Justice, Administration and Local Self-Government became the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry became the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management; the Ministry of Veterans became the Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity.

⁴ The five newly-created "mammoth" ministries were created by combining the competences of two or even more former ministries into one: the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Shipping, Transport and Communications were replaced with the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Tourism, Transport and Development; the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Crafts, Medium and Small Enterprise and a part of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare were replaced with the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Enterprise; the Ministry of Public Works and Construction and the Ministry of Environmental Protection were replaced by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction; the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Science and Technology merged into the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport; the Ministry of Health was created by merging the Ministry of Health and a part of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare.

5. The central document of the Croatian coalition government was formally called the Declaration of Post-electoral Priorities, signed on 30 November 1999. This Declaration – together with the inaugural speech of Prime Minister Ivica Račan in the House of Representatives on 2 February 2000, in which the goals outlined in the Declaration were identified as the new government's agenda – is a document concisely stating the broad general objectives concerning the comprehensive reforms of the political and economic system: the transformation of the semipresidential system of government into the parliamentary system, the decentralization of the state and the development of the local and regional government, the establishment of an independent judiciary, the depoliticization of the military and the police, the reform of the court system, the transformation of the Croatian radio & TV into a public institution, the revision of the privatization, the reorganization of the bank system, the new fiscal policy, etc. Here are a few illustrations how general and sketchy that aspect of the coalition politics was: none of the above mentioned agenda-setting documents made any mention of the parliamentary reform within the constitutional reform of the political system, necessary for the transformation of the semi-presidential regime into a parliamentary democracy. The government and its majority nevertheless disbanded the second chamber, the House of Counties, in the second stage of the constitutional reform of 2001, thereby transforming the Croatian Sabor into a unicameral legislature. In no democracy is this sort of a change so negligible not to be included in a government's political agenda. Also, concerning the economic policy, there was no mention of two government projects that turned out to be financially most taxing and politically most successful: the commencement of the construction of the Zagreb-Split highway and the incentive house-building, i.e. a form of social housing. If we compare this with some other coalition agreements in some other countries that include much smaller projects, then the failure to mention the construction of hundreds of kilometers of highways and thousands of flats seems unfathomable unless, of course, this was not planned at the beginning of the mandate.

6. The agreements on appointments outside the cabinet and the parliament can be found in most coalition democracies. In Croatia the appointments included the boards and supervisory boards of public companies, public institutions and public funds. All those appointments were "subject of the coalition agreement". The coalition agreed that these appointments were to be assigned according to the general "quota pattern" also applied in the distribution of the leading positions in the cabinet and the legislature. The coalition partners let it be known that in their political appointments they were to take into account the candidates' competence.

Mechanisms of terminating coalition governments' mandates

Wolfgang Müller and Kare Strøm (1997; 2000) mention three groups of reasons that lead to and mark the termination of the mandate of coalition governments: 1. technical (regular parliamentary elections, constitutional grounds and the incumbent prime minister's death), 2. behavioural patterns (early elections, a vote of no-confidence to the incumbent government in the legislature, a discretionary enlargement of the coalition, a conflict among the coalition partners, a conflict in a coalition party), 3. critical events (non-parliamentary elections, public pressures, economic crisis, internal security, private reasons of cabinet members). Bernard Grofman and Peter van Roozendaal (1997: 425) suggest that the termination of a coalition's mandate is induced by: the new parliamentary elections, death or illness of a leading cabinet members, a no-confidence vote in the legislature, the collapse of a coalition due to its internal discord, a government's unforced resignation, and a conflict between the cabinet and the head of state.

If we apply these two groups of criteria to Croatia's case, there were two coalition governments in the legislative mandate of 2000-2003 with the same prime minister: the first in 2000-2002 and the second in 2002-2003.¹¹ The termination of the first coalition government was brought about by the feuding of the coalition partners and by the HSLŠ quitting the coalition government and the ruling parliamentary majority. The feuding was brought on by the ideological and political disagreements between the HSLŠ and the other coalition members, primarily the SDP, the chief HSLŠ's coalition partner in the election of 2000. One of the major bones of contention and later the underlying reason of the collapse of the coalition, in the words of the president of the HSLŠ, was that the coalition, and particularly the SDP, was smothering and destroying his party's identity, endangering its survival in the political arena. It turned out, however, that the HSLŠ president and its leadership miscalculated the consequences of their decision to leave the coalition, as it was this very act that destroyed the party. Following the split within the party, the HSLŠ was trounced at the parliamentary elections in 2003. But for the big implosion of the SDP – which in the parliamentary elections in 1992 won only 5.5% of the votes, 29.5% fewer than in the elections of 1990 – this was the most dramatic implosion of any Croatian parliamentary party in the short period of its competitive politics. In the electoral coalition with the SDP in 2000 the HSLŠ got about 41% of the votes and 24 mandates, in 2003 in the electoral coalition with the DC it got only about 4% of the national votes and mere two mandates.

