

Croatian Concepts of Integration

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ABSTRACT

The administrative fragmentation of historical and ethnic 'Croatian lands' in the Habsburg Monarchy and the insufficient political power of the Croats affected the formation of diverse Croatian national integration ideologies in the 'long 19th century'. The Yugoslav concept influenced the South Slavic unification in 1918, but experience with the unitary state under Serbian domination led to demands for an autonomous Croatian unit or independent state. The provisory Croatian autonomy of 1939–1941 and excessive fascist state between 1941–1945 were replaced by the autocratic crypto-centralist communist federation. The federation provided for constitutional autonomy of the republics and nations, but, in the end, endangered Croatia's territorial integrity. The establishment of the Croatian state in 1991 was understood not only as a way out of this situation but also as an 'escape from the Balkans' and 're-integration' into Central and Western Europe.

KEYWORDS

Croatian national integration, Croatian state-building, Croatian nation-building, Yugoslavia, dissolution of Yugoslavia

Introduction

The process of building a modern Croatian nation was marked first by the fact that all countries that were considered 'Croatian lands' by historical and/or ethnic criteria were encompassed in the Habsburg Monarchy in the period between 1797 and 1918.¹ Second, through all that time, the Croatian people remained divided in different administrative areas of the Monarchy. The center of the Croatian national integration policy was based in the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia, whose autonomous positions enabled the conception and, in part, implementation of integration policies. The Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia were in a way 'residuum' of the medieval Croatian Kingdom that was associated with the Kingdom of Hungary in 1102. These

1 In 1797, the Habsburg Monarchy gained the former Venetian Republic's territory from south of Trieste to the Budua, with a mostly ethnic Croatian population. These areas were organized as crown lands, the Kingdom of Dalmatia and Istria, and made part of Cisleithenia.

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were the grounds on which Dalmatia's accession to the Monarchy in 1797 was followed by introducing the official use of 'the Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia' as the country's name. The Croatian political elite expected the King to join this Croatian medieval region with Croatia-Slavonia, but this was postponed indefinitely. Since the 1840s, the alternative name 'Triune Kingdom' came into conventional political use, stressing the political integrity of the projected 'national territory'.

The primary goals of the Croatian national integration policy until 1918 were to reintegrate the Croatian-Slavonian Military Frontier into the civil order of Croatia-Slavonia (which was done by 1881), unify Croatia-Slavonia and Dalmatia (with Dubrovnik and the Bay of Kotor), and annex Rijeka (*Fiume*) to Croatia-Slavonia.² Secondary interest was paid to the predominantly ethnic Croatian Međimurje (Muraköz) and the western coast of Istria, as well as to the rest of that ethnically predominant Croatian peninsula, and, since 1878, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The content of the Croatian national integration ideologies that were shaped in such a complex environment ranged from broader integrative frameworks to the idea of a Greater Croatia. Yet, it was the concept of South Slavic unification, realized in 1918 in the dialectic of historical determinism and contingency, that basically determined the framework in which Croatian national interests pulsated until 1991.

1. Concepts of integration in the long 19th century

1.1. Early integration ideas

The year 1790 in the Habsburg Monarchy was marked by the end of the absolutism of Joseph II, from which the Croatian-Slavonian nobility, members of feudal *natio Croatica*, learned that due to their economic backwardness and immature political organization, they alone could not defend themselves from Habsburg centralism. Therefore, in 1790–1791, the Croatian-Slavonian Diet transferred part of its competencies to the Hungarian government to strengthen the defense of common interests while maintaining autonomy. However, this framework soon became grounds for imposing the concept of a single Hungarian political nation and Hungarian as Croatia-Slavonia's official language. The members of the Croatian feudal elite and young bourgeoisie responded to this challenge by emphasizing the nation as a linguistic-cultural community and the framework for bridging over particular regional identities.³

This transition from the protonational phase to the early phase of Croatian nation-building was marked by the influence of the then dominant theory of the common Illyrian origin of the peoples from the Alps to the Black Sea, followed by the

2 The Croatian-Slavonian Military Frontier was the part of Croatia-Slavonia bordering the Ottoman Empire that was subjected to the Vienna Court's military administration in 1578, and gradually returned to Croatia-Slavonia from the 18th century to 1881. Maria Theresa 'returned' Rijeka (*Fiume*) to Croatia-Slavonia in 1767, but in 1779, put it under the administration of the Hungarian government as a separate autonomous area.

3 Stančić, 2008, pp. 114–120.

demand to create a Greater Illyria.⁴ The Illyrian name actually included Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, and Bulgarians. The Serbs and Slovenes did not accept the Illyrian name, while the Bulgarians were too far, so Illyrianism became a framework for developing a common Croatian national consciousness. After the King's ban on using the Illyrian name in 1843, Illyrianism was replaced by the South-Slavic name, with the promotion of Croatian unification as part of the unification of the South Slavs advocated by the National Party, the former Illyrian Party.

The second integration concept at that time was advocated by the Croatian-Hungarian Party. It emphasized the idea of an unconditional Croatian-Hungarian alliance based on traditional links. This party derived the Croatian national identity on a regional basis, directing its activity only toward Croatia and Slavonia.⁵

In 1848, politicians from the National Party accepted the idea of Austro-Slavism, which saw the Habsburg Monarchy as the framework for realizing the interests of its Slavic members, who began to form a series of ethnic groups. In this spirit, the Croatian-Slavonian Diet in 1848 accepted the plan of an Austrian federation in which Croatia-Slavonia would be one of the 'federal' units, based on its natural and historical right to self-government. It would then enter the alliance based on the linguistic-national principle, with Vojvodina and the lands with Slovenian population.⁶

The Pan-Slavic movement, which looked toward the powerful Slavic Russia as the leader of the Slavic peoples, also gained some popularity, but the influence of such ideas weakened due to the imperialist tendencies manifested in Russian foreign policy.

