



FACES OF POPULISM

**IN CENTRAL
AND SOUTH-EASTERN
EUROPE**

**EDITED BY
HARIS DAJČ
NATASZA STYCZYŃSKA**

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Cover design
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Funded by the Horizon 2020
Framework Programme of the
European Union

The book is the result of the project of the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822682. It reflects only the authors' views and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

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First edition, Kraków 2023

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ISBN 978-83-233-5262-4 (print)

ISBN 978-83-233-7466-4 (PDF)

ISBN 978-83-233-7467-1 (mobi)

<https://doi.org/10.4467/K7466.155/22.23.17542>



JAGIELLONIAN
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Jagiellonian University Press

Editorial Offices: Michałowskiego 9/2, 31-126 Kraków

Phone: +48 12 663 23 80

Distribution: Phone: +48 12 631 01 97

Cell Phone: +48 506 006 674, e-mail: sprzedaz@wuj.pl

Bank: PEKAO SA, IBAN PL 80 1240 4722 1111 0000 4856 3325

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NATIONALISM AND POPULISM IN 21ST CENTURY CROATIA: CONSEQUENCES OF ENCOUNTER¹

ABSTRACT

This chapter is focused on the encounter of nationalism and populism or precisely right-wing populism in the political life of Croatia in the 21st century. In this analysis, we first rely on the results of our content analysis and critical discourse analysis of Croatian parties'/movements' discourses from the fall of the Berlin wall to the 21st century, which we compare with the later period (2000–2020). Based on a critical assessment of neglecting right-wing populism in the recent research of Croatian social scientists who use the method of content analysis and focus only on election periods, we will re-examine and fulfil their analysis with a historical insight

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of the political narrative that deals with nationalism. In this chapter, special attention will be put on the Homeland Movement/HM (*Domovinski pokret*) and the initiative ‘On the Behalf of the Family’/OBF (*U ime obitelji*).

KEYWORDS: nationalism, populism, right-wing, nativism, Croatia, CDU, SDP, Homeland Movement, On the Behalf of the Family

INTRODUCTION

After two decades of a two-party frame ruling in Croatia, with right-wing conservatives and social democrats in power, we can't see a long-run continuity of democratic changes. Or, to be clearer, there's been a decline of consolidated democracy in Croatia since the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century or even earlier. In line with that, Croatia was categorised as a “semi-consolidated democracy” and received a Democracy Percentage of 54 out of 100 in the Nations in Transit 2022 report (Freedom House 2022: 22). We need to agree with this report according to the state of social freedom in Croatia, specifically in relation to minorities and LGBT rights, migration, health, delayed school reform and, finally, violence against pluralism or the supremacy of clericalism in Croatian social life. Furthermore, if we look at neutral international analysts' opinions, we can single out, for example, the Oxford Analytica briefing report, which, already in 2015, diagnosed the political state of Croatia with the title: “Populism will win, whoever triumphs in Croatia” (Oxford Analytica 2015). After the 2015 election, they observed that Croatia was on a journey towards Hungarian-style economic nationalism and a more sceptical approach towards the EU. In line with that, we need to search interdisciplinarily to understand the consequences and trends that took Croatia on this path of lacking democracy and the triumph of populism and nationalism in that process.

Although trends of mixing nativism with populism show continuity from the establishment of the Republic of Croatia in 1990 and its first president Franjo Tuđman, the democratic transition started after his death – or, more

