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Evolving identities: a poststructuralist analysis of Croatia's approach to minority rights

(Work in progress – please do not cite without permission)

In my paper I apply a poststructuralist approach to the study of relations between Croatia and the EU. The changing nature of Croatia's political identity and its acceptance of European norms and values are addressed through the case of minority rights in Croatia. The understanding of what it means to be a modern, democratic, European state is central to the study since it provides the basis of framing the minority policies in the light of the future membership in the EU. In my paper I will explore the relationship between the civilisational discourse (East/Balkans vs. West/EU) and minority rights policy choices. The discrepancy between the Western/EU and Eastern/Balkan identities offers the possibility to explore and theorise further the nature of identity and its relation to concrete political action, in this case the minority rights in the changing Croatian context of democratisation. The paper will briefly introduce basic theoretical assumptions about identity construction and proceed to the case study material and discussion of empirical findings. The data includes speeches, statements and interviews by the political elites.

Introduction

This paper analyses political change in Croatia and focuses on the question of minority rights protection in the year 2000 that witnessed a dramatic change after parliamentary and presidential elections. The analysis is conducted from a poststructuralist perspective that is rooted in the works of Laclau and Mouffe. My methodology follows the work of Lene Hansen on Radical Otherness and the need to include a range of Other-ness during analysis as well as to establish a clear system of linking and differentiation.¹ The study takes identity as a central concept and relates it to discursive constructions as well as the policy-making process.

Studying norms and values in relation to the actors' identities and the subsequent relation to policymaking reveals their interdependence, mutual construction and constitution. Looking closely into the development of Croatia's identity from the communist period towards the liberal-democratic era has demonstrated that peculiarities of each case study must be taken into account if one wants to understand the current events regarding enlargement and especially the processes of political change. Croatia's changing constructions of Self, closely connected with the issue of engaging with minority rights are all factors responsible for the country's more or less successful initiatives regarding the minority protection norm in the period of the study.

The relevance for my study of Croatia is to be found in the way the process of Othering changed after the elections in the year 2000. Significant changes on the political agenda and progress in terms of getting closer to the desired EU membership can be studied as interplay of Croatian identity, its relations to the EU, to Yugoslavia/Serbia as well as a rearticulation of Croatia's own past. In the Balkans perspective the following applies: 'Identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference. One is a Bosnian Serb to the degree to which one is not a Bosnian Moslem or a Croat... What is shocking about these developments, is not the inevitable dialectic of identity/difference that they display but rather the atavistic belief that identities can be maintained and secured only by eliminating difference and otherness. The negotiation of identity/difference... is the political problem facing democracies on a global scale.'²

Regulating minority rights has become an important indicator of democratisation in Western societies. Despite differences in institutional arrangements across European Union member states, the Copenhagen Criteria of Accession prescribed protection of minorities as one of the conditions for EU membership. Croatia had to adapt to these Western democratic standards after its proclamation of independence in 1991 and the subsequent war (1991-1995). A number of problems related to minority rights, particular to the Croatian social and political setting immediately arose and continued to challenge political agendas and proposed solutions.

¹ L. Hansen (2006), *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, Routledge, London

² Seyla Benhabib as quoted in R. Wodak, R. de Cillia, M. Reisigl and K. Liebhart (eds) (1999), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, p. 2

Theoretical framework and methodology

Identity is a relational term which defines the relationship between two or more related entities in a manner that asserts a difference, similarity or equality. In this way the concept of identity does not denote anything static and unchanging but rather it is a feature that changes all the time.³ During the period in which actor's identity is being redefined or defined for the first time, a normative space is created that offers a possibility of incorporating a new norm that is aligned with the developing identity. In the context of this study we are looking at what kind of a state is taking the minority protection norm within the context of the EU conditionality.

The process of identity building is studied as a construction around the process of 'othering'. 'Othering' distinguishes between the Self and the Other – the outsider against whom the self identifies. Through repeated encounters with otherness the identity of the Self is reinforced. Identity is always relational which means that othering can be both negative and positive.⁴

Spatiality, temporality and ethicality are analytical lenses that bring out the important political substance of identity construction.⁵ All three have equal ontological status but specific texts can be more related to one of the three in their particular contexts. However, the goal of foreign policy discourse is to articulate all three elements in a way that they reinforce and draw upon each other. The spatial construction of identity can have territorial, geographical or physical boundaries but also it can be delineated as a more abstract political space, having abstract boundaries and subjectivities. Discourses of such articulations of identity can involve concepts of civilisation, barbarians or savages. In the case of Croatia this element of identity construction has featured heavily in all the phases of its recent history. Serbs have been articulated as Croatia's radical Other and presented as non-civilised, non-Western, barbaric and tribal, as opposed to the Croatian civilised, Western Self. Temporal identity features themes such as development, transformation, continuity, change and repetition. Discourses of democratisation and human rights belong to this group. In the Croatian case, both the European Union and Serbia as its Others are temporally articulated; the EU as temporally superior to the Self (a level of development and civilisation where Croatia naturally belongs but at the same time where it aspires to be) and Serbia as inferior (savage, backward, primitive). The third feature of identity construction is ethical. It involves a construction of responsibility, such as national interest for example. Discourse analysis in this case focuses on the constructions of ethics, morality, and responsibility. The moral force is seen as being especially important for the representations of the Self and in its sense of responsibility for the Other. The importance of these elements for any poststructuralist study is that it allows for a wide-ranging knowledge of the identity construction that takes place.⁶