1.2. Formation of the main Croatian national integration ideologies

The early Croatian nationalism up to 1848 was grounded on an amorphous Illyrian cultural basis that evolved toward an understanding of the Croatian nation on a political basis.⁷ The return of constitutionality in 1860 and debates regarding the Monarchy's organization and the Croatian-Hungarian union witnessed the shaping of modern Croatian political parties and ideologies. The Croatian-Slavonian Diet of 1861 refused to accept the King's February patent based on the Vienna center's domination and decided to renew the alliance with Hungary, but with special Hungarian guarantees of Croatian-Slavonian autonomy and expanded territorial integrity. The proposal was rejected by the Hungarian side, which insisted on the 1848 Hungarian laws as the starting point for negotiations, significantly narrowing the autonomy and territorial integrity of Croatia-Slavonia.

It was the National Party that stood behind the Diet's resolution, but the party's integration ideology was much more complex. The party's leader, Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, passed on the Illyrian tradition and accepted the idea of Yugoslavism

4 Despalatović, 1975, p. 87 and Stančić, 1996, pp. 135–136.

5 Kolak Bošnjak, 2015, pp. 153–173.

6 Iveljić, 1996, pp. 125–137 and Čepulo et al. 2010, pp. 57–64.

7 Čepulo, 2019, p. 5.

as a response to the supremacy of Austrian Germans and Hungarians; as an advocate of liberal Catholicism, he also pleaded for bridging the gap between Western and Eastern Christianity. The National Party envisioned South Slavic unification in the form of some undefined decentralized state with Serbia. In that community, Serbia would be the bearer of state and military tradition, while the Croatian side would introduce a developed culture and oversee educating fellow countrymen who had long been separated from development in the rest of Europe.⁸ In this spirit, the laws founding the Yugoslav University and Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb were passed by the Diet in 1861; these were to become research and educational centers primarily for South Slavs. It was Zagreb, and not Vienna, Budapest, or Paris that should have become the center of education for the brothers from the backward Ottoman Empire, where they could adopt ideas in their own language and in the common folk's spirit rather than being educated in a colonial manner.⁹ The King did not approve these laws in 1861, but in 1867, the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts was founded, and it largely passed on the South Slavic orientation of its founders. The University was established in 1874 and profiled itself primarily as a center of education for students from the 'Croatian lands' in the Monarchy, even though numerous students from other regions of the Monarchy and the Balkan environment were also enrolled.¹⁰

Dissident members of the National Party formed the Independent National Party, which advocated alliance with Vienna and acceptance of the February Patent under conditions that granted some form of Croatian autonomy and, perhaps, fast annexation of Dalmatia. The Party disappeared in 1865 under criticism of surrendering the Croatian historical autonomy granted in the Hungarian-Croatian constitutional framework to Vienna fundamentals.

The Unionist Party, however, advocated renewal of the traditional alliance with Hungary but based on balanced negotiations. This view was in a way realized in the sub-dual Croatian-Hungarian Compromise of 1868 that guaranteed Croatia-Slavonia broad autonomy and its territorial integrity but left it without its own finances, provided for the Hungarian government's superior control, and left the city of Rijeka outside Croatia-Slavonia.¹¹ Interference by the Hungarian government in autonomous politics further compromised the unionist idea, and the Unionist Party disappeared from the political scene in 1873.

Frustration over the impossibility of realizing Croatian national interests in an alliance with Vienna and Pest fueled the idea of an independent Greater Croatia. This was grounded in the idea of a Croatian historical and natural right to the state encompassing the territories of the medieval Croatian Kingdom and ethnic Croatian regions. The idea was first formulated by Zagreb's lawyer, Eugen Kvaternik, who

8 Gross and Szabo, 1992, pp. 162–163.

9 Gross and Szabo, 1992, p. 149.

10 Čepulo, 2007, pp. 141–142.

11 Čepulo, 2015, pp. 32 et seq.

sought support for it from St. Petersburg to France. Kvaternik emphasized the historical rights upon which the Croatian people should terminate the social contract with the Habsburgs, restore an independent Croatian state, and elect a new King. Hence, he included in the Croatian state all countries between the Southern Alps, the Adriatic, the Danube, and the Drina, and considered all inhabitants of that area to be Croats, while recognizing the existence of the Serbian people only in Serbia and southern Hungary.¹² Kvaternik's main associate, Ante Starčević, was influenced by the French Revolution, Rousseau's theory of the people's sovereignty, and the liberal principles of representative democracy.¹³ He asked that a single Croatian political nation be formed, grounded in Croatian historical identity regardless of the individual ethnicity, as the basis of the Croatian state. Starčević advocated a tougher attitude toward Vienna, criticized the Yugoslav ideology, and fiercely dealt with Serbian denial of the existence of the Croatian nation and language. Kvaternik and Starčević together founded the Party of the Right (referring to the Croatian right to state) in 1861, which had significant social influence, especially among students and youth. However, due to the undemocratic electoral system, it remained only a marginal force in the Diet with no influence on official policy. The idea of an independent Croatian state had long-term 'epochal' potential, but no realistic prospects for realization at that time.