This decision of the party's president, supported by the majority of the senior members, resulted in the rift within the party and the secession of the cabinet/parliamentary faction that eventually formed a new liberal party. Underpinning the factioning within the HSLŠ were the ideological, political and personal disagreements and clashes in the party – usually described as the conflicts between the left and the right liberals or the genuine and the nationalist liberals – that came to head regarding the issue of the nature and performance of the coalition government, the place and the responsibility of the HSLŠ in it and finally, the rationale of staying in the ruling coalition. While the HSLŠ ministers, including the party's president Dražen Budiša, at the time a cabinet vice-president, and most HSLŠ representatives stepped out of the ruling coalition, 10 representatives and 3 ministers of the future new liberal party stayed on. This did not bring into question the absolute parliamentary majority that supported the government, so that Prime Minister Ivica Račan's second coalition government easily ensured a confidence vote in the legislature. This government was made up of five parties (SDP, HSS, HNS, LS, Libra), and its mandate was terminated through the regular parliamentary elections in November of 2003. In short, the cause of the termination of the mandate of the first coalition government belongs into the category of "behavioural patterns", while the second coalition government had its mandate terminated through the regular parliamentary elections, the standard technical reason.

The first coalition government of 2000-2002 turned out to be more durable than the average cabinets of oversized coalitions. In his comparative analysis of the durability of five types of government – single-party governments, minimal winning coalition governments, minority one-party coalition governments, minority coalition governments and oversized coalition governments – in 31 parliamentary democracy over a 40-year period (1945-1996), Arend Lijphart (1999: 137) found out that only the minority governments are less stable than the oversized coalition governments. The average duration

¹¹ In a strictly formal sense, it could be said that there were three coalition cabinets since as early as 2001 the sole IDS minister stepped down. The IDS, however, remained in the ruling parliamentary coalition and continued to support the government, so that this affair failed to shake the government and jeopardize it in any way.

of 120 oversized coalition governments during that time span was only 1.71 years or about 624 days. The oversized coalition government in Croatia lasted about two and a half years or 903 days, about nine and a half months longer than the average.

Finally, a cabinet's stability can be measured by the stability of its ministerial posts; in that respect, the Croatian coalition government was very stable, much more so than the previous one-party governments. All cabinet members from the HSS and the HNS, as well as all the original ministers from the SDP, except the minister of justice, went through their full four-year mandate as did the prime minister and his deputy. The LS replaced its minister only once. The ministers were mostly replaced only in the departments vacated by the IDS and the HSL. In comparison, in the course of the first incomplete mandate (1990-92), the one-party HDZ governments changed three prime ministers, in the second incomplete mandate (1992-95) two prime ministers; only in the third mandate (1995-2000) the government was headed by only one prime minister. The fluctuation of ministers in the HDZ's one-party governments was incomparably higher than in the coalition governments.

In principle it might be said that this above the average durability of the Croatian coalition government, as well as its failure to go through its full mandate without any changes in its composition, stemmed from some structural reasons and some critical events (Grofman and van Roozendaal, 1997).

The government owed its durability primarily to the balance of power in the legislature, to the party system and to the government's ideological profile. Both coalition governments enjoyed the support of a relatively absolute and stable majority in the parliament. Although the government's party composition seemed formally unfavourable due to the big number of parties it comprised during its entire legislative mandate, there was the core party or the "dominant political player"¹² that proved to be immune to factioning, which is otherwise typical of most Croatian transitional parties; consequently, the party was the government's backbone. Three out of six (2000-2) and two out of five (2002-3) government parties were a sort of "marginal parties" with one minister each. These were no pivot parties whose departure would jeopardize the entire government. Besides, there were no extreme left or extreme right parties in the government; this was a centre-left government, amongst whose members there were no major cleavages concerning the fundamental political goals or many public policies.

The stability of the government was enhanced by its political and economic achievements. The government broke through the international political isolation in which Croatia found itself during the decade of the HDZ rule (1990-2000) and initiated the processes of rapprochement and integration of the country into the international political and economic organizations and institutions from which it had been barred.¹³ Also, the government democratized the country by its institutional/political reforms and the changes in the norms of political behaviour, and put an end to the numerous ill-effects

¹² In line with Hans Keman's pattern (1994, 139), a party is dominant if the number of its seats in the parliament is equal or bigger than the quotient $100 : N$, N being the number of effective parliamentary parties. In the fourth mandate, the SDP had 31.4% of the seats which is more than 22.2% ($100 : 4.5$).