There are several strategies of constructing 'self' and 'other' in international politics.⁷ They include:

³ R. Wodak, R. de Cillia, M. Reisigl and K. Liebhart (eds) (1999), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, p. 11

⁴ G. Schopflin, op. cit., p.480

⁵ L. Hansen (2006), *Security as Practice*,

⁶ L. Hansen (2006), *Security as Practice*, pp.46-51

⁷ T. Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.33, No.3, (2005), p. 628

- Representing the other as an existential threat through a speech act of securitisation.
- Representing the other as inferior.
- Representing the other as violating universal principles by setting the standards of the self as universally valid, with the consequence that the other should be convinced or otherwise brought to accept the principles of the self.
- Representation of the other as different. This strategy differs from the previous three because it does not place a value judgement on the other. This strategy is not completely innocent but unlike the other three reduces the possibility of legitimising damaging interference with the other.

The third strategy outlined above has so far been used by the European Union in relation to its Others. The European practice is perceived to be the desired standard for others to follow. The Copenhagen criteria that set up the political, economic and administrative standards for EU membership are an excellent example of this strategy.

It is important to note at this point that in my analysis identity construction does not revolve out of a single Self-Other dichotomy but as a number of different combinations and relationships arising out of processes of linking and differentiation.⁸ The Other is what the Self identifies against and traditionally occupies diametrically opposite positions on the linking and differentiation grid. Such an Other is called a Radical Other and although it is perhaps the most common way of defining an opposition to the Self, there is a possibility of identifying a less radical Other in the complexity of subject relationships. Scholars like Campbell, Connolly and Hansen theorise that identity does not have to be constructed through so-called Radical Otherness. The identity of the Self can be thus constructed through a variety of non-Selves that have different degrees of 'otherness'. An actor can define itself as radically different from another, but at the same time perceive itself not to be as different from someone else. Croatia's search for its 'true' Self as a Western European Country features a same tendency to articulate its Self as being similar to the Other (the EU - viewed in positive terms) but at the same time divided from it through self-confessed differences. Examining the process of adjusting the identity and policy discourses on the Croatian political stage and the change in the status of Croatia's Others (the Balkans, the EU, its own past) would be the central concern of my discursive analytical approach.

An understanding of Otherness as being both positively and negatively constructed moves away from a traditional understanding of the process of Othering that stresses a radical difference between the Self and the Other. The possibility of having a range of non-Selves with a different degree of otherness has broadened the understanding of the relationship between identities and policies. The focus of analysis can move towards how the Other is placed within a network of identities rather than in a simple Self-Other relationship.⁹

The term discourse analysis refers to several distinct ways of analysing text in poststructuralist research. It can be used on several types of data: written, spoken or performed. It is not just a tool for analysing data but a part of certain epistemological positions about knowledge. The method of discourse analysis aims to find the structures and patterns in public statements that regulate political debate.¹⁰ It explores specific discursive constructions and how they arise from particular social and

⁸ L. Hansen (2006), op. cit. p.37

⁹ Hansen, op. cit. p.41

¹⁰ Waever, op. cit.

political contexts. It is focused on language and the way 'objective truths' are constructed which in turn shape our perception and understanding of reality.

Obtaining membership in the European Union was not only a foreign policy goal for the new Croatian government, but an issue closely connected to the problem of Croatia's national identity and a greater civilisational discourse that identity and foreign policy were a part of. In this sense EU membership is not only a goal in itself, but also a means of potentially recognising the de-Balkanising of Croatia. This highlights a complexity not only of this particular actor's motivations in pursuing the policy goal of EU membership but also the subtleties inherent in identity changes that would make it possible. These discourses represent a picture of a modern, Western Croatia that not only follows the EU rules, but promotes them as its own in specific settings. The discourses found at these points often contradict each other but it is these points that are of interest to the analyst because around them the debate is centred. The problem of complying with the EU minority rights regulations has never been a question of mere policy adjustment or the introduction of new laws, but carries with it the wider debate about sovereignty and legitimacy, all in the light of a Western European identity. Croatia's western identity is juxtaposed to the Balkans that features as Croatia's unfortunate past in most discourses about Croatian identity. The 'truth' about the Balkans, about the West and about Croatia is produced in discourse and constantly re-produced in the wider social and political setting. The construction of Croatia's Western identity through the civilisation discourse represent the Balkans as backward, inferior and savage, while the West (Croatia's desired identity) is constituted as progressive, superior and civilised. Discourses are fluid and 'hook' into normative ideas which convey messages about what is good and desirable, and what is bad and undesirable.¹¹ In this way discourses find their way into the policy arena and reach the point where they can become institutionalised.

The success of a particular discourse over competing ones will depend on the formation of concepts crucial to both that discourse and the context in which it exists. For example, for many years one of the crucial issues in Croatia was the understanding of a modern sovereign state. The question of the status of ethnic minorities was closely related to this problem because the very concept of 'minority' was constantly weighed and redefined with normative implications. The debate on minorities circled around the question if it was at all good to have minorities in a state that was struggling with its new-found sovereignty in the early 1990s, and later changed into the debate on the accommodation of minorities in a way that was aligned with the modern model of a sovereign state in the period 2000-2001. Therefore, in order to understand the system of beliefs in a particular political setting we must firstly understand the meanings attached to the concepts central to one's study and the specificity of the social and political context of the case study. Understanding why the concept of minorities was problematic for the Croatian state and how that issue relates to the developing identity of Croatia as a modern, Western European country is significant for understanding the way in which political change has taken place.