precisely, in 2000 with the social democrats winning the elections. The first decade of the 21st century was pretty much coloured by dark processes of the resurrection of the issue of the Yugoslav succession wars of the 1990s, now from the perspective of the *pro et contra* extradition of war criminals to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. This process fueled a new wave of nationalism and a revival of war histories (Pavlaković 2010). From 2001, a high level of pressure in public and on the new Prime minister Iвица Račan (1944–2007) related to the case of general Ante Gotovina prompted the Croatian ‘patriotic’ fraction to call him “a traitor to the national interest” or liberals to criticise him for doing nothing to fight right extremism. His lasted a few years with Gotovina being on the run until 2005.² The shadow over the social democratic government in these years resulted in new elections which led to the new government having 13 ministers from the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ) and only one from the Democratic Front. The next ten years saw Croatia facing the process of EU accession with several nationalistic events and, after this happened, there was a further rise of nationalism under the new CDU leader Tomislav Karamarko who brought the party back to the radical right and Tuđman’s legacy from 2015. In line with that, according to state statistics,³ we notice an advanced crisis in Croatian society after the new wave of sharpening right-wing ideology in the CDU in 2015–2019. Although the economy gained priority in political discourse, politicians seemed to avoid questions of social justice, civil rights, health, etc. and all hard topics during their campaigns from 2015. An example of this is the complete avoidance of the migrant issue which was a social highlight in 2015 when up to 700,000 people crossed the territory of the former Yugoslav republics. Observes confirmed that “Croatian authorities have consistently assaulted refugees and migrants and denied them access to asylum, in contravention of European and International law” (Amnesty International 2021) as an obvious example of the influence of far-right exclusionist policy. In line with that, we focus on an analysis

² This case was followed by others, such as the protest in Split against the extradition of Mirko Norac, which ended with Carla del Ponte helping to solve the case by trial in Croatia. Račan refused the extradition of Janko Bobetko in September 2002, who died the next year. For a thorough analysis of this issue, see Pavlaković 2010.

³ Compare in general statistics and publication Croatian in numbers *Hrvatska u brojkama* 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

of nativism, authoritarianism and populism as an influence on exclusionist policy and, thus, immigration policy in Croatia too.⁴ Following Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde in this sense, it's useful to remind ourselves of his far-sighted conclusion in 2016 about relations between immigration policy and right-wing populist parties' practices: "Right-wing populist parties should have the strongest impact on issues and values that are directly connected to their ideological core; in the case of nativism this would be immigration and European integration, for authoritarianism it would be crime, and for populism the issue of corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy/the political system." (Mudde 2016: 301).

After the migration crisis and several other economic affairs that included high-ranking officials, Croatia was also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and several earthquakes from 2020 onwards. The aforementioned political climate and social issues of the crises, together with a recent value survey that showed an increase in the popularity of authoritarianism, and populism in general among the younger population in Croatia (Derado, Dergić and Međugorac 2016; Gjaja 2018; Abramović and Paša 2021), prompted us to search for the answers on several questions. We first look to answer how nationalism coped with the crisis that started after Croatia's EU accession in 2013, taking into account that the rise of nationalism is historically connected with crises in Croatian society and is used as a weapon by politicians to unite. Second, are the changes in with nationalism connected to populism? And with it, has nationalism been an ideological supply of populism in recent years and in what movement/party? We found that populism as a "thin-centered ideology" defined by Mudde (2004; 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) was interconnected and permanent in Croatia and, in many cases, fuelled by nativism as an establishing force of independent Croatia stemming from the first CDU leader and first president, Franjo Tuđman.⁵ This trend of populism-nativism continued

⁴ Croatia is a country almost without immigrants and Croatian emigration rates increased during 2017, which is connected with high unemployment rates in 2016.

⁵ Mudde defined nativism that: "entails a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. It is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native (or 'alien') elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation state. [...] In the late 1980s nativism was primarily framed in ethno-national terms with economic concerns, but particularly since the terrorist attacks of 9/11

through the entire 21st century, from Stjepan Mesić as the first democratic leader from 2000 to 2010 with his ‘folksy’ and populist campaign and lengthy presidency, through all other examples of populist leaders, such as Milan Bandić (elected mayor of Zagreb in four elections, in office from 2005 to 2021) (see Zakošek 2010; Matić 2014a; 2014b). This circles up to the most permanent person in Croatian life for more than two decades who has changed his appearance to populism – now-president Zoran Milanović (see *N1 Croatia* 2021, and for earlier developments Duhaček 2020; Lalić 2013). Our goal is to follow the rise of right-wing populism and its trends in Croatia in respect of this continuity and political heritage.

