

VLADIMIR FILIPOVIĆ, PhD, Associate Professor  
Libertas International University  
Zagreb, Republic of Croatia  
vfilipovic@libertas.hr

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## **“THEY FINALLY REALIZED WHO MILOŠEVIĆ IS”: CROATIA AND THE NATO INTERVENTION IN FR YUGOSLAVIA 1999**

*ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the views on the intervention from the perspective of different actors in one of the states in the region, Croatia. Drawing on the national media archives as well as president Tuđman's archive, the paper focuses on the views of the following actors: (i) the media and the public, (ii) state officials, (iii) the opposition, and (iv) ethnic minorities. This allows for an exploration of a variety of positions, views and different interests which motivated reactions ranging from wholehearted support to reluctance, and even opposition to the intervention among different actors. The continuous media support for the intervention, shared by the ruling party and opposition at the beginning of the intervention later turned into reluctance on the side of the government, which became concerned with the intervention's consequences and potential negative impact. The paper concludes by contrasting the emotional satisfaction among the intervention's supporters with the political and economic concerns regarding the destabilizing effects of the intervention for the Croatian regime, pointing out the complex relations and ties among countries in the region and their citizens.*

**KEYWORDS:** NATO Intervention 1999, Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, Public Support

### **Introduction**

This paper analyzes how the NATO intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) was seen in Croatia, what it meant for Croatian politics and what consequences it could have had. NATO's intervention against the FRY was a key political process in Southeastern Europe during 1999. Academic research of the intervention has so far been primarily focused on the reactions from larger players and especially the NATO alliance and its member states. In Croatia, official state level reactions were by no means unequivocal. They de-

ended on a number of factors concerning relations with the FRY and the West, but included concerns regarding Croatia's internal political dynamics (government-opposition-public opinion). Therefore, in order to understand the consequences of NATO's intervention in Southeastern Europe, it is vital to explain how the intervention was received in FRY neighboring countries and how it impacted the stability of the entire region.

The political impacts on neighboring countries and their perceptions of the NATO intervention in FR Yugoslavia have still not been addressed. To fill this gap, the paper explores how different actors in Croatia viewed the intervention and what kind of (indirect) effects the intervention might have had on Croatian politics. To address these questions, the paper provides an analysis of primary Croatian language sources, including daily and weekly newspaper articles and documents from president Tuđman's archive in Zagreb. The content analysis of primary sources focuses on the opinions of four different actors, namely (i) the media and the public, (ii) the government and the president, (iii) the opposition, and (iv) ethnic minorities. The analysis begins with specific reactions from the above actors and moves to recognize the main political processes that were taking place. The criterion used to identify a particular group's position was their approval or disapproval of the intervention. Taking into account this criterion, as well as the particularities of the selected groups in Croatian society, the paper singles out the Serb and Albanian ethnic minorities as special actors outside of the dominant sphere of public opinion.

### Croatia in 1999

Croatia was in a severe crisis during 1999. Its economic indicators were poor. Its GDP was lower and its unemployment rate and foreign debt were higher than the previous year.<sup>1</sup> The political crisis was even deeper since its democracy was fragile, burdened with widespread corruption and clientelism.<sup>2</sup> The war and the ruling political party, the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* – HDZ), created a society fueled by nationalism.<sup>3</sup> HDZ had ruled since 1990, with new elections to be held at the end of 1999. The opposition (social-democratic, liberal, and regional political parties) kept accusing the ruling party of autocracy, corruption, international isolation, and pro-Ustasha politics.<sup>4</sup>

The critical political figure of the period was Croatian president Franjo Tuđman, who had won a second five-year term in 1997. He often disregarded standard democratic procedures and had poor relations with Western powers. Although Tuđman's image was not as bad as Milošević's, he was often com-

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<sup>1</sup> Gordan Družić, „Gospodarski razvoj Hrvatske i EU”, *Ekonomija/Economics*, 14, 1, (2007), 1–54.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State: Croatia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, February 26, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Sabrina Ramet, “Politics in Croatia since 1990”, in: *Croatia since independence*, editors Sabrina Ramet et al. (München: Oldenburg Verlag, 2008) 31–33.

<sup>4</sup> „Kamo vodi opasna radikalizacija hrvatske političke scene“, *Vjesnik*, 13. 2. 1999.

pared with Milošević in the Western media ("the two Balkan nationalist dictators").<sup>5</sup> Tuđman was also seriously ill,<sup>6</sup> and a struggle for succession was already taking place within HDZ. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Mate Granić was the party's moderate faction's leader and wanted the EU and the United States to recognize him as a desirable candidate.<sup>7</sup>

Croatia was in a state of moderate political isolation and a long way from Euro-Atlantic integrations. From 1996 the United States began to criticize Croatian authorities for its lack of respect for democracy and human rights, mainly due to Croatian support for anti-Dayton political structures in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1998 international developmental aid to Croatia was suspended, and Croatian participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program was rejected.<sup>8</sup> The US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Tuđman in 1998 with a clear message about the need for Croatia to become more democratic, to comply with the Dayton accords, and to allow the return of the Serb refugees. When Tuđman ignored these requests, US officials began to maintain an evident and rigid distance from Tuđman and started to talk about him as the "second Balkan nationalist dictator".<sup>9</sup>

Although the officially declared priorities of Croatian foreign policy were membership in the EU, NATO, and good relations with the United States,<sup>10</sup> its political practices were hardly representative of the values of liberal democracies. HDZ was inspired by nationalism and had infiltrated almost all spheres of Croatian society. Adding to this, criticism from Western democracies was not taken seriously. For example, the US State Department's report on Human Rights Practices published in February 1999 was very critical of Croatia.<sup>11</sup> However, both the statecontrolled media and other media supporting the current regime, reacted to these reprovals by constructing narratives claiming that international organizations and media were pressuring Croatia and that the reports were too rigid on Croatia and full of ill judgment.<sup>12</sup>

Due to these factors, official Croatian foreign policy had reached a dead end. Tuđman kept reiterating that Croatia's cultural identity placed it in Central Europe and the Mediterranean, rather than the Balkans. However, besides helping build a nationalist historical narrative, Tuđman did nothing to convince Western powers of Croatia's western democratic trajectory. Given the situation, the reprovals that Croatia had received from Western states can be divided into

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<sup>5</sup> "The two culprits", *The Economist*, 22. 2. 1998; "Let's not forget Milošević's partner in crime", *The New York Times*, 31. 5. 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Mate Granić, *Vanjski poslovi* (Zagreb: Algoritam, 2005), 150–152.

<sup>7</sup> „Granić demantira špekulacije“, *Vjesnik*, 2. 2. 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-F. Morel, "American-Croatian relations during the 1990-s", in: *Croatia since independence*, editors Sabrina Ramet et al. (München: Oldenburg Verlag, 2008), 353–376.

<sup>9</sup> "Croatia Branded as Another Balkans Pariah", *The New York Times*, 3. 3. 1999.