An empirical analysis looks into how certain links are made and how they create discourses. The discourse on Croatia's national identity for example, invokes the past that is infused with the struggle against many conquerors (Austria, Hungary) and the 'unfortunate' associations with Serbia and other Balkan states (Yugoslav

¹¹ J. Carabine, (2003), 'Unmarried Motherhood 1830-1990: A Genealogical Analysis' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor and S. J. Yates (eds) *Discourse as Data*, Sage Publications Ltd, London, p. 269

federation), and of ‘centuries long desire for a sovereign Croatian state for all Croatian people’. This discourse of national selfhood and sovereignty is further linked to other areas, such as the minority rights question in this case. It is precisely these articulations and links to concrete policy that this paper aims to investigate.

My study of Croatia follows a model that studies the official government discourse. Official policy discourse is the discourse through which state action is legitimised, and thus crucial for understanding political and social relations within and beyond state boundaries.¹² The aim of this study is not to map the degree of stability of the official discourse within the larger sphere, but is concerned with the articulations of Croatian identity at the official level. The encounter between the European Union and Croatia is not one of two equal parties. The EU is superior and determines all political and financial measures that Croatia must adopt. The EU also sets the discursive structures that Croatia must respond to. Croatian political leaders had to adjust to the EU discourse on values and norms and to navigate uncharted waters by tweaking their official discourses in response. EU membership thus became a space for new discursive articulations on what is possible within Croatia’s institutional structures. One of the approaches that the political elites have adopted is re-articulating the concepts central to Croatia’s political identity: sovereignty and legitimacy were often invoked and infused with a new meaning that was in line with the EU stance.

This study revolves around a single Self: the Croatian state. The relationship between the Self and the Other is a complex one given that the Other can be articulated as superior, inferior or equal but different. Croatian Self has two Others: Balkans/Serbia – inferior, and the West/EU that is superior at the moment of study.

The selection of texts follows the same principle of keeping with the theory. Poststructuralist discourse analysis gives epistemological and methodological priority to the study of primary texts. They include statements, speeches and interviews in the case where one studies the official government discourse. A good discourse analysis requires knowledge of the case in question, which comes from reading with a wide body of texts that cover a longer period of time. Knowing a language does not only mean being able to speak and read, but it encompasses knowledge of social and language codes. This type of knowledge enables the analyst to engage with a specific meaning in a given context.

According to Hansen, the selected texts should follow three criteria: 1. they should be characterised by the clear articulation of identities and policies; 2. they are widely read and attended to; 3. they have the formal authority to define a political position.¹³ The outlined criteria have different analytical and methodological strengths. Clear articulations make it possible to discursively analyse the texts, the texts being widely read define some texts as dominant discourses, and the formal authority is related to positions of power in a given context. The texts used in the following analysis were collected from newspapers. The period covered was from years 2000 to 2004. The newspapers are the following: *Vjesnik*, *Jutarnji List*, *Novi List* and *Slobodna Dalmacija*. I also included the following weekly publications: *Globus*, *Feral Tribune* and *Nacional*. The texts selected for the analysis feature interviews with politicians and top civil servants, their statements and speeches.

¹² L. Hansen (2006), ‘Intertextualizing Foreign Policy’ in *Security as Practice*, p.60

¹³ L. Hansen (2006), op. cit. p.85

Setting the scene: minority rights in Yugoslavia and Croatia in the early 1990s

Before 1991 Croatia was a part of the Yugoslav federation which consisted of five 'constitutive nations' and two 'nationalities'. Constitutive nations were Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins. Nationalities were Hungarians in Vojvodina (an autonomous region within Serbia) and Albanians in Kosovo. The republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina had a mixed population and thus was not a part of the constitutive nations. Constitutive nations never formed a minority even when they lived outside their native republics, and enjoyed the same rights both within and outside of their republics. Nationalities had proportional representation at the local level, as well as at the republic and federal levels for larger minority groups (e.g., Hungarians in Vojvodina). The question of national groups in Yugoslavia was very sensitive and something that was seen as potentially dangerous. The Yugoslav project was, among others, an attempt to overcome divisions according to national groups and thus rejected the idea of existing majorities and minorities on the Yugoslav territory. All were equal citizens of Yugoslavia and there was no need to additionally recognise a group's rights. The 1971 events of the Croatian Spring¹⁴ were immediately interpreted as a dangerous nationalistic movement in Belgrade. It finished in defeat and with its leaders being sent to prison. As a result, Croatia was known as 'the silent republic' until independence in 1991. Since the Croatian Spring was not intended to be a nationalist movement and its leaders were more oriented towards reformulating certain relations with Belgrade than interested in national questions, the idea about an independent Croatia that would be the home of all Croats was not on anyone's agenda. Tuđman's success was perhaps more due to good organisation, the lack of clearly defined opposition, and the lack of civil society structures in Croatia. The armed conflict and Tuđman's nationalist rhetoric focused on Serbia as the arch enemy, who then became an ancient enemy of mythical proportions and whose attempt to seize Croatian territory went back for centuries.