For this chapter, we follow the interdependence of populism and nationalism in the most important cases that we found scientifically rewarding and useful for the future developments of analyses of democracy and overall social crisis in Croatia. In line with that, we consider that populism as a political strategy and ideology fuelled by nationalism/nativism and a conservative ideology in the activities of the HM and OBF initiative. As the authors of this chapter are a sociologist and historian, our main goal is to merge critical approaches to political discourses ‘of’ and ‘on’ nationalism and populism in 21st century Croatia. Finally, our main goal is to leave behind a narrow approach to nationalism and populism only through election circles and parliamentary practices and to try to follow their ramifications and final influence on the value orientations of Croatian citizens. Therefore, we will first review the state of play in this field and then proceed to a critical analysis of political discourse of the political representatives and chosen case studies as examples of encounters of populism and nationalism in Croatia.

STATE-OF-THE-ART: A NATIONALIST AND POPULIST ENCOUNTER?

When we approach studies of Croatian politics and society in the 21st century, we need to emphasise that recent Croatian sociologists and political theory scholars have significantly focused their analysis on populism,⁶ and left the issue of nationalism and ideology to historians and political scientists. Therefore, there's been no merger of these two topics, nor a possibility for an easy comparison of the results. That's our goal in this chapter.

In the studies of populism and nationalism in Croatia, we found four types of research results useful for our analysis – two as supply – and two as the demand side of the topic. Supply of political messages and their influence is represented with qualitative research results: (1) a content analysis of populist features and representatives' discourse before and after elections, (2) case studies of several politicians or parties/movements/initiatives. The demand side was made available only through: (1) large-scale research of 'nationalism' measurements in the European Value Survey across three periods (1999/2008/2017) (Baloban, Črpić and Ježovita 2019), and (2) several small-scale research about values regarding youth (Derađo, Dergić and Međugorac 2016; Altaras Penda and Zekaj 2019; Abramović and Paša 2021).

Pioneers – or, to be precise, the most influential researchers of populism in Croatia – include sociologists Marijana Grbeša and Berto Šalaj with their book *Good, Bad or Evil? Populism in Croatia (Dobar, loš i zao? Populizam u Hrvatskoj)* (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018). They approached populism in Croatia from 2009 to 2015 with a qualitative methodology of content analysis of political messages of politicians in the media assessing three factors: mentioning “the people,” empty signifiers, and “dangerous Others.” Their results are

⁶ Croatian sociologists and political scientists spent huge research efforts in analyse of politics and especially party politics and populism in 21st century Croatia, with several PhD and MA theses too (Čačija 2016; Gjaja 2018; Knežević 2018; Matić 2014a), and scientific papers devoted to recent populist upheaval (Altaras Penda and Zekaj 2019; Grbeša and Šalaj 2017; Matić 2014b; Mustapić and Hrستیć 2016; Mustapić, Balabanić and Plenković 2019; Rogulj and Kišiček 2018).

focused on the measurement of the quantity of populism in Croatia, identifying populists, then dividing populists into “strong” and “weak” categories, and the confirming existence of “true” populism in Croatia in contrast to populism as a political style (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 227–231). Besides this, these authors divided populists into four categories: moralist, nationalist, leftist and centrist populism, and confirmed that there is no right-wing populism in Croatia (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 233), at least according to their analysis until 2015.⁷ With respect to their role as pioneers, these authors analysed only a small group of politicians and their behaviour between 2009 and 2013, and then the performance in the media of populist features before and after the electoral processes in 2014 and 2015. Stuck in the chosen tri-partite methodology, on the one hand, they never mention or relate identified populists with their party membership during whole study – and most of them were from the biggest Croatian party CDU, then the Social democratic party (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*, SDP) and others who were connected to them during their political career. On the other hand, they influenced populism studies in Croatia to be election-focused, neglecting other values that populism presented, and their activities beyond the transparent race for votes.⁸

After studies of populism were launched with a methodology completely neglecting analyses of ideology that fuelled or surrounded populists’ political performance or institutions and topics they promote and any wider context that surrounded political discourses of politicians, any further development of political analysis in Croatia faced huge ramifications of populism in the media, or precisely the popularity of populism as a topic in the media,

⁷ They just cautiously consider as a comment of their analysis that “eventually, right-wing populism could be detected in the case of the initiative of OBF” (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 235).