The diversity of the ideological scene at that time was contributed to by the agile Imbro Tkalac. In Vienna, he advocated federal reorganization of the Monarchy into an asymmetric community of Danube provinces and peoples, with a central government in Vienna, but without economic exploitation and political domination by the Austrian Germans. After his release from prison, he wandered from Russia to Paris and Rome, where he finally crossed paths with the Monarchy, predicting that a federation of free sovereign peoples within the European community of nations would be resurrected on its ruins.¹⁴

1.3. Dalmatia, Rijeka (Fiume), Istria

Although Dalmatia was the cradle of the medieval Croatian state, the area's long-term inclusion in the Venetian Republic and Ottoman Empire weakened the sense of Croatian affiliation, especially among the city's elite who were educated in Italian. Therefore, in the 19th century, members of this elite worked on shaping a particular ethnic Dalmatian identity, upon which the Dalmatian autonomist movement emerged in the 1860s, bitterly rejecting idea of annexing Dalmatia to Croatia-Slavonia.¹⁵ Such politics were supported by the Serbian parties in Dalmatia (Serbs made up about 17% of the province's population, mostly concentrated in the mountainous hinterland and the Bay of Kotor) that advocated unifying Dalmatia with Bosnia and Herzegovina as the first step toward future unification with Serbia.¹⁶

12 Raditsa, 1964–65, p. 47.

13 Gross, 2000, pp. 9–13.

14 On the political role of Imbro Tkalac, see Feldman, 2012.

15 For details relating to the Autonomist movement in Dalmatia, see Vrandečić, 2002.

16 Stančić, 1981, p. 234.

Autonomists initially achieved success at the polls in 1861, but Croatian parties had held the majority in the Dalmatian Diet since 1870; by 1883, autonomists won almost all local governments except the provincial capital of Zadar. The main parties, the National Party and the Party of the Right, were grounded on ideologies similar to those of their umbrella organizations in Croatia-Slavonia. They primarily focused on developing a Croatian national consciousness and unifying Dalmatia with Croatia-Slavonia. Over the course of time, the Autonomist movement turned into a political margin except in its only, albeit important, stronghold in Zadar.

In Rijeka, the expanded multicultural population supported the city's autonomy and opposed its inclusion in Croatia-Slavonia. However, several Croatian politicians from that region played an important part in political life in Croatia-Slavonia, where annexation of Rijeka remained *conditio sine qua non* of every political attitude. In Istria, the Croatian clergy led the struggle to introduce the Croatian language as the province's official language and enlightened the uneducated Croatian ethnic majority in rural areas. However, the idea of annexing Istria was only modestly present in Croatia-Slavonia.¹⁷

1.4. Croatian integration and the ethnic Serbs' policy

The majority of Serbs who, after the reunification of the Military Frontier in 1881, made up about a quarter of Croatia-Slavonia's population, emphasized the importance of their political parties. The fundamental issue was the relationship of Serbs with Croatian autonomy and the idea of the Triune Kingdom as a Croatian nation-state at the time of nation-building. Apart from the 'internal' issues, the Serbian policy in Croatia was also affected by the fact that large numbers of Serbs lived in the Kingdom of Hungary, beyond Croatia-Slavonia's borders, and by the establishment of the Serbian national state at the borders of Austro-Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia, which opened the prospect of creating a pan-Serbian state.

The starting point of Croatian politics of that time was the attitude that the Triune Kingdom was a Croatian national state with a single Croatian political nation consisting of all members of the Triune Kingdom regardless of ethnicity, yet with the particular ethno-cultural (but not political) identity of the Serbs.¹⁸ The Serbian side, in contrast, considered ethnic Serbs a separate political nation and bearers of autonomy together with the Croats.¹⁹ In this, the Croatian side recognized the basis of a potential separatist policy. A rather serious political clash based on these diverse attitudes broke out in 1875 over the law on secularizing the hitherto religious primary education. The law granted extensive additional particular rights to Serbs regarding education in the Serbian language, literature, history, and religion; equal use of the Cyrillian alphabet was already granted. However, Serbs rejected the law, denying in principle the competence of the Croatian-Slavonian Diet to regulate primary education

17 For an overview of the political and social processes in Istria, see Trogrlić and Šetić, 2015.

18 Gross and Szabo, 1992, pp. 150–151.

19 For unbiased research on the ethnic Serb politics in Croatia, see Miller, 1997, pp. 42–43.

for Serbs. They claimed the Serbian National-and-Church Congress, which had a seat in the then still separated Military Frontier, as exclusively competent in such matters for all Serbs in the Hungarian half of the Monarchy. The Croatian side bitterly reacted to this attitude as an attempt to establish separate Serbian political autonomy (cultural autonomy was not neglected) and the first step toward future unification of ethnic Serbs with Serbia.²⁰ The other controversy broke out in 1878 when the address from the Croatian-Slavonian Diet to the King to administratively associate occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina with Croatia-Slavonia was bitterly rejected by ethnic Serbs, who considered all of Bosnia and Herzegovina exclusive Serbian historical land that should be annexed to the Kingdom of Serbia. The whole story of Croatian-Serbian relations is more complex, yet its early appearances indicated two nation-building processes with competitive goals on at least partially the same territory.

