



Wollyf Krašić\*

## Criticism of the communist legacy in Croatia on the pages of the magazines *Republika Hrvatska* and *Nova Hrvatska* in the period 1989-1991

### *Abstract*

This paper presents and analyses the texts of selected Croatian émigrés, who in the early 1990s transferred their activities to the newly founded Republic of Croatia and called for a decisive break with communist practices and mentality in the moments of Croatia's transition from a communist to a democratic system. The aim of the paper is to enrich the findings of political ideas and visions in Croatia at the end of the 20th century and to show that some of the Croatian émigrés did not limit themselves to activities aimed at the creation of an independent Croatian state, but also offered solutions for its upbuilding as a truly democratic state.

**Key words:** communist system, Yugoslavia, Republic of Croatia, democratization, Croatian émigrés, *Nova Hrvatska*, *Republika Hrvatska*

### Introduction

For decades, thousands of Croatian political refugees in Western Europe and a number of overseas countries opposed communist Yugoslavia (1945-1990) in various ways and strove to create an independent and democratic state. The communist regime considered almost all émigrés to be right-wing extremists and philo-fascists. However, these were people with very different ideological and political orientations (Krašić, 2018a). Moreover, some of them were dedicated not only to the dismantling of the Yugoslav communist regime, but also to the question of how a truly democratic state could be built, focusing on the need for a radical decommunization of the future Croatian state and society. Some Croatian émigrés who returned to their homeland in the early 1990s and continued their political activity and social engagement were particularly active in the promotion of the idea that parallel to the struggle for the creation and defense of the Republic of Croatia, it is also necessary to wage a different struggle – against strong

---

\* Wollyf Krašić, Assistant prof., Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, [wkraasic@fhs.hr](mailto:wkraasic@fhs.hr)

remnants of communist elements in the state apparatus, in social relations, but also in the mental structure of individuals.

Such was the Croatian Republican Party (*Hrvatska republikanska stranka*, HRS), founded in Argentina in 1951, as well establishing its branches in the United States of America (USA), Canada, Australia and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). HRS continued to operate in Croatia under the name Croatian Republican Union (*Hrvatska republikanska zajednica*, HRZ). Its political program was strongly nationalist but was also deeply imbued with freedom (Oršanić, 1979; Korsky, 1991).<sup>1</sup> The editorial board of the London-based magazine *Nova Hrvatska*, which was heterogeneous in terms of its political views, pursued the same goal, while its editor-in-chief, Jakša Kušan was mainly classical liberal and to some extent moderately leftist (Borić, 2007; Kušan, 2000; Mihaljević, 2020: 11-18). It must certainly be said that these two groups of Croatian émigrés, while working in the exile, often had different and even completely opposite views on the recent Croatian past and the methods of the struggle for the creation of an independent Croatian state (Katalinić, 2017, II: 160-163; Krašić, 2018a: 211; Kušan, 2000: 257-258, 263, 266-268).

The aim of this paper is to scientifically evaluate the ideas of two groups of Croatian émigrés concerning their visions of the necessity and ways to eliminate the persistent and omnipresent elements of communism in the newly created democratic state and society of Croatia. The article is mainly based on the analysis and comparison of relevant texts from the aforementioned magazine *Nova Hrvatska*, and the magazine that was the main medium of the HRS and, from mid-June 1991, the HRZ – *Republika Hrvatska (Republic of Croatia)*. The texts from *Nova Hrvatska* date from 1990 and those from *Republika Hrvatska* from a somewhat longer period – from the 1989 to the end of the 1991. There are two reasons for such a conceptual selection. *Nova Hrvatska*

<sup>1</sup> The term used in the HRS texts, which is translated here as “imbued with freedom”, is called *slobodarstvo* in Croatian. English terms that could translate *slobodarstvo* are liberalism or even libertarianism. However, these terms, especially the latter, only partially reflect the essence of HRS’s ideology. For help in translating the term *slobodarstvo*, the author turned to a decades-long member of HRS, Mr. Šime Letina. An émigré, Mr. Letina lived in the United States since the second half of the 1960s, where he earned degrees in history, political science and librarianship. For more than 40 years, he worked at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. In his reply to the author of this article, he wrote, among other things: “Although *slobodarstvo* could be understood or translated as liberalism (liberal), I equate this word with the word freedom. I think that in writing and emphasizing this word, Croats have always had freedom in mind, which has a broader meaning than a concrete ideological understanding” (Letina, 2023). Taking into account numerous texts written by HRS members and Mr. Letina’s explanation, the author has accepted his suggestion that the word *slobodarstvo* should be translated as “imbued with freedom”. For a better understanding, it should be added that the political programme of the HRS, apart from the specificity of the struggle for an independent Croatian state, has a number of similarities with the ideology of liberal conservatism, especially from the 1980s.

was published bi-weekly, so that one can find many more relevant texts from the turbulent year 1990, when, among other things, the first multi-party elections in Croatia took place, than in *Republika Hrvatska*, which was published quarterly. Jakša Kušan's attempt to continue to publish *Nova Hrvatska* in Zagreb was not successful and the magazine was discontinued at the end of 1990 (Kušan, 2000: 307-312). The consulted texts from *Nova Hrvatska* are part of an extensive collection of articles selected by the writer and publicist Nikica Mihaljević and published in the form of an anthology in 2020. On the other hand, the *Republika Hrvatska* was successfully „transplanted” from Buenos Aires to Zagreb. After ten issues from the first half of the 1990s, which were published in both Argentina and Croatia, the magazine was published exclusively in Croatia from the double issue 183-184 for June 1994 until 2008 (Katalinić, 1994: 11; NSK Katalog).