⁸ For example, a representative of “nationalist populism” in their typology is physician Milan Kujundžić for “strongly using signifying of the Croatian people, but without mentioning dangerous others” (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 230), which we found as a shaky reason to pronounce somebody as a nationalist populist. The scholars Altaras Penda and Zekaj in their study about populism in the 2016 elections, analysed 70 newspaper articles of the most read daily newspapers. The authors concluded that the data acquired seem to suggest that there is a left-oriented and centralist populism in the Republic of Croatia with all three populist references: reference to “the people,” “anti-elitism,” and “dangerous others.” Right-oriented populism was not found by their research. Regarding the reference to “dangerous others” was only once registered in the biggest opposing party, the SDP’s media statement (Altaras Penda and Zekaj, 2019: 48, 56–57).

on TV, internet portals, and newspapers such as *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list*, *Index.hr*. Therefore, citizens became familiar with the topic, often without a definition of populism, becoming daily acquainted with populism through a political analysis of electoral processes from that view – populist elements in campaigns or party/movement/organisation programmes or style of communication of certain politicians, etc. Main reason for that is trend that populism started being widely used as political style of communication and become main weapon in their mutual classification and conflict between the main officials as *pro et contra* populism with one-sided negative view of populism or just as “empty signifier.”

We finally consider that a measurement of few politicians’ appearances in the media before and after elections oversimplified what is a complex process of the circulation of nativistic/populistic/nationalistic values in Croatia. A good example is Croatian President Zoran Milanović who, from 2020, made a significant shift not only from the use of populism as a political style of communication directed against journalists and other representatives of the coalition government, but also by representing – certain populist values and strategies, which sociologist Marijana Grbeša called “furious populism” (*N1 Croatia* 2021). To be more precise, he became opposed to COVID-19, the EU, and was even sceptical of NATO. By doing so, he deviated significantly from the overall frame of the SDP. His discourse dispersed long after the elections and transgressed the values and topics he promoted in his campaigns.

With the qualitative research results, it becomes obvious how content analysis is insufficient in the case of the intersection of populism and nationalism if it is not merged with other methods or by using sources other than media discourse. In line with that, a critical analysis of discourse by certain politicians (statutes, programmes, slogans, books, articles, etc.), and also a wider context of politicians’ performance: history of engagement in politics, social activities, status, membership in party(ies), funding, etc. have also been considered in this analysis. Also, in their approach, only Grbeša and Lalić contextualise their research with a review of economic and other social issues in Croatia around elections (Lalić and Grbeša 2015). Further, a critical analysis of Croatian media that, without evaluation, gave access even to hate speech and several non-democratic features, still didn’t catch the attention of scholars.

Therefore, for researchers interested in the rise and development of populist (radical) right-wing ideology in Croatia, on the one hand, and the conservative re-traditionalisation of society on the other, the corpus of analysis by social and political scientists focused on the most popular topic according to them – populism – and left several neglected questions, starting with reasons why they exclude even mentioning right-wing populism or nationalism as fuel for the widely accepted understanding of populism as a “thin-centered ideology” (Mudde 2004; 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). Also, as we know that ideologically – empty political strategies such as populism are expected to a higher degree during election periods, why do social scientists neglect other spaces and places for the performance of their political values and strategy? So, the exact use of nationalism as a topic in campaigns was rarely approached in recent studies and, as an exception, there are few sociologists who have conducted an in-depth analysis of certain political events and phenomena concerned with nationalism and populism in search for a more thorough interpretation (Mustapić and Balabanić 2018).

In general, until now, we found only few studies and scholars interested in nationalist performance practices that step out beyond electoral processes and their success in them. In that regard, we found precious studies on the Second World War and the War of the 1990s from memorial sites which launched and fueled nationalism. These included remembrance events for Ustasha victims at Bleiburg field in Austria, the Fall of Vukovar, celebrations of Operation ‘Storm’ (*Oluja*), the erection of certain monuments of anti-fascism or Franjo Tuđman, Jasenovac concentration camp memorial, etc. (Pavlaković, Pauković and Židek 2022), which all fuel the Croatian public and become a field of political battles and representations of the values they propagate. To add to that, sport manifestations such as football matches were also neglected as sites for nationalistic/nativistic and populist propaganda in Croatia, along with several regional national manifestations such as the Knight’s tournament in Sinj (*Sinjska alka*) with traditional political conflicts and issues aroused.