<sup>10</sup> „Granić: Prioriteti su i dalje suradnja sa SAD i približavanje EU...“, *Vjesnik*, 19. 2. 1999.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State: Croatia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998, February 26, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> „Vlada: Izvješće SAD-a o Hrvatskoj je neargumentirano“, *Vjesnik*, 5. 3. 1999.

two groups. The first was more general, aimed at illiberal practices (especially regarding the rights of ethnic Serbs), lack of media freedoms, and lack of transparency regarding democratic procedures.<sup>13</sup> The second, which narrowed the criticisms, concerned *realpolitik*. Namely, Tuđman supported anti-Dayton structures in Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus directly threatening the essential political process (implementation of the Dayton Agreement) in the US-backed region.<sup>14</sup> That connoted international isolation. At the same time, Tuđman's politics were inspired by nationalism and relied on the support of Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina. He could not change his politics without digressing from the founding principles on which he had built his position. Thus, foreign policy was reduced to involving Croatia into processes of international integration and alleviating its isolation without significantly facilitating relevant political change.

Croatia's relations with Yugoslavia at the time were still mired in memories of war, and in nationalism. Croats perceived FR Yugoslavia as a country which had orchestrated aggression on Croatia in 1991 and as a country responsible for numerous atrocities and vast destruction. Relations between the two countries were almost nonexistent. In 1996, Croatia and FR Yugoslavia recognized each other and signed an agreement to normalize relations.<sup>15</sup> However, the process of normalization and the social and economic relations between the two countries were kept to a minimum.

Attempts at normalization of bilateral relations were often labeled in Croatia as the "politics of third Yugoslavia", referring to the idea that great powers would force Croatia to return to Yugoslavia and that all regional policy initiatives were a part of that plan. The most known was initiative of Western Balkans which was introduced in 1997. The idea of a so-called "third Yugoslavia" caused much fear in Croatia. This was partially a consequence of war trauma, but also stemmed from the concern that Croatia's westward integration would be stalled or blocked because of block EU accession – that Croatia would have to wait for the other post-Yugoslav states and only enter the EU as part of a package/block, or that it would have to accept a new Balkan association as a replacement for the EU.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the "third Yugoslavia" conception was a conspiracy tactic used by HDZ to frighten the public and draw it away from the opposition.<sup>17</sup> According to this, the ruling HDZ was the only natural protector of Croatian independence, and because of this the majority of the public needed to trust them. The opposition said that the "third Yugoslavia" was "a fiction of the ruling party".<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Visible in a number of reports by Human rights watch or OSCE.

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir Filipović, Ana Radović Kapor, „Kritike međunarodne zajednice prema Hrvatskoj 1995–1999“, *Međunarodne studije*, XX, 1–2, (2020), 155–172.

<sup>15</sup> Tihomir Ponoš, „Kako smo se normalizirali – 25 godina od normalizacije odnosa između Republike Hrvatske i Savezne Republike Jugoslavije“, *Tragovi: časopis za hrvatske i srpske teme*, 4, 2, (2021), 125–145.

<sup>16</sup> „Hrvatska ne prihvaća nikakvu balkansku integraciju“, *Vjesnik*, 11. 2. 1999.

<sup>17</sup> „Granić: Neki u oporbi olako shvaćaju opasnost od balkanske federacije, a to nije izmišljotina“, *Vjesnik*, 8. 3. 1999.

<sup>18</sup> „Press konferencija Ivica Račan“, *SDP Info*, 1. 4. 1999.

## The NATO intervention and public opinion

The dominant public opinion in Croatia was full of anti-Serb sentiment and considered Serbia and Milošević as the parties responsible for all the wars, crises, and atrocities in the Balkans in the 1990s. NATO threats to FRY were not taken too seriously. Numerous comments reiterated that Milošević had been under threat of intervention since 1992, which had no consequences for his politics.<sup>19</sup> Dominant public opinion, without a doubt, supported the idea that Yugoslavia should finally be punished and hoped that the time for that had finally come.<sup>20</sup>

When the intervention started, the general impression was that the great powers had finally realized who Milošević was, had realized who was responsible for all the evils in the former Yugoslavia, and that the world was finally ready to end the genocide and ethnic cleansing.<sup>21</sup> According to surveys, 90% of Croats supported the NATO intervention, and 70% believed Croatia should give its airspace to NATO aircraft.<sup>22</sup> Later in April, when information about the land intervention went public, 52% of the Croatian population supported a land intervention through Croatian territory.<sup>23</sup>

Compared to other countries, the initial support in Croatia (90%) was significantly higher than in other countries labeled as "regional actors". Until April 1999, support for the intervention was around 60% in Poland, Hungary, Slovenia and slightly lower in the Czech Republic, 52% in Austria, with the approval of about a third of the population in Romania and Bulgaria, and only 4% in Greece.<sup>24</sup> In Macedonia, 47% of ethnic Macedonians supported the intervention.<sup>25</sup> There are no reliable contemporary polls available for Albania, but considering the government's reaction, it can be assumed that it was the only regional actor in which support for the intervention might have been higher than in Croatia. Despite several differences between these states, it is safe to conclude that this brief comparison shows that public opinion about the NATO intervention was supported in Croatia more than anywhere else (except in engaged Albania). Such high support could undoubtedly provide the Croatian government with little maneuvering space.

The Croatian media euphorically reported on statements from Western politicians (especially Clinton, Blair, and Chirac) about Milošević – "his tyranny, aggression, and responsibility for the war".<sup>26</sup> This was vital for constructing

<sup>19</sup> „Miloševiću se prijeti još od Božića 1992“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 23. 3. 1999.

<sup>20</sup> „Srbija dočekala vrijeme za batine“, *Vjesnik*, 20. 3. 1999.

<sup>21</sup> „Pisma čitatelja“, *Vjesnik*, 19. 4. 1999.

<sup>22</sup> „90 posto hrvatskih građana opravdava akciju NATO-a“, *Večernji list*, 29. 3. 1999. It is possible to have distance to methodology and sample of this survey, but we assess that results were correct.

<sup>23</sup> „Večernjakova anketa“, *Večernji list*, 21. 4. 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Congressional research service, Report for Congress: Kosovo: International Reactions to NATO Air Strikes, April 21, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Gabriel Partos, "Perceptions in former Yugoslav republics", *Kosovo: Perceptions of war and its aftermath*, editors Mary Buckley and Sally Cummings (New York: Continuum, 2001), 49.

<sup>26</sup> „Chirac: Milošević je odgovoran za 200 tisuća mrtvih“, *Vjesnik*, 30. 3. 1999.

the war narrative in Croatia, which viewed Croatia as a victim of Serbian aggression in 1991, which in turn Croatia successfully resisted and became independent. That was partially the standard narrative for newly independent states, but it was also crucial for legitimizing HDZ rule. However, the narrative was jeopardized by the ICTY's (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) investigations and indictments of Croatian generals.

The Croatian media also reported on Serbian atrocities against Albanians in Kosovo. Many original stories from Kosovo came into the public sphere, and contained mostly confessions from Albanian refugees in Croatia.<sup>27</sup> Such stories only deepened the already poor image of Serbs in Croatia. After a few weeks of continuous attacks, the support for the intervention remained high. However, other issues also came into focus, such as individual testimonies, war crimes, and other consequences of the crisis.