In addition, the paper uses both academic and journalistic books and articles, as the activities of Croatian political refugees in the West in the period from 1945 to 1990 are increasingly the subject of academic interest. Furthermore, Jakša Kušan published a book in 2000 about the magazine he published and edited for more than three decades, entitled *Bitka za Novu Hrvatsku (Struggle for the New Croatia)*. On the other hand, a prominent member of the HRS and the first president of the HRZ, Kazimir Katalinić, published a three-volume book in 2017 entitled *Od poraza do pobjede: povijest hrvatske političke emigracije 1945-1990 (From Defeat to Victory: History of Croatian Political Emigration 1945-1990)*.

## **The vision of the Croatian Republican Party – integral freedom**

The Croatian Republican Party was founded in 1951 by a small number of Croatian émigrés in Argentina, led by Ivan Oršanić, a prominent member of the Croatian Catholic movement as well as the Ustasha – a Croatian Revolutionary Organisation in the interwar period. Furthermore, Oršanić was one of the highest officials of the wartime Independent State of Croatia (NDH). Oršanić and his peers believed that in the new circumstances after the Second World War, it was necessary to create a new form, a new political organization with which they would work for the creation of an independent Croatian state. For this reason, the word „republican” was added to the name of the new organization to emphasize the desire for an independent and democratic (!) Croatian state. Among other things, to emphasize the determination that the future Croatian state would not be a copy of the NDH with a fascist order, but a parliamentary democracy. Oršanić decided to define the organization as a party in order to emphasize the need for political pluralism, in contrast to the movements that claimed to represent the entire nation, such as the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, HSS), which became a national movement in the second half of the

1930s, then the Ustasha movement and the actions of the NDH former leader Ante Pavelić after the war, and the People's Liberation Movement under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ) during the war and organizations under its control after the end of the war (e.g., the People's Front of Yugoslavia) (Katalinić, 2017, I: 192-193, 199-208).

In the Principles of the HRS, Oršanić defined as the main goal of the party the realization of integral freedom. That implied the freedom of the Croatian people, which meant a fully independent state, and the freedom of Croats and other inhabitants of the future Croatian state who will respect the democratically constituted government, which meant a freedom imbued state organization with the existence of a just socio-economic system, i.e., social justice. In contrast to the fascist understanding of the state, the HRS emphasized that the state was not an end in itself, but that it existed for the good of the people and that the state government had to reflect the will of the people. In other words, the state exists so that people can be free. HRS argued that the future Croatian state should be a constitutional republic, headed by a president elected by parliament (Katalinić, 2017, I: 208, 210).

HRS believed that Croatia could be created peacefully, for example with the mediation of the United Nations, but also by armed means – through a revolution. The more the Yugoslav communist regime managed to consolidate itself and gain the support of the West and the East, while suppressing any kind of opposition, the more the republicans were convinced that the final stage in the process of Croatian liberation had to be the Croatian revolution. The role of the HRS in the process of liberating the Croatian people was to design and disseminate the ideological framework on which these liberation efforts would be based. However, the republicans went a step further and offered a number of solutions not only for the process of creating an independent Croatian state – but also for its state-building as a republic and its society, which will be imbued with freedom. Although they were harsh critics of communist ideology and practice, especially of the Croatian communists, whom they condemned as traitors to their own people, they believed that there was still room in the Croatian revolution for communists – for those who would renounce both communism and Yugoslavism. From the point of view of the HRS, the Croatian communists thus had to undergo the catharsis of these two grave „delusions” and atone for their „sins” by participating in the act of liberation. Thus „purified”, ex-communists and Yugoslavs of Croatian nationality now had their place in the Croatian democratic state (Katalinić, 2017, I: 209, 290-293; Katalinić, 2017, II: 128-129, 138, 174-176, 203, 211-213; Katalinić, 2017, III: 129-150; Krašić, 2018a: 207-223).

## The battle for the New Croatia – informing and educating the reader politically

The founder and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Nova Hrvatska*, Jakša Kušan began to become politically active as a student in Zagreb in the mid-1950s. With a small group of like-minded people, he founded an anti-regime organization called the Croatian Resistance Movement (*Hrvatski pokret otpora*, HPO), which sought to spread the idea of the need to create an independent Croatian state and called for various forms of civil disobedience as a form of resistance. Kušan also wrote the programme documents of the HPO, which represent the first modern Croatian political programme that emerged in Croatia after the end of the Second World War. Kušan's political ideas were not burdened by the Croatian fratricidal conflict of the Second World War. In his vision, the desire to create an independent and truly democratic Croatian state, without relying on the legacy of the HSS, the Ustasha movement and the NDH, was to be the basis for the unification of Croats at home and abroad. In the programme documents of the HPO, the door for joining such a front was opened for disappointed Croatian communists – for those who were disillusioned with the idea of the equality of nations in Yugoslavia because they saw the domination of Belgrade repeating itself, and for those whose youthful ideals of an egalitarian and classless society had been shattered by the harsh reality created by the dictatorship of the KPJ (Krašić, 2018b: 11-21, 160-325).