For this chapter, we focus on right-wing populism in Croatian political life in the 21st century without neglecting the wider picture of its manifestations. Before we approach the state of democracy in the context of the encounter of nationalism and populism, we need to make some introductory notes about important features in Croatian political life and then introduce

readers to focal trends in Croatian politics in the 21st century, resulted after several episodes of changes from conservative to social democratic governments. Then, we will focus on the exact encounter of nationalism and populism in discourses and practices of the HM and OBF – or, to be precise, their leaders Miroslav Škoro and Željka Markić. We will analyse how these two entities were direct products of the deficiencies of the two-party Croatian parliamentary frame that plays its role for the international and local public, while the real encounter of nationalism and populism takes place beyond electoral and parliamentary systems. With this chapter, we will assume that scientific conclusions in this topic need an interdisciplinary approach, specifically between history and sociology.

ANALYSES: NATIONALISM AND POPULISM'S INTERSECTION

Our research focus is the encounter of nationalism and populism in political life of Croatia in the 21st century with seven parliamentary election circles (2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2020) and five presidential election circles (2000, 2005, 2009/10, 2014/15 and 2019/20). Having in mind the negative consequences of the radical right-wing populist trend, we first analyse the more general rise of right-wing populist ideology promoted by certain representatives, and then focus on the specific cases of right-wing populism in Croatia – HM and OBF.

In this analysis, we first rely on the results of our content analysis and critical discourse analysis of Croatian parties'/movements' discourses (programmes, statutes, bulletins, statements of representatives in official events, election slogans, biographies of members, etc.) from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the 21st century, which we compared with the later period (2000–2020) (Dajč et al. 2022). Accordingly, our analysis pays attention to the supply and demand side of the populist narrative, i.e., value existence/construction. In line with that, the corpus of results of discursive and content analyses of political narratives, and an analysis of value orientations through European Value Survey (Baloban, Črpić and Ježovita 2019) were conducted, and,

in the case of existing analyses, critically assessed. Our first important theoretical assumption is that we understand populism as “thin-centered” ideology which is fuelled in the case of Croatia with nationalism. Secondly, we follow American-German political scholar Jan-Werner Müller in understanding that every real populist with an insistence on being the only representative of the ‘will of the people’ is anti-pluralistic and with it authoritarian (Müller 2016). To be more precise, we will be following on from his opinion that populism is a threat to contemporary liberal democracy by this general anti-pluralistic standpoint. In line with that, we first found out that pluralism could not be found in the Croatian parliament. Since 2000, the Croatian parliament (*Sabor*) has been composed by a two-party ruling frame which is consisted of the two largest and oldest parties in Independent Croatia – CDU and SDP (Table 1). Besides a long tradition of an interchangeable dynamic between these two parties – dividing the roles of Presidents and PM (see Table 1 and 2) and dividing parliament between the (sober) left and right in general for the majority of the 21st century – their conflicts/discussions/competitiveness have shaped modern Croatia both in the parliamentary and in the media space.

In the second decade of the 21st century, or more precisely after Croatia became member of the EU and, therefore, the EU parliament too in 2013, the country was faced with new impulses and challenges from populist and left-wing parties during the election circles between 2014–2020. During this period, on the one hand, we witnessed surprisingly strong results for several political actors that planned ‘reform from inside’ and who were ‘not interested to cooperate with the two biggest parties’ (instead, standing for the *Bridge*); or they were campaigning to correct the undemocratic circumstances that contributed to the financial suffering of the Croatian people facing debts in Swiss francs (a policy of the Human Shield; see Table 3, but also 1 and 2). And finally, in 2020 the third-ranked presidential candidate, Miroslav Škoro, a folk singer and activist from the far right of the spectrum, was the president of the HM, widely-known for his hatred of Serbs, his strong nativist position and sharp exclusionary nationalistic attitudes and campaigns (we can compare the close results from the presidential elections in 2019/2020 in Table 2). On the other hand, during this period, certain left-wing participants finally received a voice in the Croatian parliament, such as the Green-left Coalition with three left-wing parties: Workers’ Front (*Radnička fronta*, RF), the New Left (*Nova ljevica*, NL) and We Can (*Možemo*) (Table 1 and 3).