Until 1995 when Croatia retrieved its land from Yugoslav occupation and established its power over the entire territory, there was not much room for discussing the relevance of minorities in the Croatian state. Tuđman's idea of what Croatia should be like after it recovered from the war did not seriously acknowledge minorities. Despite their mention in the Constitution there was no real attempt to include minority groups with 'authentic' Croatian citizens. Minorities were a threat to the wholeness of the state, especially because the most numerous group were Serbs – a group that was impossible to strip of all connotations from the recent past.

One of the first problems that had to be addressed in an independent Croatia was to define the status of its national minorities. Some of the 'new' national minorities belonged to previously defined 'constitutive nations' and as such were never identified as minorities in Yugoslavia, regardless of whether they lived in their

¹⁴ Croatian Spring or *Hrvatsko Proljeće* was a political movement in Croatia in 1971 that demanded economic and democratic reforms in Yugoslavia. The movement started with a publication of a 'Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Language' in 1967 that stood for a distinction between Serbian and Croatian languages. Student movement soon joined the cause and the movement evolved into a political question. Some of the main demands concerned the desire to be able to openly express one's national feelings towards Croatia and decentralisation of the Yugoslav economy. Croatia was the second most developed republic (after Slovenia) due to its profits from tourism. Most of that money was redistributed in Yugoslavia among the less developed republics. Croatia demanded an independent national bank that would allow a fairer distribution of profits.

republics (Serbs in Serbia), or not (Serbs in Croatia in this case). The very concept of 'national minority' had a derogatory meaning and implied a certain powerlessness and inferiority. Croatia struggled to find an adequate solution and the complex situation resulted in severe criticism by the international community. The first attempt to solve the minority problem was by passing the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities. In addition, Croatia ratified all international conventions about minority rights protection, but it failed to implement them. The Constitution from 1990 declared Croatia to be the homeland of the Croatian nation.¹⁵ The new government introduced discriminatory policies against the Serbian population and defined the new state as belonging to the ethnic Croats. Ethnic Serbs were removed from all positions of power in state institutions and the Latin script was the only officially recognised script (Cyrillic was practically banned). The changing of political symbols and renaming of the streets was undertaken as well, which consequently caused alarm among Serbs in Croatia. In eastern Slavonia where Serbian population had a provisional majority, many did not recognise the new government and started establishing their own institutions.

The Croatian Constitution proclaimed the republic's sovereignty and the right to secede from the Yugoslav federation. A new Citizenship Law was passed that allowed ethnic Croats who lived abroad the right to apply for citizenship and to vote in elections without being residents, but at the same time non-ethnic Croats had to prove their right to citizenship by presenting evidence of their residence in Croatia for a period of at least five years and proficiency in the Croatian language.¹⁶

The new Constitution caused alarm among the Serb population in Croatia because it appeared to downgrade their status as citizens from belonging to a 'constitutional nation' to 'national minority'.¹⁷ The political parties did not secure an accord between the Serbs and Croats in this process of gaining independence and the anti-Croatian propaganda of the Belgrade press that was widely read by the Serbian population in Croatia added fuel to the fire.

In 1991 the official census results showed 23 different nationalities among the citizens of Croatia, out of which 22 were formally acknowledged as national minorities.¹⁸ In 1991 there were 3,736,356 or 78.1% of Croats, 22,376 or 0.5% Slovenes, 581,663 or 12.2% Serbs, 21,303 or 0.4% Italians, 22,355 or 0.5% Hungarians and 73,376 or 1.5% of non-disclosed nationality.¹⁹

The census results of 2001 show a dramatic decline in the Serbian population. They numbered 201,631 or 4.54%. Croats numbered 3,977,171 or 89.63%, Slovenes 13,173 or 0.30%, Italians 19,636 or 0.44%, Hungarians 16,595 or 0.37%.²⁰

The legal basis for the arrangement of minority rights was based on the 1991 Constitution and in the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms, and the Rights of Ethnic and National Groups or Minorities. Both the Constitution and the Constitutional Law are based on international legal standards as well as being rooted in a civilisational discourse of Western European practice of minority rights regulation.²¹ However, problems that followed from the 1991 articulations in the

¹⁵ *Ustav Republike Hrvatske*

¹⁶ W. Bartlett, op. cit. p.36

¹⁷ D. Jović (2003), *Jugoslavija- država koja je odumrla*, Prometej, Zagreb.

¹⁸ Statistički ljetopis hrvatske 1992., Zagreb (1993), p.64

¹⁹ Census 2001

²⁰ Census 2001

²¹ My research focus at this point is not in these legal matters and the analysis does not engage with this aspect of the minority question. My reading of the Constitution and the Constitutional Law on National

Constitution and the Constitutional Law demonstrate that the minority problem was embedded within a wider civilisational discourse that was organised around a binary opposition of 'West' vs. 'East', and more specifically, between a 'European Croatia' and a 'Balkan Serbia'.

Changing the Constitution: Rearticulation of the state

The question of citizenship continued to feature in the official discourse on national minorities and offers another fruitful venue for studying the development of Croatia's westernisation. The following analysis looks at the Constitution and the way nationality and citizenship were rearticulated in the new official discourse. It is at this point that the question of Serbs in Croatia becomes more explicit and is tied to Serbia as an external/internal threat.