Partly in the face of persecution by the regime and partly because he wanted to expand the activities of the HPO, Kušan fled abroad and settled in Great Britain. In exile, Kušan tried to give the Croatian anti-communist struggle a more modern expression, as he believed that the policy based on the outdated, compromised and totalitarian principles of the Ustasha was disastrous and was failing. He therefore founded a magazine in London in 1958 called *Hrvatski bilten*, which was renamed *Nova Hrvatska* in 1959. And with the latter name, Kušan not only wanted to emphasize that the magazine was founded by young, new (!) political refugees, in contrast to older émigrés who had left their homeland in 1945, but also that they advocated the creation of a new (!) Croatian state, without the admixture of right-wing or left-wing totalitarianism (Kušan 2000: 9, 22, 24). In the vision of Kušan and his collaborators, the fight for a „new Croatia” had to begin among the numerous Croatian political emigrants, because the magazine was to become, among other things, a „weapon of Croatian public opinion”, i.e., to convey what the majority thought (Kušan, 2000: 37). The aim was to transform the passive reader into an active contributor in various ways (Kušan, 2000: 39). Kušan further writes that *Nova Hrvatska* was guided by fulfilling the main interest of the readers, namely „progress in information and political education”, and he explains: „It is clear that only a politically savvy and informed member

of the community can be an active factor in its environment and not a passive object of political manipulation” (Kušan, 2000: 8). Therefore, readers should be offered as much quality information as possible so that they can independently form values and political attitudes and make decisions. In this way, public opinion could prevail in Croatian political life (Kušan, 2000: 8).

Taking Kušan’s words into account, one can conclude that he wanted to democratize relations in the Croatian political emigration in order to break the monopoly on leadership and representation of a relatively narrow circle of individuals who distinguished themselves as leaders of émigrés organizations and groups and who, in Kušan’s opinion, were not suitable for such positions, either because of the prominent roles they held in the NDH regime or because of some other shortcomings. Kušan writes about the role of intellectuals, at home and in exile: „Regardless of the system, the silence and withdrawal of the Croatian intelligentsia from the political sphere opens the door to careerists, corruptionists and primitives with dubious intentions” (Kušan, 2000: 67).

In contrast to the Croatian émigrés, who believed that the Croatian state could only be created within the framework of a wider conflict between the Western and Eastern blocs of the Cold War or various forms of armed struggle, the circle around the *Nova Hrvatska* magazine was convinced that the creation of an independent and democratic Croatian state would take place gradually, in an evolutionary way. Kušan believed that it was necessary to work on the almost daily expansion of personal and civil liberties in Croatia, which would ultimately lead to the downfall of the communist system. At the same time, he called on some of the Croatian communists to take a stronger stand against the centralist circles in the League of Communists, especially in Belgrade, as their advocacy for reform policies in the administrative and economic spheres could lead to their entire political evolution from communists to socialists or social democrats (Kušan, 2000: 73-74, 171-173, 176-177, 191; Krašić, 2018a: 37-39, 45, 55-58).

### ***Republika Hrvatska and Nova Hrvatska***

At the end of 1989, the president of the HRS at that time, Ivo Korky, published an extensive text entitled „At a Decisive Moment,” in which he wrote not only about the danger of the growing Greater Serbian threat, but also farsightedly about the consequences that would remain after the collapse of the communist dictatorship in Croatia. He warned of the strength of the ruling communist class, which enjoys enormous privileges due to its leading position in state and society, but also of how a significant part of the population has shaped its world view under the influence of communism. He clarified the latter by claiming – surprisingly and even unpleasantly for some – that some non-communist and even anti-communist circles are infected by communist

ideology, i.e., have adopted a communist way of thinking and acting (Korsky, 1989: 24). Thus, he wrote that some intellectuals from democratic and Catholic circles „unconsciously accept communist attitudes and therefore propose hybrid, semi-Marxist solutions and are surprised that new measures stemming from the free-market system or free, parliamentary democracy do not produce the desired results as in the countries where they are successfully applied” (Korsky, 1989: 25). He then offered an answer to these „surprises”: „Upgraded ideas cannot succeed” (ibid.). In other words, according to Korsky, socialism cannot be improved, the construction of democracy on socialist foundations cannot succeed.

He considered the introduction of only some solutions in the field of politics or economics from democracy to socialism to be very dangerous, because this process actually blocks the way to freedom. Korsky correctly predicted that in the chaos caused by the reforms, nostalgia for the period of „order” during Tito’s lifetime would prevail and all those in the government who had not separated from Marxism and those who wanted to stay in power at all costs would take advantage of this (Korsky, 1989: 25). That is why he sent this message: „That is why freedom-imbued reforms that are introduced superficially and unsystematically or inconsistently are a major obstacle to the realization of a freedom-imbued political and economic system. This is because people believe that they are already experiencing a system imbued with freedom and are disappointed by the disorder and difficulties that have arisen and thus by a system imbued with freedom that they have never really enjoyed” (Korsky, 1989: 26).

The task of Croatian and freedom-oriented intellectuals, such as the members of the HRS, was to break the illusions Korsky wrote about – that is, to spread the awareness that Croatia needed radical reforms and that freedom could not be achieved either within the framework of socialism or in a democratic system in which the Marxist worldview prevailed among the population (Korsky, 1989: 26). According to Korsky, however, the challenges for the emerging Croatian state do not end here, as he claimed that even if a freedom-imbued system is introduced, it will encounter great difficulties „because after dictatorship people are not ready for freedom, but mentally and emotionally only for another or different dictatorship” (ibid.). He warned that there would be remnants of the communist system for a long time to come and that communists must be allowed to express their political views freely in order to consolidate freedom (Korsky, 1989: 26-27).