¹³ Between 2000 and 2003, Croatia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), signed the Central-European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), joined the Partnership for Peace, signed the Agreement on Stabilization and Accession to the EU, submitted its request for EU membership; in June of 2004 it achieved the status of a candidate.

of the authoritarian style of governing of the previous period.¹⁴ It enabled economic growth: in 1999 Croatia had a negative rate of growth of GNP of –0.9%, which later reached 2.9% (2000), 4.4% (2001), 5.2% (2002) and 4.3% (2003). Some massive projects were launched and partly completed: construction of roads, incentive housebuilding, modernization of the railway system, reorganization of the banking system, the internal debt was settled, the nominal and the real indicators of the growth of living standard increased, unemployment was reduced, etc.

Table 2. Croatian governments 1990-2003

Prime minister	Mandate	Type of government	Parties in government	Reason of termination
Stjepan Mesić	30/5/90-24/8/90	One-party	HDZ ¹	Presidential decision
Josip Manolić	24/8/90-17/7/91	One-party	HDZ ¹	Presidential decision
Franjo Gregorić	17/7/91-12/8/92	All-party	HDZ, SDP, HNS, HSLs, HDS, SDH, SSH	Early elections
Hrvoje Šarinić	12/8/92-3/4/93	One-party	HD	Presidential decision
Nikica Valentić	3/4/93-7/11/95	One-party	HDZ ²	Early elections
Zlatko Mateša	7/11/95-27/1/00	One-party	HDZ	Regular elections
Ivica Račan (I)	27/1/00-30/7/02	Coalition	SDP, HSLs, HSS, HNS, IDS, LS ³	Cabinet resignation after HSLs's departure
Ivica Račan (II)	30/7/02-23/12/03	Coalition	SDP, HSS, LS, HNS, Libra ³	Regular elections
Ivo Sanader	23/12/03-	Coalition	HDZ, DC	

¹ In the cabinets of prime ministers S. Mesić and J. Manolić, there was one minister from the HDS and a few non-party ministers.

² In the cabinet of prime minister N. Valentić there was a minister from the HSS and some non-party ministers.

³ In both coalition cabinets of prime minister I. Račan there were some non-party ministers appointed in accordance with the party quotas of the coalition partners.

The inability of the first coalition to complete its full four-year mandate structurally stemmed above all from the big number of parties in the government and from a plethora of issue-related disputes that eventually caused the fissures in the policy space that revealed, deepened and exacerbated the political and ideological differences among the

¹⁴ In a regular survey conducted by the Freedom House, in 2002 Croatia found itself for the first time on the list of free countries. Until then, it had regularly been included in the category of semi-free countries. In the period of coalition governments, Croatia went through a kind of the second wave of democratization, that included the democratization of the HDZ as the proponent of the authoritarian politics and authoritarian governing style in the prior decade. On the nature and the classifications of the type of the political regime in Croatia 1990-2000, see Kasapović, 2001.

coalition members that did not exist or were not noticeable at the beginning. Some foreign policy issues, especially the policy regarding the International Court for War Crimes Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia in the Hague in relation to the extradition of the indicted Croatian generals, the policy of privatization, agriculture, education and so on, it soon became obvious that the coalition parties were on the opposite ends of the typical postcommunist transitional axis of polarization e.g. modern-traditional, liberal-conservative or secular-clerical. In the mandate of the first coalition government this division was mostly manifested in the polarization of the SDP, HNS, IDS and the LS, on the one hand, and the HSLs on the other. In the mandate of the second coalition government, the HSS increasingly clashed with the other coalition partners because of its traditionalist, conservative and clericalist demands and attitudes.

It may be said that the critical event that served as the “crisis trigger” in the ruling coalition and greatly contributed to the departure of the HSLs was the government’s policy towards the Hague Tribunal and the reactions it provoked in the country. Already in the summer of 2000 there emerged a rightist political movement which initiated a series of mass rallies under the guise of the fight against the policy of the “criminalization of the Homeland War” that was allegedly pursued by the new government of the left-centre in their cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. The movement’s core was made up of an array of associations of the former veterans, volunteers and defenders that established the “headquarters for the defence of the dignity of the Homeland War”. Publicly or tacitly, they were supported by a part of the military and the police structures, the senior Catholic Church clergy, the radical right-wing parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties, including the oppositional HDZ, the right-wing populist trade unions, some media and so on. They demanded the ouster of the government, the resignation of the president of the state, an emergency session of the parliament, and created a genuine pre-putschist atmosphere in the country. These events reached their apogee in the anti-government political diatribe of 12 Croatian Army generals who were immediately sent into retirement by the president. However, the government enjoyed enough support by the democratic public not to succumb to this attempt of an extra-institutional rightist coup. Still, these events undoubtedly left their mark on the divisions within the coalition and precipitated the departure of the HSLs.

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