The American Embassy in Zagreb received numerous letters of support from ordinary citizens.<sup>28</sup> Because of the NATO attacks, unofficial celebrations were organized in some Croatian cities.<sup>29</sup> Croatian public opinion was not compassionate with news on Serbian civil casualties. One of the many readers' letters sent to one daily newspaper stated that "they [the citizens of Belgrade] had thrown flowers on the tanks that went to the Croatian border in 1991, and now they act that as if they are innocent and confused". The general conclusion was that "they got what they deserved".<sup>30</sup>

Different and opposite reactions were infrequent and demanded a degree of courage. For example, left-leaning journalist Igor Mandić published a critical text in which he questioned whether the intervention was justified. He noticed that there were no protests in Croatia against the attacks and that Croatia was the only country in Europe, along with far-away Iceland and Ireland, without protests or any public arguments against the attacks.<sup>31</sup> Mandić immediately faced intense reactions from various sides. Some of the reactions were, for example: "We felt Milošević's politics on our own skin, and we sympathize with refugees and Milošević's victims".<sup>32</sup> "What about the rights of Albanians? Why didn't Mandić criticize the silence of Serbian intellectuals during the war in Croatia".<sup>33</sup>

A leading anti-regime newspaper, *Feral Tribune*, distanced themselves from the attacks. *Feral* reported on the situation in Belgrade without celebration and with some level of empathy. However, *Feral* also published reports on atrocities in Kosovo and on the difficult experiences of Albanians who came to Croatia as refugees.<sup>34</sup> As the intervention continued, *Feral* openly questioned its

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<sup>27</sup> „Ispovijed albanske obitelji izbjegle iz Prištine“, *Vjesnik*, 18. 4. 1999.

<sup>28</sup> „Leskovac zabrinut akcijom NATO, Šuvar protiv“, *Vjesnik*, 27. 3. 1999.

<sup>29</sup> „Osnovna škola mržnje“, *Feral Tribune*, 5. 4. 1999.

<sup>30</sup> „Pisma čitatelja“, *Vjesnik*, 9. 4. 1999.

<sup>31</sup> „Šutnja intelektualaca“, *Vjesnik*, 3. 6. 1999.

<sup>32</sup> „Hrvatski intelektualci i akcija NATO-a“, *Vjesnik*, 11. 6. 1999.

<sup>33</sup> „Zašto Mandić ne brani prava Albanaca“, *Vjesnik*, 16. 6. 1999.

<sup>34</sup> „Dom za bježanje“, *Feral Tribune*, 3. 5. 1999.

reasons and motives and predicted pessimistic outcomes.<sup>35</sup> A frequent conclusion was that the war provided Tuđman and the HDZ with an environment in which they could win another election.<sup>36</sup>

## The Government and President Tuđman

### *First reactions*

The NATO intervention in Yugoslavia caught Croatian politicians off guard. Almost nobody believed that the attacks would actually begin. President Tuđman also did not believe that the intervention would happen. He said as much to the Yugoslav Ambassador in Croatia Veljko Knežević, who had requested an emergency meeting on March 24. Tuđman also promised him that Croatia would not use a possible intervention as an opportunity to unilaterally resolve open issues such as border disputes (the Prevlaka area under UN supervision).<sup>37</sup>

On March 25, the day after the attacks began, Foreign Minister Granić met the American Ambassador William Montgomery and expressed support for the action. Granić wanted to present Croatia as a peaceful and civilized, stable and cooperative European country, different from Milošević's country.<sup>38</sup> It was apparent that Granić wanted American support and obvious that he was trying to present himself as a leader of a pro-Western, moderate faction within HDZ, as opposed to the chauvinistic and anti-Western faction led primarily by Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>39</sup> Officially, HDZ denied such a division existed within the party.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to President Clinton from March 25, 1999, Tuđman wrote that he understands the reasons behind the intervention. Tuđman stated that he hopes the attacks will force Milošević to accept the Rambouillet agreement. However, he warned that the intervention would have economic consequences for Croatia and underlined Croatian concerns, such as the spillover of the crisis into Bosnia-Herzegovina and the destabilization of the entire region. Tuđman asked for guarantees from the USA that such a scenario would not happen. In addition, he emphasized his readiness for partnership and cooperation. According to Tuđman, Croatia was the only country in the region to achieve political and economic stability. Furthermore, Croatia desired an individual approach to Euroatlantic integrations instead of block integration with other former Yugoslav republics.<sup>41</sup>

A parliamentary majority in Croatia supported the reaction of the government and supported the attacks. The atmosphere at the Parliamentary session on March 25 was almost celebratory. Members of HDZ welcomed the attacks which would finally "destroy the last oasis of Stalinism in Europe and signify

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<sup>35</sup> „Humanitarna katastrofa“, *Feral Tribune*, 17. 5. 1999.

<sup>36</sup> „Bože čuvaj Ameriku“, *Feral Tribune*, 12. 4. 1999.

<sup>37</sup> „Što prije postići mirno rješenje“, *Vjesnik*, 27. 3. 1999.

<sup>38</sup> „Hrvatska i SAD idućeg tjedna o partnerstvu“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 14. 4. 1999.

<sup>39</sup> „Amerikanci sve snažnije podržavaju Granića“, *Nacional*, 7. 4. 1999.

<sup>40</sup> „HDZ spreman na kompromis“, *Novi list*, 10. 4. 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from 25 March, published in: *Tuđmanov arhiv*, vol. V (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2015), 550–552.

the end of Serbian imperial politics“. Most HDZ members were repeatedly saying, “Serbia finally got what it deserved because of the last 50 years”.<sup>42</sup> The last statement dominated public discourse at the time, which was also important for HDZ’s nationalist narrative and its view of Serbia/Belgrade as responsible for many of the political and economic troubles in Croatia.

### *The issue of airspace*

It was evident that NATO aircraft required the use of Croatian airspace. The Croatian government was not informed of the intervention even as it commenced on March 24. Croatian airspace was closed and the airport in Zagreb learned about the closure from Eurocontrol, an association concerned with air traffic control.<sup>43</sup> Foreign minister Granić described in his memoirs how Ambassador Montgomery called him on March 24, around 6 pm, and told him that air attacks would begin soon from warships on the Adriatic coast through Croatian airspace. Montgomery explained that he had earlier had to withhold the information as a military secret, and that because of this the US did not ask Croatia to use its airspace.<sup>44</sup> NATO command explained to Croatian authorities that they were ignored due to a technical error.<sup>45</sup>

On March 25, in front of the Parliament, Foreign Minister Granić announced official Croatian support for the intervention and permitted NATO the use of Croatian airspace. What he withheld was the fact that NATO did not even ask for permission. The lack of a request left President Tuđman dissatisfied. He was a president who respected the idea of sovereignty, and was inspired by ideas of national independence and pride. The fact that no one asked permission to use his country’s airspace was difficult to swallow. Tuđman further expressed his dissatisfaction in a letter to President Clinton from March 27.<sup>46</sup> Croatian authorities tried to hide the fact that they were not even consulted regarding the use of Croatian airspace from the domestic public. The truth of this was revealed to the public by the Yugoslav Ambassador Veljko Knežević. In a statement given to Croatian media, he said that FR Yugoslavia was not very pleased that NATO was using Croatian airspace to attack Yugoslavia, and that he found out that nobody even asked Croatian authorities for permission.<sup>47</sup> The Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded an explanation from Knežević, claiming that he had lied.<sup>48</sup> When it became apparent that Knežević was telling the truth, the Croatian regime tried to present the issue in a different light during the following weeks, for example, stating that NATO aircraft did not actually use Croatian airspace.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> „Sabor jednoglasno podupro akciju NATO-a“, *Vjesnik*, 26. 3. 1999.