In the April 1990 issue of *Republika Hrvatska*, before the first multi-party elections in Croatia, the unsigned text „On the Eve of Liberation” was published. The main message was that these were not „ordinary” parliamentary elections, but a referendum in which voters would decide on the following: Yugoslavia and communism or Croatia and democracy. However, the text warns that only a small number of people know what democracy is, namely only those who were of legal age before 1929 and

the introduction of the dictatorship of King Aleksandar I. Karađorđević. The younger generations grew up under different dictatorships. Then Oršanić's thought from 1954 was mentioned: „History knows no great freedoms after times of great dictatorships”. The latter is explained by the assertion that a system and atmosphere of great freedom cannot be created artificially, because the dictatorship tried to destroy the forces that lead to the creation of a system of freedom, which is never completely possible (Uoči oslobođenja, 1990: 2). The Croatian opposition candidates should be aware of this and clearly tell the people that, as Oršanić said, it is not the worst situation during the existence of a dictatorship, but the one after it. Or in Oršanić's exact words, also from 1954: „The greatest revenge of dictators and dictatorships lies in the state they leave behind” (Uoči oslobođenja, 1990: 3). From this article, it is noteworthy to highlight the part that talks about possible revenge against members of the communist regime, about which the following is also written: „The Croatian opposition, the Croatian people, when they take their destiny back into their own hands, must know that their first duty is to break the chain of revenge that is responsible for many misfortunes that have befallen all nations that liberate themselves” (Uoči oslobođenja, 1990: 3). Therefore, the HRS advocated not the revenge against a large number of people who were members of the communist government, but the fair trials against the perpetrators and those who had ordered the repression of political dissidents of the Yugoslav communist regime (Uoči oslobođenja, 1990: 3).

The following year, in 1991, Korsky gave an extensive interview on a number of topics relevant to this article. And on that occasion, he emphasized that the fundamental task of the HRS was the struggle for the realization of integral freedom and the conviction that Croats will fight not only for the form, for the names and signs of state independence, but for the content, „for the political, economic and social content to be presented as the goal of the struggle and sacrifices” (Moje sudjelovanje u hrvatskim političkim zbivanjima, 1991: 49). He also reminded that republicans are not „worshippers of the state”, but that they see it only as a suitable political framework for the realization of the freedom of the people and the individual. Indeed, an individual cannot be completely free if the nation to which he or she belongs is not free, and a nation is not free unless all its members are completely free. „But there is no real freedom for the starving and economically neglected inhabitants of a country,” Korsky concluded his explanation of the basic principles of the HRS political programme (Moje sudjelovanje u hrvatskim političkim zbivanjima, 1991: 50).

Regarding the new Croatian authorities, he said that the HRS was not in opposition to the Croatian government and that its leadership and members made no secret of the fact that they supported this national movement – because the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ) adopted this political form, which is unusual for democratic countries, due to the unfree system. Then that the HRS sup-



ported the HDZ in the pre-election campaign because it saw in it „the only political form that was capable of winning the elections due to the number of its supporters” (Moje sudjelovanje u hrvatskim političkim zbivanjima, 1991: 51). However, he added that they emphasized „that it is necessary to understand that Croatian political life must not be transformed into a new unanimity and that even the majority party must never think that it will be the only one” (ibid.). Moreover, Korsky admits that they spoke and wrote that „after more than four decades of totalitarianism, it is normal that in order to overthrow the system, one needed a superior force, and that even the leadership came from the former ruling team, so that the dissidents, the dissatisfied and disillusioned members of the leading or ruling class, are the ones who will ensure the victory of the forces of freedom” (ibid.). He came to the conclusion that the HDZ leadership brings together dissidents, i.e., people who used to belong to the communist system, while the majority of members are non-communist and moderately conservative. According to Korsky, the lower functionaries and local HDZ leaders are close to the Christian democratic, Christian social and, in the European sense, liberal parties (ibid.)

Korsky was extremely realistic when it came to the communist cadres remaining in the new government. He pointed out that, unlike the communists, the HDZ had come to power in democratic elections and therefore, also due to the pressure from the West, had to refrain from „cleansing” the administration of those who were part of the „old system”. (Moje sudjelovanje u hrvatskim političkim zbivanjima, 1991: 60). There were further difficulties for the new government – it had no armed forces of its own, the repressive apparatus was largely in the hands of people from the „old system”. The economy, in turn, was under the control of Belgrade, which also used the Serbian minority to destabilize Croatia, Korsky enumerated, expressing understanding for the difficult situation in which the new Croatian authorities found themselves. However, he said that there were cases of „unworthy people” getting into prominent positions in the government, but that this was a feature of any upheaval and that such people would eventually have to leave positions for which they were not suitable. One of the most important questions after the introduction of the multi-party system in Croatia was what should happen to the so-called social property, which was nominally in the hands of the „working class” but actually under the control of the state and the League of Communists. Therefore, Korsky also addressed this issue, saying that he was in favor of a „mixed economy”, i.e., the coexistence of the state sector with the private sector developing in parallel. He emphasized that the state’s influence on the economy should be reduced and left to market mechanisms to eliminate unprofitable enterprises (Moje sudjelovanje u hrvatskim političkim zbivanjima, 1991: 61-62). He added that, on the other hand, „unbridled private greed” should not take the place of „current public inefficiency and irresponsible waste of resources” (Moje sudjelovanje u

hrvatskim političkim zbivanjima, 1991: 63). He explained that a mixed economy would be a kind of compromise because there are currently no conditions for complete economic freedom in Croatia, as there are no entrepreneurs, employees and workers who can work in such an environment. That is why Croatia cannot immediately ask to join the European Economic Community, because it must first be cured of the „socialist disease”. „The transformation of larger companies into joint-stock companies, in which the state initially holds the majority of shares and later gradually sells them off, as well as the transformation of smaller companies into cooperatives and the development of spontaneously founded new private companies will create a new work ethic and thus enable the Croatian economy to rise to the Western European level,” concluded Korsky (ibid.).

With reference to Korsky’s interview, one should ask oneself how great the will was in the ranks of the HDZ to make a decisive break with communist practice, which would also mean excluding some of the prominent figures of the communist regime from the administration and justly punishing the perpetrators and executors of the repression. Such a scenario was difficult to implement, firstly due to the inability of former communists, including president of the HDZ and the Republic of Croatia – Franjo Tuđman, to completely abandon the „communist mentality”; secondly, and even more so, due to the numerous opportunists who had „run” into the ranks of the new government in order to protect their acquired privileges and who would certainly put up various kinds of resistance in the event of greater interference in their interests.