TABLE 1. Parliamentary elections in Croatia 2000–2020: winners and other coalition/parties results⁹

Year of election circle	Winning party/coalition, with number of seats	2nd place party/coalition	3rd–4th place parties/coalition
2000	SDP led coalition with HSL (Croatian Social Liberal Party), PGS (Alliance of Primorje Gorski Kotar), and SBHS (Slavonia-Baranja Croatian Party) ¹⁰ Leaders Ivica Račan and Dražen Budiša – 71 seats	CDU led by Zlatko Mateša – 46 seats	<p> CPP–IDA–CPP/HNS–LP–SDAC (Croatian Peasant Party–Istrian Democratic Assembly – Croatian People’s Party/Liberal Democrats – Liberal Party – Social Democratic Action for Croatia)¹¹ led by Zlatko Tomčić – 24 seats; HSU (Croatian Party of Pensioners) led by Anto Dapčić – 5 seats </p> <p> HNS–PGS–SBHS Croatian Peasant Party (HPSS) – 11 seats; HSS (Croatian Peasant Party) – 9 seats </p>
2003	CDU led by Ivo Sanader – 66 seats	SDP led by Ivica Račan with Istrian Democratic Assembly (<i>Istarski demokratski sabor</i> – IDS), Party of Liberal Democrats (Libra) (in Croatian: <i>LIBRA</i> – <i>Stranka liberalnih demokrata</i>) and the Liberal Party (LS) – 43 seats	<p> CPP–CSLP coalition – 8 seats; CPP/HNS–LD (Liberal Democrats) (in Croatian: Liberalni demokrtati) – 7 seats </p>
2007	CDU led by Ivo Sanader – 66 seats	SDP led by Zoran Milanović – 56 seats	

⁹ Table made according to data on the Croatian national election platform: Državno izborno povjerenstvo Republike Hrvatske, <https://www.izbori.hr/site/> [accessed: May 2, 2022].

¹⁰ Original names of parties that were in coalition with SDP: *Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka* – HSL, *Primorsko goranski savez* – PGS, and *Slavonsko-baranjska hrvatska stranka* – SBHS.

¹¹ Original Croatian names: *Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, *Hrvatska narodna stranka*, *Liberalna stranka*, and *Akcija socijaldemokrata Hrvatske*. To avoid confusion, and to make a difference between the Croatian People’s Party and Croatia Peasant Party, we will use both languages in abbreviation – CPP/HNS.

Year of election circle	Winning party/coalition, with number of seats	2nd place party/coalition	3rd–4th place parties/coalition
2011	SDP led “Kukuriku coalition” ¹² led by Zoran Milanović – 80 seats	CDU coalition led by Jadranka Kosor – 47 seats	Labour led by Dragutin Lesar – 6 seats; HDSSB Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja – 6 seats
2015	CDU “Patriotic coalition” led by Tomislav Karamarko – 59 seats	SDP “Croatia is Growing” led by Zoran Milanović – 56 seats	Bridge of Independent Lists led by Božo Petrov – 19 seats
2016	CDU “Patriotic coalition” led by Andrej Plenković ¹³ – 61 seats	SDP “People’s coalition” led by Zoran Milanović – 54 seats	Bridge of Independent Lists led by Božo Petrov – 13 seats
2020	CDU-led coalition; Centre-right – 66 seats	SDP “Restart coalition” led by Zoran Milanović; Centre-left ¹⁴ – 41 seats	HM by Miroslav Škoro – 16 seats; Most Božo Petrov – 8 seats; Green-left Coalition – 7 seats

Source: own elaboration.

¹² The coalition was consisted of: SDP (66), CPP/HNS-LD (13), IDS (3), CPP/HSU (Croatian Party of Pensioners/Hrvatska stranka umirovjenika) (2), Vladimir Bilek (Czech and Slovak minority; CPP/HNS-LD). SDP-led coalition changed their name to “Croatia is Growing” for the 2015 election: SDP (42), CPP/HNS-LD (9), HL-SR (3), CPP/HSU (2), Sándor Juhász (Hungarian minority; SDP), Ermina Lekaj Prljaskaj (Albanian, Bosniak, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Slovene minority; HNS-LD), Veljko Kajtazi (Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Jewish, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Russian, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vlach minority; HNS-LD). Furthermore, they become the “People’s Coalition” (*Narodna koalicija*) (SDP, CPP/HNS-LD and CPP/HSU) in 2016, and “Restart coalition” for 2020 (SDP, CPP, CPP/HSU, Civic-Liberal Alliance (*Građansko-liberalni savez*, abbr. GLAS) and Power – Party of People’s and Civic Engagement (SNAGA – Stranka narodnog i građanskog aktivizma), and, finally for the 2020 circle of parliamentary elections the “Restart coalition” gathered SDP (33), IDS (3), CPP (2), CPP/HSU (1), Glas (1) and DBIL (Damir Bajsi Independent List) (1).