The dichotomy over these issues burdened Croatian-Serbian relations; this was skillfully used by Ban Károly Khuen-Héderváry (1883–1903) in his policy of controlling Croatian autonomy in favor of the Budapest and Vienna centers. However, the social and political changes that took place by 1905 led to cooperation between the most of the Croatian opposition and Serbian parties in Croatia-Slavonia and the support of Serbian parties in Dalmatia to its annexation to Croatia-Slavonia, under condition of grants of equality for Serbs. This compromise shaped the ‘policy of the new course’ that led to the Croatian-Serbian Coalition, the cluster of political parties that became the main political force in Croatia-Slavonia from 1906 to 1918.²¹

1.5. Trialism and Yugoslavism

The obvious problems in the Monarchy’s functioning encouraged the search for an alternative to dualistic order while retaining the Habsburg Monarchy as a powerful protector from the neighboring countries’ expansionism. Different versions of trialism appeared, and the most influential idea was establishing a third, South Slavic unit.²² The idea received an important promotion from the May Declaration accepted by the ‘Yugoslav Club’ of South Slavic MPs in the Imperial Council in May 1917. The declaration called for establishing an independent South Slavic unit of the Monarchy based on ethnic principle and Croatian historical state rights as an existing legitimistic and institutional basis.²³

This idea was at odds with the idea of integral Yugoslavism, which advocated overthrowing Austro-Hungary and creating an entire state of South Slavs led by the Kingdom of Serbia. The idea of integral Yugoslavism was conveyed to Croats by members of the intellectual youth who often visited Belgrade, where they came under the influence of Serbian organizations that promoted struggle against Austro-Hungary as the main obstacle to the Serbian national goals.²⁴

20 Čepulo, 2019, pp. 36 et seq.

21 Banac, 1984, pp. 98–99.

22 Matijević, 2009, pp. 74–78 and Matković, 2010, pp. 123–124.

23 Trogrlić, 2016, pp. 1009–1011.

24 Banac, 1984, p. 103.

Before the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, some anti-Habsburg-oriented Croatian politicians, especially those from Dalmatia, emigrated to neutral Italy. There they established a Croatian Committee that expressed solidarity with the attacked Serbia and were soon transformed in the Yugoslav Committee, which included representatives of Slovenes and Serbs from the Monarchy. The Committee's aims were to oppose the Italian occupation of the eastern Adriatic coast promised to Italy in the secret Treaty of London (1915), to work on unification with the kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro under balanced terms, and to fight against any solution to the South Slavic question under the Habsburg dynasty. Ante Trumbić, the experienced president of the Yugoslav Committee, often debated with Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić over the principles of unification. He had no illusions about Pašić's Greater Serbian intentions, but never abandoned the policy of alliance with Serbia. Anti-Habsburg determination also connected the Yugoslav Committee with the Czechs and Slovaks, and Trumbić spoke about the possibility of connecting the two territories via a corridor.²⁵

The May Declaration was an impetus for a joint counterproposal by the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee in the form of the Corfu Declaration, which was adopted in July 1917 at the seat of the Serbian government in-exile on the island of Corfu. The declaration called for unifying into the new unitary state a 'three-named' people of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, led by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty, with a constitution passed by an (unspecified) qualified majority. With this compromise declaration, the Serbian government abandoned its concept of unification in the form of an enlarged Serbia, while the Yugoslav Committee abandoned the decentralized structure as a condition for unification.

2. Yugoslav solutions (1918–1941)

At the intersection of these ideas, the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs was formed on October 29, 1918, in Zagreb, encompassing the South Slavic areas of the Habsburg Monarchy. The difficulties that this provisional state faced dramatically accelerated its intended unification with Serbia and Montenegro.²⁶ Serbia, which in the meantime had annexed Montenegro, did not agree to decentralization as a condition for the unification that was practically carried out as unconditional on December 1, 1918, when regent Alexander proclaimed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Macedonians and Montenegrins were presumably absorbed by the Serbs, and the large Albanian population was ignored.

25 Suppan, 1996, p. 563.

26 The main problems of that provisory state were internal disarray and advancing Italian occupation of the territory with the Croatian and Slovenian ethnic majority promised to Italy by the Treaty of London. Italy finally gained these territories with the Treaty of Rapallo signed between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and Italy in 1920. The Treaty of Rome signed in 1924 between the same parties ceded the city of Rijeka to Italy.

The *Vidovdan* Constitution of the new state was accepted in 1921 by a plain majority, with mostly Serbian votes supported with the additional traded votes of the Bosnian Muslims. It established a unitary state based on the idea of a single ‘three-tribal people’ with an official (in reality non-existent) ‘Serbo-Croatian-Slavic language.’²⁷ With a relatively Serbian majority (38.8%), the new state passed on the traditions of the Serbian nation-state with a single language and centralized administration. The dominant Serbian elite considered Serbs ‘the war winners’ and ‘the liberators,’ who made heavy sacrifices for unification and therefore had the right to dominant influence.²⁸ Although the concept of a single triune nation was almost generally accepted by the intellectual and political elites, Croats (23,7%) expected equality and preservation of their cultural traditions in accordance with the long experience of living in an organized multicultural community.²⁹

The political conflicts that arose on that basis led to constant government crises, with Stjepan Radić’s Croatian Republican Peasant Party soon taking over the role of the all-Croatian national movement. Radić was extremely reluctant to unite too quickly into a new state, and after its creation, he proposed establishing a Croatian peasant republic within it. He refused to recognize the *Vidovdan* Constitution, trying unsuccessfully to internationalize the Croatian question.³⁰ Radić’s political influence increased in 1927 when he joined a coalition with Svetozar Pribićević, a disappointed radical Yugoslav integralist and leader of the Serbs from the former Austro-Hungarian territories. Pribićević believed that the Belgrade elite encouraged and exploited Serbo-Croatian conflicts for its own interests. He advocated cooperation between Croats and Serbs and accepted Radić’s program of federalizing the country, subject to guarantees of rights for Serbs.³¹