In the same issue of *Republika Hrvatska* in which the interview with party leader Korsky was published, the HRS commented on the issue of joining the Croatian national movement under the leadership of the HDZ. The text, entitled „An Honorable and Responsible Role”, stated that it is currently easier to „join hundreds of thousands of HDZ supporters or seek shelter in another national party”, but that the HRS believes that party differences and ideological criticism are necessary so that political life in Croatia does not turn back into a dictatorship. Although such a danger did not exist in reality, this is mentioned to illustrate the HRS’s commitment to a truly democratic society (*Časna i odgovorna uloga*, 1991: 76).

On June 15, 1990, the founding assembly of the Croatian Republican Union, as the HRS called itself after it had shifted the focus of its work to the homeland, took place in Zagreb. The newly elected president, Kazimir Katalinić, former secretary of the HRS for many years, reminded the audience of Oršanić’s thought that after the fall of a dictatorship, its spirit remains, it shapes the liberation that a new dictatorship can bring about. A liberated Croatia cannot automatically become a free Croatia, warned Katalinić. Due to the long-term influence of the dictatorship, it will be difficult for the bearers of liberation in their homeland to establish a system of true freedom. Therefore, forms of organization are needed to spread the ideas of freedom. After 40 years

of spreading the vision of freedom in political exile, the HRS will do the same at home under a new name. Katalinić also pointed out that in the many decades of its work, the HRS has developed solutions to the most important political problems of Croatia and the Croatian people. Moreover, it has the experience of operating in the Western world and was shaped in the democratic countries, while at home the only example of political activity and organization was the communist party (Osnivačka skupština Hrvatske republikanske zajednice, 1991: 25, 40, 43). On this occasion, the HRZ programme was also adopted, part of which referred to the Croatian Constitution adopted at the end of December 1990. The republicans proposed several changes which, in their opinion, should have led to more democracy, as well as a change in the electoral system with the aim of more direct participation of voters in the formation of government (PROGRAM Hrvatske republikanske zajednice, 1991: 50-51).

Although they largely held opposing views on how to conduct the battle for an independent Croatian state and argued openly and fiercely on various occasions, the members of the HRS/HRZ and people who gathered around the magazine *Nova Hrvatska* assessed the situation in Croatia on the eve of the first parliamentary elections in a similar way and then criticized the abundant retention of communist elements in the young Croatian democracy. In the first issue of *Nova Hrvatska* for 1990, Jakša Kušan wrote unreservedly that the main enemy of Croatian freedom and democracy was no longer the communists on their way out of power, but „our own bad qualities – indifference to social issues, vanity, ambition, egoism, striving for personal advancement and rivalry, that is the main struggle we are facing” (Mihaljević, 2020: 556). Kušan was of the opinion that the latter and other personal weaknesses and mistakes were particularly widespread in communist systems. He considered them dangerous for the stability of the future Croatian democracy, especially because he saw them in the ranks of the Croatian opposition. Speaking of the latter, he also wrote about a widespread phenomenon in the appearances of certain Croatian opposition members, who often limited themselves to uttering patriotic Croatian slogans. According to Kušan, the first general assembly of the HDZ in February 1990 looked like this, where no real political programme was presented. Soon a quasi-political competition of „who is the greater Croat” began between some of the Croatian opposition parties (Mihaljević, 2020: 563-564). Kušan’s criticism was correct to a considerable extent, and the external manifestation of Croatianhood as the main prerequisite for joining the HDZ was the ideal basis for the mass exodus from the ranks of the League of Communists to the ranks of the election winner and the maintenance of elements of the communist system and mentality.

In those moments, Kušan was not a blinded and bitter critic of Tuđman and the HDZ, so he praised Tuđman for the peaceful transfer of power, the easing of tensions, the relationship towards the Serb minority in Croatia, as well as for the messages that

there will be no revenge against the members former regime (Mihaljević, 2020: 573, 575). Kušan believed that there is actually no great danger of a conflict between the new government and the communists, because „representatives of the old government are more afraid for their privileges and corruption income” than Serbian nationalism or that they will be persecuted because they were members of the League of Communists (Mihaljević, 2020: 575). But Kušan saw another mortal danger for Croatian democracy: „Most of the evils and mistakes of the communist regime were rightly attributed to incompetent people in responsible positions and advancement by party loyalty and connections, not by ability. This deformation did not disappear overnight when the communists came down from power. It will use every weak point to poison the new order, and first of all the winning party.” He realistically asserted that new political parties were created in a short time, so there was no time for personnel checks, for finding the best experts for certain areas, but also that „society, which for several generations lived in abnormal circumstances, developed in the struggle for self-preservation to the incredible perfection of its opportunistic inclination. That is why the same people from the Party (Kušan refers to the the Communist Party, that is, the League of Communists, AN), who until yesterday were fear and trembling in Croatia, suddenly approach the winner and become the greatest Croats” (Mihaljević, 2020: 575). According to Kušan, this phenomenon also had its good side, as it enabled a more painless transfer of power, „but at the same time it severely disappoints precisely those who paid dearly for their consistency under the former regime”, obviously thinking of himself as well (Mihaljević, 2020: 575). Such people are disgusted by the hunt for positions led by ex-communists, Kušan remarked, but, similarly to Korsky, he noted that non-communist or anti-communist Croats also participate in this. At the end of the article, however, he expressed the hope that the strengthening of democratic values and system will eventually correct bad staffing solutions (Mihaljević, 2020: 576). After the outbreak of the rebellion of a part of the Serbian population in Croatia in the summer of 1990, he wrote that „the authority of the government is damaged not only by the Serbian insurgents, but also by all those who abuse the weaknesses and volatility of the new system for their personal interests, be they old crooks in the social enterprises or new careerists in the political structures” (Mihaljević, 2020: 588).