<sup>43</sup> „Nakon jednodnevnog prekida otvorena Zračna luka Zagreb“, *Vjesnik*, 26. 3. 1999.

<sup>44</sup> M. Granić, *Vanjski poslovi*, 180.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from 27 March, published in: *Tuđmanov arhiv*, 554–557.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> „SRJ se neće nikome osvećivati“, *Vjesnik*, 30. 3. 1999.

<sup>48</sup> „MVP traži Kneževićevo objašnjenje“, *Vjesnik*, 31. 3. 1999.

<sup>49</sup> „Borbeni zrakoplovi nisu letjeli preko Hrvatske“, *Večernji list*, 27. 3. 1999.

The issue of Croatian airspace was a clear signal to the Croatian government that although the NATO intervention was directed against FRY, NATO powers did not care much about the sovereignty of neighboring states.

### *Partnership for Peace and Relations with the USA*

When it became obvious that the NATO intervention had started, the Croatian government wanted to use it to improve relations with Western powers, particularly the United States. President Tuđman realized that the intervention was now under way and that Croatia would not be able to stop it even if it wanted. Therefore, he believed that Croatia should seize the moment, cooperate with the United States, and ask for benefits in return. In his letter to Clinton from March 27, he expressed support and demanded Croatian membership in the PfP and World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>50</sup>

Support for the NATO intervention was not the only measure the Croatian government used to improve relations with the United States. Tuđman also promised Clinton "more space for American investments in Croatia, including one enormous business opportunity for Enron".<sup>51</sup> On March 30, a deal with the Enron Corporation was signed, and it was agreed that Enron would build and operate a \$175 million power plant in Croatia.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, Enron's board was trying to lobby for Croatia in Washington.<sup>53</sup> It can be concluded that the Croatian government was trying hard to seize the moment and improve its relations with the United States.

Foreign Minister Granić traveled to Washington and met with Madeleine Albright on March 31. He reiterated Croatian support for the NATO intervention and announced cooperation in intelligence, logistics, etc., hoping the Americans would ease up the demands placed before Croatia for PfP membership.<sup>54</sup> Granić warned that there was some fear in Croatia of FR Yugoslavia taking revenge on Croatia, and he asked for protection and urgent membership in PfP.<sup>55</sup> The fears he expressed were not real. The Croatian army was not even on standby, and the only security measures taken were the near the border with Yugoslavia.<sup>56</sup> It was hard to imagine that Yugoslavia would seek conflict with Croatia while it was under NATO bombardment. The Croatian request and stated fears had a different purpose, namely, the HDZ-led government desperately needed a foreign policy success.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from 27 March, *Tuđmanov arhiv*, 554–557.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; „Američko ulaganje i u banke i u telekomunikacije“, *Večernji list*, 8. 4. 1999.

<sup>52</sup> „Enron Agrees to Build, Operate \$175 Million Plant in Croatia“, *The Wall Street Journal*, 31. 3. 1999.

<sup>53</sup> „Intervju Joseph Sutton“, *Globus*, 14. 5. 1999; „Američki bomboni“, *Feral Tribune*, 5. 4. 1999. Opposition in Croatia criticized that agreement as unfavorable for Croatia and cancelled a deal in 2000 when they took power.

<sup>54</sup> „Albright pozvala Granića u Washington“, *Vjesnik*, 30. 3. 1999.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from 27 March, *Tuđmanov arhiv*, 554–557; „SAD spremne ubrzati prijem Hrvatske u Partnerstvo za mir“, *Vjesnik*, 1. 4. 1999.

<sup>56</sup> „Proširenje rata iz SRJ u Hrvatsku nerealno“, *Novi list*, 9. 4. 1999.

Although Granić and the pro-regime media portrayed his visit as a success,<sup>57</sup> Albright confronted Granić with the same American demands.<sup>58</sup> Croatia was required to stop supporting anti-Dayton political structures in Bosnia-Herzegovina, change the privileged status of Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina in Croatian elections (which had so far given a significant advantage to HDZ), enable the return of Serbs to Croatia, and make progress with respect to human rights and freedom of the media.<sup>59</sup> The same was repeated many times during April. The US Embassy in Zagreb emphasized that the requirements for Croatian membership in PfP were transparent and that entrance into the PfP now depended on the Croatian government.<sup>60</sup> The only actual American move that benefited Croatia was the State Department's approval for Croatia's acquisition of military equipment from the United States.<sup>61</sup>

### *Intervention as trouble for Tuđman's regime*

By the end of April speculation had started filling the public space that the aim of the attacks was not only to convince Milošević to accept the peace agreement for Kosovo, but also to remove Milošević from power.<sup>62</sup> The US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright insisted that the intervention was part of a broader struggle against nationalism.<sup>63</sup> Liberal forces in the region were content: human rights were more important than sovereignty, they emphasized.<sup>64</sup> However, president Tuđman was displeased and worried about the hierarchy of these principles.

The fruits of Western diplomacy were disliked by Croatian authorities. In May, the new OSCE report on Croatia was once again critical. The government insisted on the report being non-objective and tendentious.<sup>65</sup> The idea of a German initiative for a Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe appeared in diplomatic circles. That German initiative had many critics in Croatia, mainly because it promoted regional access.<sup>66</sup> President Tuđman had serious misgivings about the initiative.<sup>67</sup>

Since the beginning of the attacks, the idea that existed in the international public was that the ICTY would raise indictments against Milošević. That finally happened at the end of May.<sup>68</sup> Although the public opinion in Croatia

<sup>57</sup> „Hrvatska bliža nego ikad“, *Vjesnik*, 1. 4. 1999.

<sup>58</sup> M. Granić, *Vanjski poslovi*, 181.

<sup>59</sup> „SAD spremne ubrzati prijem Hrvatske u Partnerstvo za mir“, *Vjesnik*, 1. 4. 1999.

<sup>60</sup> „I bez NATO-a, Hrvatska može zaštititi svoj teritorij“, *Vjesnik*, 9. 4. 1999.

<sup>61</sup> „Nagrada za partnerstvo“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 10. 4. 1999.

<sup>62</sup> „Sustavnim bombardiranjem SRJ NATO želi isprovocirati srpski puč“, *Vjesnik*, 1. 5. 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Madeleine Albright, *Madam secretary: A memoir*. Cited in Croatian edition: *Memoari državne tajnice: autobiografija* (Zagreb: Profil, 2005), 336.

<sup>64</sup> „Vlado Gotovac o akciji NATO-a“, *Novi list*, 19. 4. 1999.

<sup>65</sup> „Neprihvatljivo izvješće OESS-a o Hrvatskoj“, *Vjesnik*, 21. 4. 1999.