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, banned by law in 1921, first accepted the ideology of a unitary nation and the state but replaced it in 1924 with a critique of Greater Serbian hegemony and the function of Yugoslavia as part of a *cordon sanitaire* around the Soviet Union. The Party advocated breaking Yugoslavia up into national Soviet-type republics that would join the Soviet federation of the Balkan-Danube republics. In 1937, this attitude was replaced by a more realistic commitment to turning Yugoslavia into a Soviet-type federation.³²

The Croatian unrest that followed the assassination of Radić and two Croatian Peasant Party MPs in Parliament by a member of the (Serbian) National Radical Party was the impetus for King Alexander’s *coup d’etat* in 1929. The King introduced ‘the dictatorship,’ changed the country’s name to Yugoslavia, and proclaimed full Yugoslav integralism in the 1931 imposed Constitution.³³

27 Čepulo, 2021, p. 27.

28 Goldstein, 2011, pp. 12–13.

29 Banac, 1984, pp. 141 et seq.

30 Biondich, 2000, pp. 178–179.

31 Banac, 1984, pp. 177 et seq.

32 Čepulo, 2021, p. 305.

33 Lampe, 2000, pp. 163–176.

This triggered radical Croatian nationalists to found the extreme organization ‘*Ustasha—Croatian Revolutionary Organization*’ with its leader Ante Pavelić. The *Ustashes* resorted to assassinating Yugoslav politicians, with the ultimate goal of creating an independent ethnic Croatian state in the entire ethnic and historical territory of the Croats, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, and considering Muslims an integral part of the Croatian people. The fascist and Nazi movements had a significant influence on the party’s ideology. The main patron for *Ustasha* was Italy, where it had training camps, which were also supported by Hungary. In 1934, the *Ustashes*, in cooperation with the Macedonian revolutionary organization VMRO, organized the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles, manifesting the breadth of anti-Yugoslav resistance.³⁴

In contrast, in cooperation with Belgrade, the new leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vladko Maček, turned to seeking a solution to the ‘Croatian question’ and condemned the *Ustashes* as ‘Italian mercenaries.’ In 1939, this policy resulted in an agreement between Maček and the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Dragiša Cvetković, upon the foundation of the autonomous Banate (*Banovina*) of Croatia, which was established by a decree of the Royal Regency just before the outbreak of World War II. With the establishment of the *Banovina*, unification of Croatia and greater parts of Dalmatia was finally achieved. Portions of Bosnia and Herzegovina with a Croatian ethnic majority were merged with it, and the *Banovina* enjoyed much wider autonomy than the former Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia.³⁵ Nonetheless, the *Ustashes* and other radical Croatian nationalists rejected the agreement and tried to internationalize the Croatian question, expecting the support of the Axis Powers. Serbian nationalists, on the other hand, demanded establishment of a Serb unit that would include parts of the *Banovina* with a Serb majority. However, the imminent collapse of Yugoslavia in 1941 interrupted further development.³⁶

In the 1930s, wider European integrations were also discussed in Zagreb. In 1931, Fran Ilešič, a professor of the Slovene language at the University of Zagreb, proposed creating a military-political-economic bloc from the Baltic and Black Seas to the Adriatic, which would include Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. The proposal stemmed from fears that a major economic crisis could upset the European balance based on the Versailles order; its main goal was to prevent restoration of German domination and the spread of communist ideas from the USSR.³⁷

34 Goldstein, 2011, pp. 126 et seq.

35 Šlabek, 1997, pp. 62–66.

36 Steindorff, 2007, pp. 168–170.

37 Zlodi, 2004, pp. 981–995.

3. World War II and Croatia (1941–1945)

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia joined the Triple Alliance under very moderate conditions on March 25, 1941. Two days later, a *coup d'état* was carried out under the influence of the British Secret service, after which Hitler ordered an attack on Yugoslavia. After a quick capitulation, the king and the Yugoslav government fled to London, where the émigré government, which included Croatian politicians, was divided over the national question and support to the (Serbian) *Chetnik* movement that was proclaimed the 'Yugoslav Army in Homeland.' Various ideas emerged among Croats in the émigré government, such as creating a federal peasant state of Southern Slavs or a confederation of peasant peoples between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas, but the idea of preserving Yugoslavia prevailed.

Hitler's conception of the break-up of Yugoslavia included creating a Croatian state, but Vladko Maček, who believed in the victory of Western democracy, rejected the German invitation to become the leader of that state.³⁸ Thus, on April 10, 1941, the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) was proclaimed in Zagreb; its leadership was taken over by Ante Pavelić, who came from Italy with 300 *Ustashas*.³⁹ Following the Nazi-fascist model, Pavelić established a system of government in which all power was concentrated in the hands of the Head (*Poglavnik*) as an incarnation of the will of the Croatian people. He soon passed racial laws modeled on the Nuremberg Laws and organized a persecution of Serbs, Jews, and Roma. For Muslims, as part of the Croatian people, he opened a large mosque in the wider center of Zagreb. The ISC was proclaimed a kingdom under the Italian influence, but the duke of Spoleto soon abandoned his intention to perform the duty of Croatian king; thus, apart from the formal name, there were no traces of a monarchical organization. The ISC acceded to the Triple Alliance and was recognized by all Axis states with Italian and German troops stationed and operated freely in the country. Italian patronage was also paid for by the Treaties of Rome, through which Italy received a significant part of the Croatian coastal area. These territories were taken over by German troops after the Italian capitulation, regardless of Pavelić's annulment of those treaties.⁴⁰ A certain degree of the ISC's independence in foreign policy was reflected in the protest to Hungary over the annexation of Međimurje, which the ISC did not recognize. The attempt of Slovak-Romanian-Croatian cooperation was directed against reconstructing pre-Trianon Hungarian borders, but in practice, it remained limited only to the cultural field.⁴¹ The plan of some high-ranking *Ustasha* officials to join the ISC with the Allies in 1944 was initially thwarted, and the conspirators were executed.⁴²