As in the *Republika Hrvatska*, articles appeared on the pages of *Nova Hrvatska* discussing what should be done with the so-called social property. At the same time, it must be said that articles on economic issues were certainly present in *Nova Hrvatska* and that the magazine wrote extensively about the weaknesses of the communist system in Yugoslavia long before its collapse and proposed solutions for its implementation in the future Croatian state. An outstanding economic expert and long-time member of the editorial board of *Nova Hrvatska*, Tihomil Rađa, like Korsky, advocated the introduction of a mixed economy, i.e., that part of the „social property” should

be transferred to the state and part sold to the citizens. However, as most of them did not have much capital due to the difficult economic situation, Rađa saw that as a great opportunity for investment and thus for the return of numerous Croatian emigrants. However, a prerequisite for this would have been liberal legislation (Mihaljević, 2020: 264-266). Rađa also pointed out that two-thirds of companies were eligible for bankruptcy proceedings and that further investment in these companies would have a number of negative consequences, such as a further increase in already extremely high inflation. As a possible solution, he suggested the introduction of some kind of temporary receivership in companies to overcome the difficulties caused by excessive bureaucratization. Rađa claimed that some kind of control in „self-managed companies” is necessary „because otherwise all kinds of fraud will happen under the guise of self-management and bankruptcy in companies”. He added that in recent months „almost a thousand directors have suddenly started their own companies in the same industry” and that „such ‚competition’ and ‚entrepreneurship’ are not allowed even in the most liberal countries”. (Mihaljević, 2020: 270). One of Rađa’s conclusions is: „In the structures of the new authorities, there are also thick deposits of outdated business habits and ways of thinking. Many have renounced socialism, but socialism has not renounced them” (ibid.). He also recorded an interesting event when one of the „advocates of the new government” said that the opposition had promised „not a better life, but a fairer distribution”. Rađa considers that statement to be a symbolic remnant of the „socialist consciousness”, which was much more concerned with „distribution and redistribution” than with the creation of goods that the market should distribute (ibid.). Rađa saw the role of the state very similarly to the republicans. He wrote that the government should take care of the distribution of public goods, such as healthcare, education, the system of social solidarity, justice, civil security, road maintenance, then resources such as water and forests. Then there are monopolies on postal services, railroads and the like. And if we talk about private goods and the economy, the role of the state should only be to ensure a stable framework for the economy through fiscal, monetary and customs policies as well as social and labor legislation (ibid.).

The extent to which the communist system was present in each individual is also illustrated by an article from *Nova Hrvatska*, which was about a text written for the magazine by a certain collaborator from Croatia. The text spoke about the challenges of denationalization of companies and was full of expressions characteristic of „socialist self-government”, which were incomprehensible to the majority of *Nova Hrvatska*’s readers abroad. Therefore, *Nova Hrvatska* exclaimed: „How is it possible to open a new chapter in the economy, to move on to completely new principles and methods, to convince people to accept these changes and finally work more and better than under the failed system, how is all this and more possible if the problems are approached in

the old way, with the old language and the same socio-economic phraseology?” (Mihaljević, 2020: 547).

In the last issue of *Nova Hrvatska* from the end of 1990, Kušan wrote prophetically and boldly in an article entitled „The Goals Remain the Same” that „the greatest danger for Croatia in the long term does not come from Knin or Belgrade (meaning the rebellion of a part of the Serbian population in Croatia and the Serbian aggression), but from the same contagious habits that destroyed previous societies”, and called for „more decisive action against careerism in political positions, incompetence, corruption, nepotism and provincialism” (Mihaljević, 2020: 595).

Kušán referred to the period and events analyzed in this paper in his repeatedly mentioned book, in which he was far more critical in his assessment than in the articles published in *Nova Hrvatska* in 1990. Due to his deep disappointment and even bitterness towards the Croatian authorities under Tuđman at that time, he was more subjective in his assessments with a distance of ten years. For example, he wrote that the HDZ took in Croatian émigrés whom he considered radicals and primitives and who occupied important positions in the new government (Kušan, 2000: 7, 157). There is no doubt that individuals who were Kušan’s political opponents, became influential members of the HDZ, but also that the HDZ, just as at home, took on the characteristics of a national movement for the creation of an independent state in the Croatian diaspora, joined by people with very different ideological and political views (Čizmić et. al., 2005: 435-470). When it comes to returnees from the diaspora who occupied prominent positions in the new Croatian government, it should also be mentioned that Branko Salaj, a member of the closest circle that gathered around *Nova Hrvatska*, was Minister of Information in the Government of Democratic Unity from August 1991 to August 1992 and then Croatian Ambassador to France and the Netherlands (Salaj, Branko; Kušan, 2000: 18, 50, 91, 104, 109-110).

It is clear from Kušan’s writing that he believed that part of the Croatian political emigration, which according to him had a strong democratic deficit, very easily found a common language with people from the communist system who also had this characteristic. By then, two opposing groups – Croatian nationalists from the homeland and the diaspora and part of the Croatian communists – had reached a cooperation in the early 1990s aimed at satisfying personal, family, party and similar interests at the expense of general, national, Croatian interests. Moreover, Kušan put forward a kind of conspiracy theory, claiming that the communist secret services in Croatia played a key role in installing Franjo Tuđman as the head of the newly created Croatian state, which he then paid back by not lustrating the cadres who had previously been involved in horrific human rights violations and allowing them to continue consuming the privileges they had previously acquired (Kušan, 2000: 220-221, 314).