¹³ Besides the CDU led by Andrej Plenković, the coalition consisted of: Croatian Party of Rights dr Ante Starčević, CPP, CSLP, Croatian Growth (*Hrvatski rast*), Bloc Pensioners Together, Croatian Demochristian Party (*Hrvatska demokrićanska stranka*), and Democratic Party by Zagorje (*Zagorska demokratska stranka-ZDS*).

¹⁴ SDP was led by Zoran Milanović and, during 2020, by Davor Bernardić.

TABLE 2. Presidential elections in Croatia 2020: winners and other candidates results

Year of election	Winner	2nd place candidate	3rd–4th place candidate
2000	Stjepan Mesić ¹⁵ joint candidate of the CPP/HNS, CPP, LP and IDS. 56%	Dražen Budiša CSLP 27.8% Conservative-liberal	Mate Granić 22.6 % from CDU Centre-right
2005	Stepan Mesić a joint candidate of 8 parties 41.3%	Jadranka Kosor 20.3% from CDU Centre-right	Boris Mikšić independent candidate, businessman
2009/2010	Ivo Josipović SDP candidate 60.2%	Milan Bandić ¹⁶ 14.5% Left-centre populist expelled from SDP	Andrija Hebrang CDU 12.04% and Nadan Vidošević (independent candidate, former member of CDU) 11.33%
2014/2015	Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović from CDU 50.7%	Ivo Josipović SDP 49.26%	Ivan Vilibor Sinčić the Human Shield 16.4%
2019/2020	Zoran Milanović SDP 29.55%	Kolinda Grabar Kitarović CDU 26.55%	Miroslav Škoro HM 24.45 % Conservative-right, far-right populist

Source: own elaboration.

¹⁵ Mesić has a strong CDU-connected past. He was elected as a first president of the independent Croatia in 1990, as a Prime minister.

¹⁶ Mayor of the capital city, Zagreb from 2000 to 2017, winning six elections. See about his first mandate in Goldstein and Hutinec (2007: 316).

TABLE 3. The main Croatian political parties, movements, and civic organisations 2000–2020

Party/ movement/civic organisation	Date established and activity period	Political ideology	Political spectre
CDU	17/06/1989	Conservatism, Christian democracy, and Pro-Europeanism (2020–)	Centre-right, and far right-wing (2015–2020)
SDP	03/11/1990	Social democracy, Anti-fascism, Progressivism, Pro-Europeanism	Centre-left
The Bridge of Independent Lists	2012 active from 2020	Fiscal conservatism, Economic liberalism, Soft Euroscepticism, Green conservatism, Social conservatism, Populism	–
The Human Shield ¹⁷	2011 active from 2014	Populism, Euroscepticism, Anti-establishment, Sovereignism Protectionism	–
OBF	15/05/2013–	Conservatism, Populism, New morality, Anti-LGBT, Clerical fascism	Right-wing
HM		Nationalism, Conservatism, Populism, Soft Euroscepticism,	Right-wing
Green-left Coalition	2014 2016 2019	RF – Socialism, Anti-fascism, Anti-clericalism, Anti-militarism, Democratic Socialism, Social Progressivism, Left-wing populism NL– Democratic socialism, Social democracy, Anti-fascism, anti-clericalism, Anti- nationalism <i>Možemo</i> – Eco-socialism, Green politics, Progressivism	Left-wing

Source: own elaboration.

¹⁷ Formerly founded under name The Key of Croatia (*Ključ Hrvatske*) in 2011, but changed their name in May 21, 2022 according to event when they played human wall protesting against foreclosures.