Addressing the minority rights question was practically avoided during the first year of the coalition being in power. Events in Serbia, primarily the fall of Milošević in October 2000, Croatia's relations with the ICTY and the EU dominated the agenda. The question of minorities was largely neglected and mentioned strictly in a legislative sense, by preparing a bill about minority rights and the way the question was tied to the change in the Constitution, from defining Croatia as a nation state to a civil state.

The Constitution debate was carried on along the lines of the necessity to change the status of Croatia as a 'nation state', or whether it was necessary to add to the Constitution a definition of Croatia as a 'civil state'. However, the existing Constitution had a clearly stated definition, a variation from the US Constitution, that 'in the Republic of Croatia the power comes from its people and belongs to its people as a community of all free and equal citizens.'²² This implies that from its beginning Croatia has been defined as a civil state in which all rights, freedoms and obligation have been defined on the basis of it being a civil state, rather than being based on nationality, gender, religion or race/ethnicity. The dilemma that emerged in the post-election context therefore had more to do with the recent historical circumstance of Tuđman's practice and his insistence on the definition of Croatia as a nation state, than the definition on the Constitutional level. '(...) the Republic of Croatia is established as a nation state for Croatian people and a state for all other national minorities: Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians and others that are Croatian citizens. They are guaranteed equality with all citizens of Croatian nationality and granted national rights according to democratic norms of the free world.'²³ The question of defining Croatia along national or civic lines is thus more than a question about terminology and appropriate conceptualisation, but a question about constitutive elements of that political and social community. This brings back the fundamental myth of 'a centuries long dream' for establishing a sovereign nation state that Tuđman used in his rhetoric and which legitimised much of the political action during the 1990s.

Minorities serves the purpose of providing an institutional context to the development of the minority debate in Croatia.

²² The Croatian Constitution, 1. Section, 2 Part

²³ *Ustavni zakon o ljudskim pravima i slobodama i pravima etničkih i nacionalnih zajednica ili manjina*
The Croatian Constitution, section written by Franjo Tuđman; my translation

One of the questions that had to be addressed regarding the change of the Constitution was the change in the concepts of statehood and sovereignty of Croatia. The debate was placed within the broader question of Croatian democratisation and was linked to a debate about the duties of the President. A desire to make changes that would move the new Croatia as far away as possible from Tuđman's idea on how to organise a state opened up a complex discussion about the very nature of the Croatian state and its people. The initial dilemma at this point was a distinction between a 'nation state' and a 'civil state'. A majority of politicians belonging to the winning coalition were supportive of the definition of Croatia in terms of a civil state, rather than keeping the old concept of a nation state.²⁴ Vesna Pusić of HNS stated that the request 'is understandable and justifiable given that the majority of European states have abandoned the national definition of their states. It was something that was dominant in the 19th century while the idea of a 'nation' was still questionable and thus needed a defined framework. In the modern day of globalisation such a definition has become redundant and even stands in stark contrast with the basic idea of integration.'²⁵ The notion of a nation state is here pushed to the past and tied with a necessity to protect that political entity. It implies that the modern world has changed and so has no need to protect the state. Furthermore, this position stresses superiority of integration above traditional state relations. The concept of a traditional nation state is interpreted as a hindrance to modern developments of integration, and nation and civil state are thus constructed as mutually exclusive.

A different argument but with a similar conclusion was put forward by Mato Arlović of SDP who said that 'at the beginning of the 1990s, when Croatia was fighting for its independence and sovereignty it made sense to define it as a nation state in the Constitution. But after the battle was won there was no need to keep this definition.'²⁶ Both texts define the concept of a nation state as outdated and unnecessary. The nation state makes sense at a time of crisis where boundaries and definitions of statehood are not set and when identity formation revolves around a negative differentiation between the Self and the Other. Croatia's independence and sovereignty had to first be established and then defended between 1991 and 1995. During the time of peace, however, it was deemed necessary to abandon such conceptualisations that were understood as contrary to conceptions of integration and progress. A 'nation state' thus changes from being acceptable to unacceptable for modern standards and definitions of statehood. The Serbian Radical Other here becomes more acceptable to the Croatian Self when it ceases to be an external threat and becomes an acceptable Other that shares Croatian civil identity.

Addressing the minority question from the position of a civil state continued to feature among the ruling coalition with even deeper implications. Željka Antunović, Deputy Head of Government stated: 'All who suffered in the war are equal to the Government: both Croats and Serbs'²⁷ Her statement made the headlines and was equally criticised and applauded for its message. Equation of Croats and Serbs and their construction as both being victims made a break with the tradition that constructed Croats as victims during their conflict with Yugoslavia and Serbs as aggressor/perpetrator. The individualisation of responsibility in the war and re-definition of Croatia as a civil state provided grounds for changing the victim-

²⁴ *Nacional* conducted a survey among the politicians of the winning coalition about the question of the nature of the Croatian state, 28.4.2000.

²⁵ Vesna Pusić in *Nacional*, 28.4.2000, my translation.

²⁶ Mato Arlović in *Nacional*, 28.4.2000, my translation.