The phenomenon described by Kušan has actually occurred to a certain extent. However, two extremely important things should also be emphasized. The creation of an independent Croatian state cannot be explained as the result of a phantom alliance of numerically small groups of Croatian right-wing and left-wing radicals.<sup>2</sup> Millions of people participated in the process of independence and then in the defense of the Republic of Croatia in the Homeland War by participating in the multi-party elections, participating in the referendum on Croatian independence and in various efforts to defend the Republic of Croatia against Greater Serbian aggression. There was therefore no equal „division of spoils” between the „Ustasha and the *udbaši*”, as the proponents of this conspiracy theory like to say.<sup>3</sup> That this is the case is evident from the fact that the vast majority of former Croatian émigrés were already dissatisfied with the retention of the communist legacy in Croatia in the 1990s, and this dissatisfaction only intensified. Among them are also people who joined the HDZ and whose prominent members were from the diaspora, such as Marin Sopta (Intervju Marin Sopta: Mnogi bi na mom mjestu davno napustili Hrvatsku da su doživjeli ono što sam ja doživio nakon povratka). It is also important to mention that the returnees from abroad, including the former émigrés, mainly occupied positions in diplomacy, the army, the intelligence services and the police, while those institutions and positions where they could influence the transition process more significantly remained beyond their reach (in the political and administrative structures, the economy, the judiciary and the like) (Čizmić et.al., 2005: 463-470).

On the other hand, in his later review of the period of the establishment of the independent Croatian state, Kušan rightly criticized the Croatian authorities of the time for not having familiarized themselves better with the experiences of Croats in the diaspora, because they would have seen that Croatian political emigrants had discussed and offered solutions to the problems that surfaced in the early 1990s (Kušan, 2000: 7). He explained that he and his colleagues considered the participation of numerous Croatians in the elections in Canada, the USA and Australia to be a very valuable experience and firmly believed that these people would one day be the engines of democratization in Croatia. In addition, there were quite a few who participated in the work of local self-government in the countries of the Western world, not only in the aforementioned overseas countries, but also in Sweden, for example (Kušan, 2000: 315; Krašić, 2022c: 174-180). According to Kušan, there was even more experience in the field of business organization and work under modern conditions, the functioning

---

<sup>2</sup> See in detail about this theory: Hudelist, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> The term *udbaš* refers to UDB-a, an abbreviation of the name for the Yugoslav secret service, which was actually the political police and one of the most important levers of repression of the communist regime. The full name is State Security Administration (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*, UDB).

of the market, experience with independent trade unions, media freedom and the like. He added that the majority of emigrants in the Western world had adopted the need for tolerance, i.e., respect for other people and other opinions (Kušan, 2000: 315).

He also wrote, quite rightly, that in the early days of democratic life, Croatia understandably did not have a free press that could shape public opinion and whose reaction and criticism would largely prevent the survival of the destructive social phenomena prevalent in the communist system (Kušan, 2000: 158). Kušan further explains that many in the Croatian opposition believed that it was not the right time to criticize, as the young Croatian state was struggling desperately for its independence and then for its survival, while the circle around *Nova Hrvatska* believed that „it is a sign of weakness and political parochialism not to react to failures, which for various reasons we from abroad could perceive more easily than our compatriots at home” (Kušan, 2000: 160). Kušan also admits that he had no real insight into the situation in his home country due to his decades-long absence from Croatia, writing: „We were obviously not sufficiently aware of how widespread and deeply rooted various deformations of political behavior are as a result of the long-standing one-party system and the habits acquired under communism.” However, he and his colleagues felt that the time of the emergence of Croatian democracy, despite the fact that it was facing enormous challenges from external threats, was the right time to point out such mistakes and phenomena (Kušan, 2000: 161). „Unfortunately, what we could offer, our foreign experiences and the political habits of the Western climate, seemed to find little interest” in Croatia, Kušan concludes (Kušan, 2000: 163). Kušan is convinced that the criticism of the existing conditions, the lack of connection to the new Croatian authorities and the insistence on independence contributed significantly to the fact that *Nova Hrvatska* did not take root in the new Croatia. He claims that the qualities characteristic of communist parties – blind obedience and worship – were valued by the new Croatian authorities (Kušan, 2000: 314).

Another reason for the failure of the project to transfer *Nova Hrvatska* to the home country was the extremely limited opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship in Croatia in 1990. Regardless of all objective difficulties, according to Kušan, the abolition of communist elements was too slow, and phenomena such as excessive bureaucratization, monopolization in the field of publishing and media, and even open theft of magazine copies sent by employees of distribution companies for sale in Croatia had a significant impact on *Nova Hrvatska*'s failure to move to Croatia and become the Croatian *Time*, *The Economist* or *Der Spiegel*, as Kušan wrote (Kušan, 2000: 163-168, 307-310; Mihaljević, 2020: 58-60, 577, 579, 594-595).



## Conclusion

Politically and socially active Croats abroad had numerous ideas and visions for up-building an independent and democratic Croatian state. Among them, Croatian émigrés stand out, some of whom continued their political and social engagement even after returning to their homeland in the early 1990s. One of the most important elements of their political agendas was that a thorough decommunization must be carried out in parallel with the defense of the newly established state as a prerequisite for building a truly democratic state. This article presents the ideological and political programs and then the criticism of the communist legacy in Croatia of the Croatian Republican Party/Union and the group of intellectuals who gathered around the magazine *Nova Hrvatska* in the period from 1989 to 1991.

Although the Yugoslav communist regime demonized almost all Croatian émigrés as fascists, the future Croatian state was to be exclusively democratic, regardless of their mutual differences in their visions and political programs. For only the democratic system of government offered the much-needed framework for overcoming the consequences of the Croatian fratricidal conflict from the Second World War. Moreover, it was the only effective alternative to the communist system of government, which they believed had led the Croatian people into a severe political, economic and moral crisis. In order to survive at all, the new Croatian state not only had to defend itself against Greater Serbian aggression, but also decisively break with the communist legacy.