38 Biondich, 2007, p. 212.

39 Goldstein, 2011, p. 133.

40 For a concise review of the Independent State of Croatia, see Goldstein, 2011, pp. 131–140.

41 Rychlick, 2004, pp. 949–950.

42 Steindorff, 2007, pp. 186–187.

After the German attack on the Soviet Union, a partisan liberating movement was formed in Yugoslavia under the leadership of Josip Broz-Tito and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Under its auspices, a civilian power structure was established, and in 1943, the Anti-fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (ACPLY) declared itself the Parliament, banned King Peter's return to the country until the people's decision after the war, and accepted the decision to build Yugoslavia on democratic and federal principles, based on the right to self-determination and secession of Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Slovenes, and Serbs. Only after that were the land's anti-fascist councils constituted, among which was the Land Anti-fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Croatia (ACPLC). In 1944 ACPLC proclaimed the Federal State of Croatia as an integral part of the six-member Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, which was not internationally recognized at the time.⁴³

4. In the Communist Federation (1946–1990)

In 1945, the Yugoslav Communists quickly turned their victory into a monopoly of power, and in 1946, the Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was adopted according to the Soviet model. In the following year, the constitutions of the republics were adopted, including the Constitution of the People's Republic of Croatia.

In accordance with the Allies' decisions, Yugoslavia was rebuilt after the war within the previous borders, with corrections regarding the imposed unjust solutions. Thus, the peace treaty with Italy in 1947 and the London Memorandum with Italy in 1954 ceded to Yugoslavia areas with ethnic Croat and Slovene majorities that Italy had acquired by the Treaty of Rapallo and Treaty of Rome.⁴⁴ These areas were then included in the republics of Croatia and Slovenia according to ethnic criteria. However, the London Memorandum only provisionally resolved the disputed border issue, and it was only the 1975 Osimo Agreements between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the Italian Republic that confirmed the situation on the ground, and permanently determined the Italian-Yugoslav border that Croatia and Slovenia, as SFRY's successor states, inherited in 1991.⁴⁵

The self-confident Tito, who enjoyed a special reputation in the international communist movement due to his success in liberating the country, began to lead independent regional politics, planning to create a Balkan federation with Bulgaria and, in the future, Albania and Greece.⁴⁶ Stalin took it as a challenge to his leadership

43 Goldstein, 2011, p. 150.

44 A similar decision was proclaimed by ACPLC in 1943 and 'enforced' by ACPLY the same year, but it had only internal meaning since Democratic Federal Yugoslavia was not yet recognized. This was the first time in history that the largest part of Istria, west of river Raša, was associated with Croatia.

45 Rudolf, 2013, p. 23.

46 Banac, 1988, p. 37.

in the communist movement, and the fierce conflict between the whole Communist block and Yugoslavia erupted in 1948. It resulted in Tito's radical purge of the potential intra-communist opposition and a turn in foreign policy. After accepting Western aid, Yugoslavia developed a new model of socialism and established a policy of equidistance between the two blocs. In further development, these politics led to creating a non-aligned movement in 1961, together with African and Asian countries, which contributed to the country and Tito's international perception. Along with Malta and Cyprus, Yugoslavia was the only European country in this movement.⁴⁷

Although Yugoslav federalism was formally based on the concept of shared sovereignty, in reality the decision-making system was highly centralized, thanks to the concentration of powers in the federation and party-state regime, which did not leave much room for republican autonomy.⁴⁸ However, the gradual loosening of discipline from the 1960s, with Croatian and Slovene communists continuing to advocate decentralization, and Tito's dramatic showdown in 1965 with the centralist Serbian-Montenegrin block in the communist leadership, resulted in radical decentralization in 1967–1971. In the debates over the constitutional amendments at the time, the Croatian communist leadership, which enjoyed mass support in Croatia, took the lead in seeking wider independence of the republics, emphasizing Croatian interests and their neglect in federal politics. Although this movement did not in any way call into question the Yugoslav framework, Tito cut short its further development; in 1971, numerous arrests and dismissals of the communist officials and proclaimed nationalists in Croatia followed. However, the new Constitution of the SFRY in 1974 further decentralized the previous system and strengthened the positions of the republics. Among other things, republics were allowed to establish international cooperation within the established federal foreign policy. This was used by Croatia and Slovenia, which, in 1978, together with some Italian, Austrian, and South German provinces, established the Working Community Alps-Adria in Venice with a coordinative agenda in transport, culture, and ecology. The meaning of this cooperation should not be overestimated; yet in the circumstances at the time, it symbolically promoted the Central European and Mediterranean identity of the two republics. This is why the project aroused suspicion and even certain criticism from other republics.