²⁷ Željka Antunović as quoted in *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 20.5.2000, my translation.

perpetrator subject positions. Nationality ceased to be the grounds for such definitions and the Serbs as civil subjects could hence be equated with the Croats. Furthermore, their positions as 'victims' was legitimised by a moral obligation by the state to cater for those who suffered.

In the same vein, during an official visit to Austria the President called the refugees to return: 'Croatia is calling all its citizens to return to their homes. It is our obligation to repair all homes ruined in the war. The return of the Serbs is of great importance because it shows the maturity of our democracy. That means that it is primarily our interest and Croatian citizens will be able to recognise that.'²⁸ The statement calls on Croatian citizens to return to their homes without explicit mention of their nationality. All citizens are equal for the state (civil and democratic) and providing means to help them return home is an obligation for the state, which will confirm its identity as democratic. National interest is redefined and instead of sovereignty the President stresses democracy as being the main goal. In another statement the President calls for democracy and the law to ensure the rights of its citizens, regardless of their nationality: 'Croatia has chosen a democratic system in which all citizens must be equal and have equal rights before the law. There must be no preferential treatment of any kind. Croatian citizens must not feel threatened but all must share the same destiny as citizens of Croatia.'²⁹

Minority rights and the fear of the Balkans: a crisis of identity

An important element of the debate with the West became the idea that Croatia should work as a provider of stabilisation in the region. The changes on the political scene were distinctively radical in comparison to previous periods and seemed promising in the long run. The recognition of Croatia's success was evident in the hopes and encouragement that its case could serve as an example and a model for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia to follow, each in their own right. The notion of Croatia as a bridge that stands between the West and the Balkans was a popular one and well illustrated by the following statement of the Head of Government, Ivica Račan after his visit to Germany in February 2000. 'In some way we are expected to do Europe's work in our relations with the neighbours. Our location between Central Europe, the Balkans and the Mediterranean is very important.'³⁰ A positive link with Europe is established and Croatia that does 'Europe's work' thus engages in a process of identity rearticulation. Doing Europe's work becomes equated with being like Europe, and ultimately being Europe. It also separates Croatia from its neighbours who are not like Europe.

Despite the desire to be the generator of positive changes in the region and a role model for its eastern neighbours, Croatian politicians expressed their opinions early on about the need to keep certain boundaries between themselves and Yugoslavia. The Foreign Minister stated: 'Political changes in Croatia thus caused excitement in Europe- people showed at elections the desire for positive change. Europe wants us to be their partner who will help resolve the regional problem. I want

²⁸ Stipe Mesić as quoted in *Novli List*, 22.2.2001, my translation.

²⁹ Stipe Mesić as quoted in *Jutarnji List*, 12.11.2000, my translation.

³⁰ Ivica Račan as quoted in *Novi List* on 17.2.2000, my translation.

to stress that we are not being pushed into bad political options; they just want us to contribute in clearing things up in this area. We must serve as an example to our eastern neighbours that it is possible to change the government through proper pre-election campaign and by forming certain coalitions. The international community really needs a move forward in terms of the status quo that exists in Bosnia and Kosovo, and especially in Yugoslavia. We are aware of the hopes that they are putting into Croatia. This is a chance for the whole new generation that is coming into power now and it would be a disaster to waste it.’³¹

The ‘bad political options’ concern a Balkan union of a kind; something to be avoided at all costs. An example to the neighbours is acceptable as long as Croatia has full European support and works as its agent. Being compared to Yugoslavia/Serbia becomes a question of Croatia’s Balkan identity – something that is considered the least desirable option for the future. If Croatia is to be like Serbia then it has not developed and democratised, it has not moved away from the Balkans. However, in order to reinforce its Western identity there was a request by the EU to increase engagement in European attempts to collaborate with the Balkans. Accepting its geographical position but with a strong temporal and ethical distance from Yugoslavia was thus understood as the only possible way forward to Europe.

‘We have always claimed that we support regional cooperation but that every country should approach the EU membership on individual basis. There is no doubt about it- we are for good neighbourly relations, which includes our realisation that Croatia connects the Mediterranean, Central Europe and the South-east. On the 3rd January elections were held that signalled the democratisation of our country. However, Croatia has not been accompanied by the democratisation of the region. It does play the part in the EU’s ambitions to transform Europe’s south-east. That is an important message but we are not expected to be prisoners of the region. It is important to us to be seen as possible future candidate to the EU membership.’³² The statement explicitly juxtaposes ‘the region’, i.e. Balkans and the EU. The Balkans have not followed Croatia into the processes of democratisation and that in itself is a danger: being influenced by the Balkan neighbours would keep Croatia a ‘prisoner’ in this region where it does not truly belong. Future EU membership and the past of the Balkan prison stand in stark contrast in the discourse on Croatian identity and its political options. This division features heavily in the discourse on minority rights. The most numerous minority in this period were the Serbs, which posed a problem for Croatia given the nature of its own identity construction as European that excludes the Balkan. The Serbian minority is an extension of Yugoslavia/Serbia and stands for the Balkans in the midst of democratising and progressive Croatia. Granting them rights is at the same time a European requirement and a sign of Western democratic practice, as well as a danger of remaining under the Balkan influence and imprisonment in that foster home of a region. Thus relations with Yugoslavia/Serbia are closely intertwined with the minority question and must be looked at with equal scrutiny. The minority question does not stand alone as a domestic issue, but is a part of the grander discourse of Croatia as a Balkan or a European country.