<sup>66</sup> „Pakt o stabilnosti ili tapkanje u mjestu“, *Vjesnik*, 28. 5. 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Radovan Vukadinović, „Pakt o stabilnosti – početak novih sigurnosnih rješenja na jugoistoku Europe“, *Croatian Political Science Review*, 36, 3, (1999), 3–22.

<sup>68</sup> „Milošević optužen“, *Vjesnik*, 28. 5. 1999.

was delighted with the indictment against Milošević, president Tuđman was worried. He recognized the indictment as an instrument in an attempt to overthrow the government.<sup>69</sup> The Croatian political establishment and part of the public opinion were previously disappointed with the ICTY and objected because of equal treatment of the sides involved,<sup>70</sup> and HDZ insisted that cooperation with the ICTY should be limited and that it should "respect national dignity".<sup>71</sup> The ICTY indictment against low-ranking Croat officials from Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was contemporaneous with the NATO attacks on FRY, was full of serious indictments against Croatia and President Tuđman.<sup>72</sup> Suspicion of the court being used as a pressure tool was indicatively growing.

*The New York Times* wrote in April that Tuđman was also under ICTY investigation.<sup>73</sup> When the indictment against Milošević became public, *The New York Times* published an article in which they reminded: "Milošević is far more responsible than Mr. Tuđman for the bloodshed in the Balkans, but president Franjo Tuđman of Croatia is hardly an innocent lamb, and if the war-crimes tribunal in The Hague hopes to be seen as an impartial arbiter of justice, it should match its indictment of Mr. Milošević with a move against Mr. Tuđman".<sup>74</sup> That was enough for the Croatian government to be more than skeptical of Western involvement in the Balkans.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Tuđman's peace initiative*

President Tuđman did not have sympathies towards Albanians in Kosovo and he refused to cooperate with them even in the first half of the 1990s.<sup>76</sup> He showed a good understanding of Serbian arguments regarding Kosovo. At the end of May, in an interview for an Italian newspaper, Tuđman recognized the importance of Kosovo for Serbian national identity and warned that Western powers should keep that in mind. Tuđman called Kosovo the "cradle of the Serbian nation" and made mention of famous Serbian monuments and monasteries in Kosovo. He also criticized the myth of Kosovo and stated that the ideology of Greater Serbia was not defeated.<sup>77</sup>

In mid-May, Tuđman summoned all the relevant ambassadors in Zagreb and proposed his plan for Kosovo. He also held a history lecture about the importance of Kosovo for Serbs and the origins of the Serbian national ideology. According to Tuđman, the Yugoslav army should have retreated from southern

<sup>69</sup> „Tuđman: Intervju“, *Vjesnik*, 1. 6. 1999.

<sup>70</sup> „U Haagu se sudi samo Hrvatima“, *Vjesnik*, 18. 2. 1999.

<sup>71</sup> „Suradnja s Haagom ne smije prelaziti granicu dostojanstva“, *Vjesnik*, 3. 2. 1999.

<sup>72</sup> „Stvaranje Herceg-Bosne bila je priprema za Veliku Hrvatsku“, *Vjesnik*, 2. 4. 1999; Refers to a process Kordić&Čerkez at ICTY (IT-95-14/2). <http://www.icty.org/cases/party/705/4>.

<sup>73</sup> „Franjo Tuđman pod istragom“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 14. 4. 1999.

<sup>74</sup> „Let's Not Forget Milošević's Partner in Crime“, *The New York Times*, 31. 5. 1999.

<sup>75</sup> „Sporno izjednačavanje krivnje“, *Novi list*, 21. 5. 1999.

<sup>76</sup> Davor Marijan, *Hrvatska 1989.-1992.: Rađanje države* (Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2017), 421–422.

<sup>77</sup> „Tuđman: Intervju“, *Vjesnik*, 1. 6. 1999.

Kosovo, and Kosovo should have been divided in two parts: a northern part under Serbian authority and a southern part under international supervision. A UN peacekeeping force should have been deployed, with a Russian contingent in the North and an international one in the South.<sup>78</sup>

The plan was very similar to the Russian one and implied a division of Kosovo in accordance with ethnic borders. The plan was seen as the work of hard-line nationalists around Tuđman, especially Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who had hoped to establish a precedent in order to achieve similar goals in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>79</sup> The moderate faction in HDZ did not support the plan.<sup>80</sup> However, Tuđman wanted respect for national sovereignty and was skeptical about the stability of multi-ethnic states. His plan was not in accordance with the political mainstream in world politics, which supported the concept of human rights and other liberal principles. It came as no surprise that the plan did not reverberate among Western politicians. Montgomery, the US ambassador in Zagreb, refused to even comment on the plan.<sup>81</sup>

### *How not to lose from the intervention?*

When it became apparent that Croatian politics would not benefit from the so-called partnership with the United States and that almost nothing had changed, the Croatian government distanced itself from the intervention. Foreign Minister Granić and the media that supported him continued to emphasize Croatia's partnership with the United States. At least he could pretend that everything was different. Granić told the media that negotiations regarding Croatia's PfP membership would start soon. He completely ignored American messages for the purposes of domestic politics.<sup>82</sup>

However, cooperation between Croatia and NATO did exist. For example, NATO used the airport in Osijek in Eastern Croatia as a logistics base.<sup>83</sup> The Croatian Military's Chief of Staff was taking part in regular meetings with NATO officials,<sup>84</sup> and Croatia was included in regular meetings of the so-called "states of the first line". Minister Granić participated in the meeting marking the 50th anniversary of NATO.<sup>85</sup> However, such cooperation was not what the Croatian government wanted. They wanted more benefits because they were cooperative, but those benefits were missing.

The Croatian economy suffered. When it became apparent that the intervention would last for some time, the Croatian tourist season was devastated.<sup>86</sup> At

<sup>78</sup> „Predsjednik Tuđman predložio rješenja za kosovsku krizu“, *Vjesnik*, 22. 5. 1999.

<sup>79</sup> M. Granić, *Vanjski poslovi*, 181–182.

<sup>80</sup> „Intervju Mate Granić“, *Globus*, 28. 5. 1999.

<sup>81</sup> „Montgomery bez komentara“, *Novi list*, 22. 5. 1999.

<sup>82</sup> „Za tjedan dana razgovori o Partnerstvu za mir“, *Vjesnik*, 14. 4. 1999.

<sup>83</sup> „NATO unajmljuje Klisu“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 7. 4. 1999.

<sup>84</sup> „Miljavac s Albright i Gelbardom“, *Vjesnik*, 14. 5. 1999.

<sup>85</sup> „Granić na večeri ministara vanjskih poslova susjeda SRJ“, *Vjesnik*, 24. 4. 1999.