It was a modest, but also the only possible integration reach of the official Croatian policy in the Yugoslav framework. Croatian emigration was more dynamic yet burdened with Western support for the independent position of Yugoslavia regarding the USSR. Vladko Maček, who left Croatia at the end of the war, was convinced that the West would support communist opponents and worked on reconstructing Yugoslavia with a multi-party system. In New York in 1947, he established the International

47 The importance of the non-aligned movement has essentially declined with the disintegration of the bipolar world, but it still exists, with the Republic of Croatia as an observer.

48 Čepulo, 2021, p. 324.

Peasant Union with agricultural parties having émigré leaderships from Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia, but it did not have a significant impact.⁴⁹

Most of the Croatian emigration throughout Yugoslavia's existence was convinced of its disintegration due to internal weaknesses, which would open space for forming an independent Croatian state. A moderate part of the emigration advocated Croatia's accession to the Liberal International and the political and economic integration of European states, even at the expense of losing part of its national sovereignty. Some emigrants viewed Croatian integration in the geopolitical structure of the Adriatic and Danube regions. They believed that Warsaw Pact countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria could enter a neutral zone that would be a balance between the Soviet Union and the West, and projected accession to that community of Croatia and other former Yugoslavian republics plus Albania.⁵⁰ Similar opinions were expressed in the 1970s by the future President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, who wrote about the peaceful 'Scandinavization' of the Yugoslav space as a precondition for normalizing inter-ethnic relations.⁵¹

5. Toward state independence and European integration (1990–2013)

Tito's death in the circumstances of the advancing economic and political crisis in 1980 freed space for disintegrative processes through which particular, primarily national, interests embodied in the interests of republican elites were sought, for which the established system did not provide a real solution. The crises began with the Serbian-ethnic Albanian conflict over control of Kosovo but escalated into Serbian complaints of discrimination against Serbs in all of Yugoslavia, with demands for 'Serbian unity' and recentralizing the federation with an outcome of Serbian supremacy as the most numerous nation. The populist all-Serbian movement led by Slobodan Milošević was fiercely opposed by Slovenia, which saw the introduction of a state of emergency in Kosovo as a pretext for breaking the autonomy of the republics. Slovenia invoked the right of the people to self-determination and secession and began preparations for secession from Yugoslavia with the support of the Croatian communist leadership concerned about Serbian threats to Croatia's territorial integrity.⁵²

The Yugoslav crisis deepened after nationalist parties won multi-party elections in the republics. The new Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman, who remained at the helm of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union party, advocated Croatia's independence. Yet, unlike Slovenia, he pleaded for the establishment of a confederation of former Yugoslav republics as a transitional stage toward independence, aware of the dangers of armed conflict for Croatia. However, Serbia rejected all such proposals. Therefore,

49 Boban, 2007, p. 256.

50 Petričević, 1972, pp. 458–459.

51 Bekić, 2016, p. 24.

52 Čepulo, 2021, pp. 370–371.

the proclamation of Croatian independence together with Slovenia on June 25, 1991, was to some extent a forced act avoiding Croatia remaining in a ‘rump Yugoslavia’ without Slovenia.⁵³

The starting point of Tuđman’s policy was the attitude of the Croatian historical affiliation to Western civilization and the imperative to return to it. He enthusiastically accepted Samuel Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations as complementary to his view.⁵⁴ Tuđman also advocated the ‘correction’ of ‘unnatural’ Croatian borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina by their ‘thickening,’ that is, annexation of predominantly Croatian ethnic and historical areas (Turkish Croatia), similar to the borders of the Banate of Croatia.⁵⁵ Some leading members of Tuđman’s party and the largest part of opposition confronted such politics, opening a political crisis in Croatia. Yet the attitude of the ‘return to Europe’ was generally shared by all political factors of any significance in Croatia, and joining the West and Euro-Atlantic integration remained a fundamental and unchallenged determinant of contemporary Croatian politics.

Tuđman believed that the key solution for the problems in Southeast Europe was an agreement between Croats and Serbs. This is why, despite the rebellion and secession proclaimed by part of the ethnic Serbs in Croatia that were encouraged and supported by Serbia, he met with Slobodan Milosevic on several occasions. This sparked repeated yet unproven accusations of their agreement to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵⁶

Croatia was the first to recognize the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because of Tuđman’s views, it was faced with accusations of interfering in that country’s internal relations and plans for its disintegration, primarily due to the 1992 proclamation of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna and conflicts between the Croatian Defense Council (of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Bosniak forces in 1993.⁵⁷ These hostilities were stopped by US mediation. The Washington Agreement, signed by Presidents Tuđman and Izetbegović in 1994, established a federation of Croats and Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This federation was supposed to enter into a confederation with Croatia; however, this did not happen. Tuđman’s attitudes and part of his policy toward Bosnia and Herzegovina remained the ‘original sin’ of Croatian politics, which is why all Croatian governments, from Tuđman’s death to joining the European Union and beyond, avoided formulating a more active policy toward that neighboring country.

The disintegrative and integrative processes were also influenced by the opinions of the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia. These opinions had non-binding force but were unanimously accepted by the EU countries; in the overall development, they established de facto mandatory standards for the former Yugoslav republics. Contrary to Serbia’s position and in accordance with the position of the republics that declared independence, the Commission stated that the Serbs’ right to self-determination in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia did not include

53 Čepulo, 2021, pp. 378–379.