The following text, an interview with the Deputy of Head of Government, Goran Granić, demonstrates the tension between the subject positions of Croatia-victim, Serbia-aggressor and Serbian civilians-victims:

³¹ Tonino Picula, Minister of Foreign Affairs, interview published in *Jutarnji List*, 28.1.2000.

³² Tonino Picula, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as quoted in *Jutarnji List*, 17.2.2000.

Q: Tuđman used to say that the return of Serbs would diminish the result of the Homeland War. Now we have a situation where his vision is interpreted and used to destabilise the ruling coalition. Is the coalition ready to reinterpret the aims of the war?

GG: First of all, Croatia suffered aggression and the war was imposed. Through that war Croatia achieved its independence and for that reason the war will have its place in the history of the making of our country, whatever the politicians decide to say about the matter. The war was an imperialist attempt and it included an ethnic component. Because of that we have to look at the problem of the destiny of Croatian citizens of Serbian nationality that allied with the other side. If we are now looking at this problem solely through the prism of war, we have to ask ourselves how is it possible to live alongside someone who had opted for the other side. By doing so it is very easy to criminalise an entire people and to press upon them collective responsibility. The point of the matter is that war traumas must be overcome and that all citizens have the right to return to Croatia and to enjoy their private property. If they committed crimes they will have to answer for them. It is on us to support Croatia's future, and that means building civil, democratic society in which national, religious or any other divisions and differences cannot be a privilege.'

The question asked by the interviewer openly links the return of Serbian refugees and the threat to Croatian sovereignty. Tuđman's articulation of Croatia as a nation state for all Croats is brought into dialogue and challenges the speaker to reveal an alternative interpretation of the Homeland War. The war was continuously stressed as being the founding element of Croatia, and the defence of the country reinforced its right for sovereignty. A sovereign nation state for Croats was born out of the Homeland War that was fought against Yugoslav/Serbian forces. Serbian presence is constructed as a threat to Croatian sovereignty. It was an external threat during the 1990s that at the beginning of the new decade turned into an internal threat as well. A relatively small number of the Serbian population that remained in Croatia³³ could have been disregarded due to political circumstances, but the change that came with the new regime demanded a closer look at the problem of Serbs. The prospect of having that particular national minority enjoying rights and the protection of the state was problematic on two levels: a threat to Croatian sovereignty and still fresh war traumas. Granić points to that factor when asking a rhetorical question about one's ability to live alongside the enemy. He then makes a transition into a discourse that distinguishes between collective and individual guilt and responsibility in the war. Serbs that have stayed in Croatia (as long as they are innocent) and those that have chosen to return are here constructed as individuals and as human beings who have suffered as much as Croats. They are also constructed as citizens of Croatia who on that basis have the right to enjoy the protection of the law that includes the rightful return of their private property. Understanding their rights in this way is a Western and European feature, a sign of Croatia's democratic maturity and a way to build bridges between national groups in the country.

The Zagreb Summit which took place in November 2000 was a sign of EU recognition and of further encouragement for Croatia to carry on its work in order to

³³ At the time of writing the figure of the remaining Serbian population throughout the 1990s was still not known, and the number of Serbs expected to return post-2000 was also a rough estimate of some 17,000 people. The census of 2001 numbered 201, 631 Serbs living in Croatia. It is important to note that the census offered an option not to disclose one's nationality and/or religion. Source: Republic of Croatia – Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002.

become a completely democratic state governed by law. The alternative to the EU, in the words of President Mesić is 'balkanisation in a political and civilisational sense. We do not want an isolated Croatia that can be abused and robbed from the inside. Still, there are people that will demonstrate against the Summit by using transparent proclamations that hide their true intentions. Those who do that are directly working against this state and its interests and I am calling all citizens not to be fooled.'³⁴ Mesić calls upon the civilisational discourse of Balkans vs. Europe and warns of the danger of choosing the wrong group. However, the concept of 'balkanisation' does not stand for Serbia in this case but refers to those who do not support democratic changes, who want to protest against Serbia's appearance at the Summit; in short, those who are working against the modern, democratised Croatia by keeping to the old, dishonest, and backward ways characteristic of the Balkans. In this way 'balkanisation' and being from the Balkans are not simply geographical/civilisational concepts, but directly anti-Croatian and subversive. As I have argued previously, it is Croatia's past and the previous regime that was also Balkan, and as a consequence dangerous for contemporary policymaking. Holding on to the old ways and greeting Serbia with rage and hostility is equally un-civilised and Balkan, as Serbia itself. It was the fall of Milošević that made it possible for Serbia to attend the Summit and marked the initial stage of distinguishing between his regime and the Serbian people. It is something that featured in the early post-Tuđmanist Croatian discourse, analysed in more detail in the previous chapter. In this context acceptance of Serbs at the Summit hosted by Croatia signifies a Western attitude of agreement and tolerance. Serbia not represented by Milošević has an opportunity to change into a less Radical Other. And it is this construction of Serbia by the Croats that makes it acceptable, and later necessary, to recognise the Serbian minority and equate them with the Self in the Constitution.