<sup>86</sup> Marina Kokanović, “NATO intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its effects on tourism in Croatia”, *Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 2, 2, (1999), 21–28.

the end of April, Croatia started a media campaign claiming that the country was safe for tourists and far away from the conflict,<sup>87</sup> but it brought limited success. The damage to industry, shipyards, traffic, trade, and lower profits in all those sectors caused budgetary problems. The state needed new loans and help from the World Bank and IMF.<sup>88</sup>

The previous chapter portrayed how the public opinion's verve regarding the NATO intervention narrowed the window of opportunity for the Croatian government. Because of that, in April, the pro-regime media wanted to decrease its support for the attacks. Except for economic damage, they pointed out different incidents, such as the unexploded NATO bombs in the Adriatic Sea and low flyovers above Dubrovnik and other tourist destinations.<sup>89</sup> After significant damage had been done to two out of three bridges on the Danube on the border between Yugoslavia and Croatia, the question was, "why were the bridges destroyed"? Croatia co-owned those bridges, and no one could understand why they were bombed. Yugoslavia did not receive any supplies through that route, and even if it did, there was a border crossing without a river just a few kilometers to the south.<sup>90</sup>

In April, a discussion about the land intervention was set.<sup>91</sup> It was hard to expect that NATO would need to use Croatian territory for a land intervention (due to strategic reasons Macedonia was a better option)<sup>92</sup>, and, indeed, no such demands or requests were made by NATO.<sup>93</sup> However, the possibility of a land intervention via Croatian territory was a topic of heavy discussion in Croatia. The government and president Tuđman were against the idea.<sup>94</sup> Diplomats also emphasized that Croatia had no interest in giving its territory to NATO.<sup>95</sup>

As these discussions echoed through Croatian society the intervention continued, and the Croatian government's views on it grew pessimistic. The much-desired partnership with the United States remained limited. The government did not achieve any relevant political benefits, and it was evident that Western opinion remained the same. The elections were getting closer, and the opposition was becoming stronger.

### The opposition

The opposition in Croatia supported the intervention. During the parliamentary discussion on May 25, the Social-Democrats (SDP) prioritized peaceful settlements of disputes but applauded the attacks on Yugoslavia. The other opposi-

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<sup>87</sup> „Poziv turistima“, *Vjesnik*, 24. 4. 1999.

<sup>88</sup> „Hrvatskoj je nanescena šteta“, *Vjesnik*, 14. 5. 1999.

<sup>89</sup> „Koliko je incidenata tijekom akcije NATO imao u Hrvatskoj“, *Vjesnik*, 25. 5. 1999.

<sup>90</sup> „Hrvatskoj treba nadoknaditi štetu“, *Večernji list*, 7. 4. 1999.

<sup>91</sup> „Clark u Albaniji i Makedoniji priprema kopnenu intervenciju“, *Vjesnik*, 18. 4. 1999.

<sup>92</sup> G. Partos, "Perceptions in former Yugoslav republics", 47.

<sup>93</sup> „Hrvatska nije primila zahtjev za smještaj kopnenih snaga NATO-a“, *Večernji list*, 22. 4. 1999.

<sup>94</sup> „Hrvatska odluka...“, *Globus*, 23. 4. 1999.

<sup>95</sup> „NATO nas treba i bez partnerstva“, *Večernji list*, 21. 4. 1999.

tion parties mentioned issues that were not welcomed by the HDZ majority. Vlado Gotovac, a Croatian liberal, welcomed the attacks as they would “destroy the source of instability in the region” at the same time asked “what are our obligations”? To put it differently, the opposition wanted to assess what would happen with HDZ after the defeat of Milošević? Radimir Čačić from HNS (Hrvatska narodna stranka) proposed that Croatia should finally lower its military spending now that Milošević was no longer a threat. This notion was not welcomed by the large group of army generals who were hard-line nationalists and HDZ members. Lastly, Ivan Jakovčić from regional IDS (Istarski demokratski sabor) reminded HDZ of their reaction a few weeks earlier when they saw the US State Department’s report about human rights practices in Croatia and emphasized that celebrating the NATO intervention after vilifying the United States was hypocritical.<sup>96</sup>

Non-parliamentary extreme parties reacted loudly. Extreme right parties in Croatia supported the NATO intervention and proposed that Croatia should break all relations with FR Yugoslavia. Dobroslav Paraga even proposed that Croatian forces should join NATO forces in the attack.<sup>97</sup> On the opposite side of the spectrum, the extreme left political party led by former conservative communist Stipe Šušvar used Cold War language denouncing NATO for its imperialism and hegemony, and condemning the intervention.<sup>98</sup>

Political parties that had a chance of rising to power not only supported the intervention but were very careful not to say anything against it. They did not want to irritate public opinion, and they wanted to be recognized by Western powers as desirable candidates to take over power from HDZ. They feared that the United States would recognize the strategic importance of Croatia and discontinue distancing themselves from HDZ. Their worries were soon put to rest. In mid-April, the Special Envoy of President Clinton for the Dayton Agreement Robert Gelbard visited Zagreb and met with the opposition leaders before meeting with the government’s officials. He also reiterated that the conditions for PpP and American expectations for Croatia remained the same and criticized HDZ.<sup>99</sup> In their desire to appear constructive the main opposition parties underlined their readiness to give permission for the use of Croatian territory in the intervention, and to take part in the final clash with Milošević.<sup>100</sup>

The second reason for caution among the opposition towards the intervention came from fear that the NATO intervention would be used as an excuse for economic disaster in Croatia and thus help HDZ impose a state of emergency and win elections.<sup>101</sup> The opposition in Croatia did not support the thesis that the ICTY should prosecute Tuđman,<sup>102</sup> but it had hoped that Tuđman’s regime would

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<sup>96</sup> „Sabor jednoglasno podupro akciju NATO-a“, *Vjesnik*, 26. 3. 1999.

<sup>97</sup> „Paraga: izgnati Kneževića iz Hrvatske“, *Novi list*, 1. 4. 1999.

<sup>98</sup> „Leskovac zabrinut akcijom NATO, Šušvar protiv“, *Vjesnik*, 27. 3. 1999.

<sup>99</sup> „Kriteriji za Partnerstvo za mir ostaju isti“, *Vjesnik*, 20. 4. 1999; „Gelbard šestorku pretpostavio Tuđmanu“, *Novi list*, 20. 4. 1999.

<sup>100</sup> „Oporba različito oko moguće invazije NATO-a iz Hrvatske“, *Vjesnik*, 19. 4. 1999.

<sup>101</sup> „HDZ protiv NATO“, *Globus*, 14. 5. 1999.

<sup>102</sup> „Oporba oštro protiv“, *Vjesnik*, 2. 6. 1999.

lose power in the next election. Liberal leader Vlado Gotovac said that Milošević was an inspiration for nationalist parties in Croatia.<sup>103</sup> He stressed that there was a contradiction in Croatian politics regarding the intervention. Officially, Croatia supported the intervention, but Tuđman and Milošević needed each other to survive.<sup>104</sup> The opposition media in Croatia reported extensively on the cooperation and mutual understanding between the two nationalist dictators.<sup>105</sup>

Croatian opposition heavily criticized Tuđman's peace plan, labeling it a disaster.<sup>106</sup> It was described as frivolous because it accepted the results of ethnic cleansing, promoted dictators, and created unwanted precedent.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, Tuđman did not advocate removing Milošević from power. Because of this, his plan was interpreted as actually helping Milošević as an attempt to preserve Tuđman's nationalism-inspired conception of Croatian sovereignty.<sup>108</sup> They concluded that Tuđman's anti-Western orientation was one of the main problems with his rhetoric.<sup>109</sup>