54 Bekić, 2016, p. 16.

55 Bing, 2006, pp. 346–347.

56 Goldstein, 2021, pp. 163–164.

57 Bing, 2006, p. 349.

the right to secession but did include the right to grants of human and minority rights within the two states. It also stated that inter-republican borders could not be changed unilaterally but became international borders in accordance with the principle of *uti possidetis iuris*.⁵⁸ This has significantly weakened, although not eliminated, plans for cross-border national integrations and territorial annexations in the Balkans.

After the armed liberation of a significant part of its occupied territory in 1995 and the peaceful reintegration of the remaining part in 1998, Croatia shifted its focus to realizing foreign policy interests by joining international integrations, primarily the EU and NATO.⁵⁹ However, since declaring independence, Croatia has faced a form of undeclared limited international isolation, especially due to the policy toward Bosnia and Herzegovina and President Tuđman's autocratic administration. This perception of Croatia and the fact that Slovenia managed to join the circle of countries rapidly approaching the EU pushed Croatia into the circle of the Western Balkan countries from Croatia to Albania, which were the object of the EU's common policy of neutralizing tensions and encouraging mutual cooperation. That policy raised concerns in Croatia about the possible intention of establishing a Western Balkan integration on the periphery of the EU. This was the reason for the 1997 amendment to the Croatian Constitution that banned Croatia from entering any form of a renewed South Slavic state or other Balkan state union.⁶⁰

Tuđman's continuation of an autocratic policy after the cease of hostilities provoked a change in government after his death in 1999.⁶¹ The new government replaced the semi-presidential system with a parliamentary government, organized the summit of the EU and Western Balkans countries in Zagreb in 2000, and submitted its application for accession to the EU in 2003. Acceptance of this application in 2004 detached Croatia from the rest of the Balkan countries, but the accession process has become much more complex and time-consuming than before. This was not only because of the EU's poor experience with the admission of Bulgaria and Romania but also because of its strict insistence on full Croatian co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).⁶² This obstacle was definitely resolved after the arrest in 2005 of one Croatian general in Spain who the Croatian authorities had previously allowed to flee.⁶³ Croatia was then admitted to NATO in 2009, but the expected acceleration of negotiations with the EU was thwarted due to Slovenia's obstructions aimed at achieving the outcome it projected in the delimitation of the Croatian-Slovenian sea border. After this dispute was resolved in November 2009, the negotiations were finally accelerated, and on July 1, 2013, the Republic of Croatia became a member of the EU.

58 Ragazzi, 1992, p. 1491.

59 Suppan, 2013, p. 151.

60 Goldstein, 2021, p. 209.

61 Tanner, 2001, p. 310.

62 Čepulo, 2021, pp. 408–411.

63 Three Croatian generals were indicted before ICTY with one being acquitted at the first instance in 2011 and two others on appeal in 2012. Goldstein, 2021, pp. 341, 346.

6. Conclusion

The Croatian integration concepts until 1918 were determined by the fact that during the Middle Ages, Croats were divided into several states and remained administratively divided within one complex Monarchy during the nation-building period, lacking the political power to unite. Consequently, the prevailing integration concepts up to 1918 searched for a broader framework that could bridge particular Croatian identities and unite them into a single community. The idea of Croatian integration, therefore, first appeared as part of a broader 'Illyrian' and then South Slavic cluster. The idea of an independent Greater Croatia based on the French model of a political nation, unfeasible at the time, appeared only in late 1850. The unionist idea of a traditional alliance with Hungary was compromised by Hungarian inflexibility in the unbalanced union, yet it also reflected the incompatibility of the Croatian and Hungarian nation-building processes.

That Croatia was not formed as a state was the reason all Croatian integrative conceptions focused on national integration in the context of the relevant Central European and Balkan environment and lacked a 'state-policy' interest for the wider European environment.

South Slavic unification took place in the historical contingency of 1918 by merging the Central European-Mediterranean and Balkan areas that were connected by linguistic vicinity but separated by different mentalities and cultural patterns, as well as competitive religious affiliations, lacking any historical precedent. The new unitary Yugoslav nation-building was grounded on the Serbian national tradition. This caused the Croats to become indignant, resulting in their demands to establish a Croatian autonomous unit or independent state as the only paradigm that would ensure protection of Croatian national interests. The provisional Croatian autonomy and excessive fascist state created in turbulent and contingent circumstances before and during the Second World War were replaced by a renewal of the Yugoslav framework set on the new foundations of an imposed Soviet-style federation. Contrary to the previous unitary paradigm, this model emphasized the political autonomy and equality of nations in the decentralized structure of the state. However, in the reality of the undemocratic system of the party-state type of government, Yugoslav federalism functioned as crypto-centralism, this time marked by the ideological core and not by the predominance of some particular national interests.

The disintegration of authoritarian integrative instruments in Yugoslavia in the circumstances of the disappearance of the bipolar world resulted in the growth of competitive nationalisms embodied in the republican leaderships, with two basic projects of national emancipation and integration. One was the project to establish an all-Serbian nation-state at the allegedly Serbian ethnic and historical space, regardless of the republican borders. The other was a project to emancipate all other republics (except Montenegro) into nation-states. The Croatian project of gaining independence was dialectically paired with the integration. It included establishing

the Yugoslav confederation as a transitional form toward full independence and then accessing independent Croatia in the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations as an adequate framework for Croatian national interests.

The history of Croatian integration concepts, even those that followed independence, thus indicates a permanent and pronounced orientation toward broader integrative forms. Such a tendency reflects almost the only Croatian experience of living in a multicultural framework; however, it probably even more reflects the experience of a small nation with a developed identity but insufficient capacity to independently realize and defend national interests in an international order based on national statehoods.

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