The Summit marked a new phase between the EU and Croatia. The most important element was a promise from the EU that all future candidates that come from the Western Balkans shall be evaluated on an individual basis. Croatia will consequently not have to wait for other countries in the region to join the EU in a group, but will do so on the basis of its individual progress. 'The EU is very much interested in the regional aspect of joining the EU but the way that was understood in Croatia had a strong emotional component. It was often interpreted as 'returning to the Balkans'. Eventually, this fear was understood in Brussels and was decided that new members shall join individually.'³⁵ The fear of being grouped together with the 'real Balkans' thus generates a fear of being taken back to the trap of the East, the foster home, the Serbian hegemony. The presence of Serbia at the Summit was enough to cause suspicion among many and to start speculation about a Balkan union being prepared. The Otherness of Serbia is continuously invoked through concepts of 'balkanisation', isolation, inability to enact democratic change and fear of stagnation. Becoming Western excludes any presence of Serbia/Yugoslavia/the Balkans in Croatia's future. Institutional ties with the European Union secure this division between the 'real Balkans' and Croatia and are seen as the only option. Everything else leads back to the past.

The adoption of the Stabilisation and Association Process hence represented a new chapter in relations between the EU and Croatia as well as between Croatia and its Eastern neighbours. The threat of a regional development towards EU membership

³⁴ President Stipe Mesić as quoted in *Jutarnji List*, 22.11.2000.

³⁵ President Stipe Mesić as quoted in *Jutarnji List*, 22.11.2000.

was removed and although Yugoslavia participated at the Summit it was received with positive assessment. In the speech given in front of the Summit participants who belonged to the Central European Initiative, Ivica Račan stated that ‘The participation of the Yugoslav Republic has given a new dimension to the relations of the countries in this region, ending the period of instability and crisis.’³⁶ Rejecting the politics of Milošević Serbia is beginning the process of democratisation and as such it has the potential to be Croatia’s partner in the region, rather than a threat. It is at this point that the Serbian Radical Other can change and become a less Radical Other: still different but acceptable, or even similar to the Self in some respects. The change in the Self (Croatia accepting western European values and norms) makes it possible to question the relationship with its Radical Other(s), and the interaction between them further reconstructs their identities. It is perhaps the very nature of the Western European identity that rejects Radical Otherness and seeks to change the way it engages with other political entities. Radical Otherness could thus be interpreted as non-Western European in this context and offers an intriguing area for study of identity and foreign policy.

Conclusion

The first thing that becomes increasingly apparent when looking at the data on minority rights in Croatia, is how little was actually said during the period 2000-2002. The Government and the Parliament struggled to find a balance between following European directions on democratisation processes and legitimising their decisions to the public. Breaking with the Tuđmanist tradition that constructed the idea of national interest around the thousand year’s dream of statehood and sovereignty was challenging in the circumstances. The case of minority rights developed along similar lines in that ideas about the nature of the state had to be addressed and redefined.

Events in Serbia and its changing political landscape had a major impact on Croatia and some of its policy decisions. Redefining its relationship with Serbia was not a foreign policy matter but something that played a role in the minority rights discourse as well. It is this relationship between Croatia as a civil state, Serbia/Yugoslavia and the problem of the Serbian minority in Croatia that makes the focus of this paper. My analysis focused on the links between the role of Serbia/Yugoslavia and the Serbian minority in Croatia’s political discourse and the way political decisions are shaped and legitimised. The role of the Homeland War and the question of responsibility are also present in the discourse, through Croatia that defines itself at first as a victim only, and later as also being responsible for war crimes, and through Serbia who is continuously articulated as the aggressor. The position of the Serbian minority is in this case particularly complex because the minority problem must be analysed from two positions: one that includes a redefinition of Croatia as a civil state, and a second that takes into consideration that the most numerous national minority in Croatia are the Serbs – the Radical Other, the aggressor, the Balkan element in the otherwise Western Croatia.

³⁶ Ivica Račan as quoted in *Vjesnik*, 28.11.2000.

The complexity of the situation in the post-2000 Croatian elections made it difficult to answer the EU demands without defining the relationship with Serbia. The Milošević regime presented a direct threat and communication was impossible. It was Serbia as the most Radical Other: the hegemon of Yugoslavia, the aggressor, the backward Balkan civilisation. The question of establishing relations with Serbia was thus not only political in a strict sense, but civilisational as well. An interview with Croatia's Minister for European Integration, Ivan Jakovčić demonstrates: 'It is very simple: it cannot be anyone's interest for Croatia to stay in the same group as countries that are not capable of democratic steps. Just because Croatia has opted for democratic cooperation on the Southeast of Europe it does not mean that it has chosen its regional destiny. We are looking for an individual approach towards EU membership.'³⁷ The official discourse stressed a strict division between Croatia's geographical location – the Balkans, and where it truly belongs- Western Europe/EU. Cooperating with neighbours is thus a sign of its European willingness to spread democracy and encourage peace and stability, but at the same time a very clear distinction between itself and the Balkan Others is needed in order to reinforce its Western European identity. Serbia is at first articulated as not being capable of democratic change and its identity as a backward, uncivilised entity is a threat for democratic and civilised Croatia, but later changes into a less Radical Other that is capable of change and has potential to further close the gap between its own entity and the Croatian Self.

³⁷ Interview with Ivan Jakovčić, from *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 24.5.2000, my translation.