## Ethnic minorities

### *Serbs in Croatia*

The position of Serbs in Croatia was dictated by the overall social and political environment of the concluded war and the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia and Baranja, which was completed on January 15, 1998. The number of Serbs in Croatia decreased significantly. From the pre-war 580,000, the estimated number in 1998 had decreased to 200,000 (201,000 according to the 2001 census).<sup>110</sup> Most of the Serb population was concentrated in Eastern Slavonia near the border with FR Yugoslavia. The relation between Serbs and the Croatian authorities was problematic. The biggest concern among Serbs was that Croatia would use the NATO intervention as an opportunity to question the terms of the Erdut Agreement (which arranged the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia under Croatian authority and guaranteed the status of Serbs in the region) and take more power.<sup>111</sup>

When the intervention started, Serbs in Croatia were disturbed and deeply worried.<sup>112</sup> Most of them believed that that "the entire world joined in a conspiracy against an honest and free Serbian nation" - a notion shared with Serbs from Serbia. Serb politicians in Croatia compared the fate of Albanians in Kosovo with

<sup>103</sup> „Intervju Vlado Gotovac“, *Feral Tribune*, 25. 1. 1999.

<sup>104</sup> „Kraj jednog skandala“, *Feral Tribune*, 19. 4. 1999.

<sup>105</sup> „Tuđman i dalje uz Miloševića“, *Nacional*, 28. 4. 1999.

<sup>106</sup> „Oporba oštro protiv“, *Vjesnik*, 2. 6. 1999.

<sup>107</sup> „Tuđman ponovo pomaže Miloševiću“, *Novi list*, 23. 5. 1999.

<sup>108</sup> „Tuđmanovi problematični recepti na Kosovu“, *Novi list*, 24. 4. 1999.

<sup>109</sup> „HDZ protiv NATO-a“, *Globus*, 14. 5. 1999.

<sup>110</sup> *Popis stanovništva, kućanstava i stanova 2001.* (Zagreb, 2001).

<sup>111</sup> „Plaše li se podunavski Srbi...“, *Vjesnik*, 28. 3. 1999.

<sup>112</sup> „Osnovna škola mržnje“, *Feral Tribune*, 5. 4. 1999.

Serbs in Croatia stressing one significant difference - that in 1995 nobody reacted.<sup>113</sup> They criticized the euphoria in Croatia and refused to take part in it.<sup>114</sup>

The reaction to the NATO attacks on Yugoslavia was critical among the majority of Serb politicians in Croatia. However, its nature depended largely on their relations with Milošević and his politics. Pro-Croat and anti-Milošević Serb politicians in Croatia warned of casualties but criticized Milošević and his politics as the cause of the attacks.<sup>115</sup> Members of the other group of Serb politicians in Croatia were terrified of the attacks. According to them, Yugoslavia was a sovereign state that invested much effort in finding a peaceful solution, and they warned that the intervention was without UN approval. They said that NATO acted against peace in the region and that innocent people were losing their lives. "The Serb national minority in Croatia stands with their nation", they concluded.<sup>116</sup>

The Serbian Orthodox Church (*Srpska pravoslavna crkva* – SPC) in Croatia emphasized "sadness, pain, and indignation", and underlined that NATO was on the side of "Albanian separatists and terrorists". The Orthodox Archbishop of Zagreb (Metropolitan) Jovan said that the attacks were a demonstration of force by world powers over a tiny, innocent, and freedom-loving nation.<sup>117</sup> During the Serbian Orthodox Easter liturgy in Zagreb the Church organized a reading of Patriarch Pavle's (head of the SPC) letter, in which he emphasized that Kosovo was an ancient part of Serbia and would remain so forever.<sup>118</sup>

It was evident that the Yugoslav Embassy in Zagreb and its Consulate in Vukovar were trying to organize anti-intervention protests in Vukovar and other cities with a significant Serb population. Ambassador Knežević officially denied such rumors, but the attempts at protests were confirmed by Serb politicians in Eastern Slavonia.<sup>119</sup> However, they rejected the idea because they believed that protests would provoke Croatian nationalists and provide an excuse for extreme measures.<sup>120</sup> Also, Serb politicians in Croatia needed good relations with Western powers in order to guarantee their minority status in Croatia.

Serb politicians in Croatia criticized Croatian authorities for their support of NATO. They reminded the public of the fact that NATO bombs were killing Yugoslav citizens indiscriminately (Croats in Serbia included), and regardless of their ethnicity.<sup>121</sup> They complained about the reporting provided by the Croatian media, which was marked as unprofessional and pro-Albanian. The leader of the Serb National Council in Croatia Milorad Pupovac reminded the public that 350,000 Serbs escaped from Croatia and stated that supporting the Albanians was

<sup>113</sup> „Intervju Milorad Pupovac“, *Globus*, 30. 4. 1999; „Srpski prvaci u Hrvatskoj navijaju za Beograd“, *Vjesnik*, 25. 4. 1999.

<sup>114</sup> „Porast govora mržnje“, *Novi list*, 2. 4. 1999.

<sup>115</sup> „Leskovac zabrinut akcijom NATO, Šuvar protiv“, *Vjesnik*, 27. 3. 1999.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> „Apel Mitropolije SPC-a u Zagrebu“, *Vjesnik*, 30. 3. 1999.

<sup>118</sup> „Pravoslavni vjernici proslavili Uskrs“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 13. 4. 1999.

<sup>119</sup> „Hrvatski Srbi o bombardiranju Jugoslavije“, *Nacional*, 14. 4. 1999.

<sup>120</sup> „Podunavski Srbi spremaju prosvjede zbog akcije NATO-a“, *Vjesnik*, 2. 4. 1999.

<sup>121</sup> „Sigurnosno stanje u Podunavlju – stabilno“, *Vjesnik*, 1. 4. 1999.

hypocritical. He distanced himself from Milošević but was against the attacks on Serbia as a state.<sup>122</sup> The Serb National Council led by Pupovac, made an official plea to the United States to end the attacks on April 20th.<sup>123</sup>

Such attitudes by Serb politicians in Croatia created an additional gap between the Serbs and the Croatian public, which expected the Serb minority to distance itself from Milošević. This also caused numerous negative comments about Serbs in Croatia.<sup>124</sup> The most common one was that Serbs held the Western powers, the EU and NATO, in high regard only when they needed to complain about the Croatian administration, but were now against their humanitarian NATO intervention.<sup>125</sup> The other side replied in the exact same way – with accusations of hypocrisy. Clearly, the NATO intervention did not improve the position of Serbs in Croatia.