Prominent members of the HRS/HRZ warned that due to the long existence of the communist dictatorship in Croatia, communist elements remain not only in the state administration, the economy and the like, but also in the mindset and behaviour of most people. Furthermore, the party warned that both non-communist and anti-communist-oriented individuals and groups think and act in a way that is characteristic of a one-party system. Although the Republic of Croatia has transformed itself into a democratic state, in the opinion of the HRS/HRZ it had democratic deficits, and the public was even warned that there was a possibility of a gradual slide into a new form of totalitarian or authoritarian forms of government. Therefore, the party members advocated investing great efforts in what could be called political re-education – both of society as a whole and of as many individuals as possible. Or, to use a phrase from the party's founding texts – to spread the spirit of freedom.

As an émigré, the founder and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Nova Hrvatska*, Jakša Kušan, was a political opponent and harsh critic of the HRS. However, when he criticized the retention of communist elements in the young Croatian democracy, he warned of the same problems and issues as HRS/HRZ. In addition to the retention of communist cadres in prominent positions in the state administration and in positions

of power, Kušan warned above all of the danger of retaining social relations, which he saw as characteristic of the communist system. He was thinking primarily of phenomena such as nepotism and corruption, but also opportunism, and even pointed out that these „diseases“ of the collapsing communist system were more dangerous for the long-term survival of the Republic of Croatia than the Serbian aggression.

## References

- Borić, Gojko, 2007, *Hrvat izvan domovine : sjećanja političkog emigranta*, Naklada Pavičić, Zagreb.
- Časna i odgovorna uloga, 1991, *Republika Hrvatska*, vol. 172: 73-77.
- Čizmić, Ivan, Sopta, Marin, Šakić, Vlado, 2005, *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 2005.
- Hudelist, Darko, 2004, *Tuđman: biografija*, Profil International, Zagreb.
- Intervju Marin Sopta: Mnogi bi na mom mjestu davno napustili Hrvatsku da su doživjeli ono što sam ja doživio nakon povratka. <https://teleskop.hr/hrvatska/intervju-marin-sopta-mnogi-bi-na-mom-mjestu-davno-napustili-hrvatsku-da-su-doživjeli-ono-sto-sam-ja-doživio-nakon-povratka/> . Accessed on December 19, 2023.
- Katalinić, Kazimir, 2017, *Od poraza do pobjede : povijest hrvatske političke emigracije 1945.-1990.*, Vol. I-III, Naklada Trpimir, Mini-print-logo, Zagreb, Varaždin.
- Korsky, Ivo, 1989, U odlučnom času, *Republika Hrvatska*, vol. 167: 1-27.
- Korsky, Ivo, 1991, Moje sudjelovanje u hrvatskim političkim zbivanjima, *Republika Hrvatska*, vol. 172: 32-64.
- Korsky, Ivo, 1991, *Hrvatski nacionalizam*, Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, Zagreb.
- Krašić, Wolly, 2018a, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb.
- Krašić, Wolly, 2018b, *Hrvatski pokret otpora: hrvatske državotvorne organizacije i skupine 1945. – 1966.*, AGM, Zagreb.
- Krašić, Wolly, 2022c, Croatian Federation of Sweden in 1980s – a story of an improbable success, *Historijski zbornik* (75), 1: 155-192.
- Kušan, Jakša, 2000, *Bitka za Novu Hrvatsku*, „Otokar Keršovani“, Rijeka.
- Mihaljević, Nikica, ed., 2020, *Zbornik radova Nove Hrvatske*, Umjetnička organizacija Knjigohvat, Varaždin.
- NSK Katalog. [https://katalog.nsk.hr/F/?func=direct&doc\\_number=000001420](https://katalog.nsk.hr/F/?func=direct&doc_number=000001420) . Accessed on November 22, 2023.
- Oršanić, Ivan, 1979, *Vizija slobode*, Buenos Aires.
- Osnivačka skupština Hrvatske republikanske zajednice, 1991, *Republika Hrvatska*, vol. 174: 25-45.
- Program Hrvatske republikanske zajednice, 1991, *Republika Hrvatska*, vol. 174: 46-60.

Salaj, Branko. <https://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=54140> . Accessed on December 18, 2023.

Šime Letina's e-mail to the author. November 27, 2023.

Uoči oslobođenja, 1990, *Republika Hrvatska*, vol. 168: 1-4.

## Kritika komunističkog nasljeđa u Hrvatskoj na stranicama novina *Republika Hrvatska* i *Nova Hrvatska* u razdoblju 1989-1991.

### *Sažetak*

U ovome radu prezentiraju se i analiziraju tekstovi izabranih pripadnika hrvatske političke emigracije, koji su početkom 1990-ih prenijeli svoje djelovanje u novouspostavljenu Republiku Hrvatsku te u trenucima hrvatske tranzicije iz komunističkog u demokratski sustav pozivali na potrebu odlučnog raskida sa komunističkim praksama i mentalitetom. Cilj rada jest obogatiti saznanja o političkim idejama i vizijama u Hrvatskoj koncem 20. stoljeća. K tome, ilustrirati da se dio hrvatskih političkih emigranata nije ograničavao samo na djelovanje s ciljem stvaranja samostalne hrvatske države, nego i nudio rješenja za njenu izgradnju kao istinski demokratske države.

**Ključne riječi:** komunistički sustav, Jugoslavija, Hrvatska, demokratizacija, hrvatski politički emigranti, *Nova Hrvatska*, *Republika Hrvatska*