### *Albanian issue*

Albanians in Croatia, numbering about 17,000, were mainly pleased with the intervention, although they were deeply worried about their relatives in Kosovo. When the attacks started, the Albanian community pointed to atrocities committed against Albanians, asked for help, and proposed a land intervention.<sup>126</sup> The Union of Albanians in Croatia said that NATO stood in defense of the law, humanitarian principles, and civilization.<sup>127</sup> They expressed satisfaction with the attitude of the Croatian government, especially with ordinary citizens in Croatia.<sup>128</sup>

Solidarity with Albanians, indeed, existed in Croatia. Humanitarian aid was organized, primarily through the Catholic Church.<sup>129</sup> It was publicly known that many Albanians who served in the Croatian army left for Kosovo to serve as members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Oslobodilačka vojska Kosova* – OVK), most notably Agim Çeku, future prime-minister of Kosovo. The Croatian public welcomed that.<sup>130</sup> However, solidarity was not without its limits. Public opinion, especially in Dalmatia, expressed worries concerning the possible influx of Albanian refugees. In mid-April, there were some 5,000 refugees from Kosovo in Croatia, but they were mostly housed with their relatives already living in Croatia.<sup>131</sup> Rumors that many more refugees would come and that a refugee camp would be opened near Dubrovnik caused dissatisfaction and many protests from hotel owners.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> „Intervju Milorad Pupovac“, *Globus*, 30. 4. 1999.

<sup>123</sup> „Pupovac traži od Amerike prekid NATO napada“, *Vjesnik*, 21. 4. 1999.

<sup>124</sup> „Pisma čitatelja“, *Vjesnik*, 3. 3. 1999 – 21. 4. 1999.

<sup>125</sup> „Srpski prvaci u Hrvatskoj navijaju za Beograd“, *Vjesnik*, 25. 4. 1999.

<sup>126</sup> „Nema kraja genocidu bez kopnenih snaga NATO-a“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 31. 3. 1999.

<sup>127</sup> „Leskovac zabrinut akcijom NATO, Šuvar protiv“, *Vjesnik*, 27. 3. 1999.

<sup>128</sup> „Nema kraja genocidu bez kopnenih snaga NATO-a“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 31. 3. 1999.

<sup>129</sup> „Pomoć za Tiranu“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 10. 4. 1999.

<sup>130</sup> „HV nije posebno podigao borbenu spremnost“, *Vjesnik*, 8. 4. 1999.

<sup>131</sup> „Hrvatska primila 5000, a Slovenija 2500 kosovskih izbjeglica“, *Vjesnik*, 17. 4. 1999.

<sup>132</sup> „Prihvat izbjeglih nije predviđen“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 10. 4. 1999.

Out of all the Croatian politicians, opposition politician Stipe Mesić (last president of Yugoslavia in 1991 and future president of Croatia) had the best relationship with the Albanians. He traveled to Macedonia and Kosovo at the beginning of April and openly supported Albanians and the NATO intervention. He gave his war uniform from the Croatian war for independence (1991–1995) to a commander in the OVK and called the OVK “brave and honest fighters”.<sup>133</sup> Mesić criticized Croatian authorities for being passive and urged for more help to Albanians.<sup>134</sup> Although Mesić’s support to Albanians was genuine, his criticism of President Tuđman can be construed as having had an obvious political angle, since Mesić was the victorious presidential candidate the following year. He said that Croatian passivity was a consequence of Tuđman’s calculations with Milošević and their secret negotiations policy since 1991.<sup>135</sup> He wanted to discredit Tuđman, which had significant political gains for him, which is a good example of how the intervention was used for political purposes in the Croatian domestic political arena.

### Conclusion

In the first phase, the Croatian government wanted to use the intervention to gain foreign policy benefits. It quickly became apparent that such goals were not going to be obtained. The principles that Western politicians emphasized were usually only partially understood and often only partly accepted in Croatia. To a certain extent that was due to HDZ’s nationalism and political culture, but also to the lack of credibility of Western actors as unsuccessful mediators in 1991, when they failed to stop the war in Croatia.<sup>136</sup> Due to these factors, Croatian politicians welcomed Western condemnations of Milošević, but were against applying some of the principles espoused in those condemnations in the case of Croatia. The HDZ government, inspired by nationalism, insisted that Croatian sovereignty be respected by all actors.

In the second phase, the Croatian government believed that the NATO intervention and Milošević’s possible resignation could seriously change the balance of power in the region of the former Yugoslavia, which would open possibilities for a new distribution of power. Under president Tuđman, Croatia existed in a state of moderate international isolation, but had a far better international reputation than FR Yugoslavia. The overthrow of Milošević’s regime had the potential to change that. It can be concluded that the Croatian government, which did have some authoritarian tendencies, was worried that the possible fall of Milošević would give more power to the opposition in Croatia. At the same time, the left and liberal opposition players openly supported the intervention.

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<sup>133</sup> „Milošević je podcijenio NATO“, *Novi list*, 19. 4. 1999.

<sup>134</sup> „Tuđmanov režim protiv Albanaca“, *Nacional*, 7. 4. 1999.

<sup>135</sup> „Pomognimo Albancima“, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 1. 4. 1999.

<sup>136</sup> Saadia Touval, *Mediation in Yugoslav wars: the critical years 1990–1995* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); James Gow, *Triumph of the lack of will* (London: Hurst, 1997).

They believed it to be a good measure against Milošević and also wanted Croatia to be recognized by Western powers as a force ready for cooperation.

President Tuđman won the elections in 1990, 1992, and 1997 largely because he and his party were perceived as a force ready to resist Milošević.<sup>137</sup> With the intervention against Milošević, the nationalist force's position of power in Croatia could be threatened. Because of that, the intervention against Milošević could have been perceived as a serious struggle against nationalism in the region, as Madalaine Albright mentioned. In accordance with that, the intervention could be a tool for the change of regime not only in FR Yugoslavia but also in Croatia. Because of that, Tuđman was more than reserved to intervention.

Finally, Croatian foreign policy in 1999 and the unsuccessful Croatian demands during the intervention showed that strategic importance was less valuable than liberal principles, which Western powers emphasized. In the case of Croatia, Western powers insisted on those liberal principles, which created more credibility for Western powers in Croatia and empowered liberal opposition against HDZ rule.

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VLADIMIR FILIPOVIĆ, PhD, Associate Professor  
Libertas International University  
Zagreb, Republic of Croatia  
vfilipovic@libertas.hr

“THEY FINALLY REALIZED WHO MILOŠEVIĆ IS”:  
CROATIA AND THE NATO INTERVENTION IN FR YUGOSLAVIA 1999

*Summary*

Original enthusiasm of Croatian government regarding the NATO intervention in FR Yugoslavia slowly transformed to a more nuanced and distanced position with serious reservations. However, public opinion in Croatia was more than delighted with the intervention and believed that “the Western powers finally realized who was guilty for all the evils in the Balkans”, and in time this opinion made the government’s position difficult. The HDZ government created a nationalistic public mood, and then had to cope with its effects in the case of the 1999 intervention. President Tuđman had serious reserves towards the interventions, mostly due to his idea of sovereignty and fear that intervention can cause the change of regime, not only in Serbia but in entire region. Tuđman presented his own plan for Kosovo which was ignored. At the same time, voices with serious reservations regarding the intervention were rare, especially in the first few weeks. Those voices belonged to small anti-war groups gathered around NGO’s and those newspapers which were critical of the regime. Organized opposition supported intervention because they wanted to show to Western powers that they are cooperative and desirable candidates for power in Croatia. The Serb and Albanian ethnic groups in Croatia viewed the intervention in accordance with their broader national positions. Those views are of interest, but did not have much influence on Croatian politics.

KEYWORDS: NATO Intervention 1999, Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, Public Support