Unfortunately, together with the impossibility of the aforementioned newcomer to preserve and institutionalise, and the minority of left-wing voices in the *Sabor*, Croatian political life changed only on the surface and stayed stuck focusing on old issues with unresolved or new crisis “fatigue” from the huge number of changes during the 1990s.¹⁸

Although scholars insist on the decline of radical right-wing ideology and the non-existence of right-wing populism, political discourses, and practices we analysed show the entrance of these features in the media sphere and mass events, and with it influence on Croatian citizens. Therefore, after election results, we follow, in the next part of the chapter, right-wing populism. We found it important because of the ramifications and possibilities which transcend the parliamentary system and have more consequences than just the populist Human Shield and the Bridge with their episodic nature and obvious impossibility to cope with the two-frame party system frame. Above all, in this respect, we agree with Cas Mudde who considered in 2016 that populist radical right-parties “are relevant political actors in about one-third of all European countries, even if many seem to be beyond their electoral peak. This notwithstanding, the populist radical right is by far the most successful new party family in postwar Europe” (Mudde 2016: 298).

Another important insight of scholars is concerned with the ‘demand’ side of populism/nationalism. Therefore, as we wait for the next value survey cycle, it is important to apprehend data from the European Values Survey that shows that has been in decline since the beginning of the 21st century (Baloban, Črpić and Ježovita 2019).¹⁹ Over 86% of respondents were proud of their country (quite proud or very proud) during Period 1, the share of people proud of their country rose to 90% in Period 2, and slightly declined (81%) during Period 3. Additionally, when comparing the 2nd and 3rd periods, it is apparent that more people were “very proud” of their nation in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century (42% compared to 38% in 3rd period), while more people were “not at all proud” at the end of the second decade

¹⁸ That process is understood through another EU Commission – sponsored project “Fatigue: Populism in Central and Eastern Europe” as “delayed transformational fatigue,” where scholars confirmed that populism gained strength after the most stressful phase of post-communist transformations was over. Compare in Fatigue 2022.

¹⁹ For further value orientations analysis with a comparison of Croatia and Serbia, see: Pešić 2017.

of the 21st century (5% compared to 1% in 3rd period). Besides this survey, value analysis concerned with the consequences of the rise of populism were conducted, and they confirmed an affirmation of authoritarianism, populism, and nationalism in younger generations of Croatian society. The research of Mustapić and Karajić, which deals with students as an elite intellectual cohort of young people, confirmed their strong distrust in parties and the connection between such attitudes and the presence of social problems in Croatia (Mustapić and Karajić 2013). Then Derado, Dergić and Međugorac indicate the obvious inclination and receptivity of young people to populism in Croatia, an almost dominance of populist sentiment among young people and distrust in existing political parties (Derado, Dergić and Međugorac 2016). What is also confirmed by several small-scale research conducted in the period after the last EVS cycle in 2018 is that populism become popular (Rogulj and Kišiček 2018) and widespread amongst younger generations (Gjaja 2018). Lately, researchers have been dealing with the reception of populism among Croatian citizens, with a small group of respondents as well as messages that certain right-wing politicians convey through the media (Abramović and Paša 2021).

NATIVISM, AUTHORITARIANISM, AND POPULISM'S LEGACY HAS PREVAILED IN CROATIA

A nationalistic and authoritarian political heritage from the past, both from WWII and the Wars of Yugoslav Succession in the 1990s were still the strongest fuel for contemporary Croatian politics.²⁰ On this occasion

²⁰ For a more general approach to Croatian politics as being stuck with old issues and how badly it dealt with its past, see Goldstein and Hutinec 2007; Markovina 2019; Goldstein 2021. In line with that, as is common for post-socialist countries, Croatia started its independent history with reformed communists in power (see further in Pešić 2017: 165). Torn with the wars of the 1990s, Croatian political elites still slowly accept the "sins from the past" such as WWII when it was a Nazi satellite state, but also resurrected even the medieval knighthood legacy of the Kingdom of Croatia. More unfortunately, Croatia's post-socialist transition period was slowed down by the Homeland

we need to remember that the primary features we identified as unifying right-wing populism in Croatia from the 1990s until third decade of the 21st century are nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, which are three main features that Mudde singled out in his analysis (Mudde 2016: 296).

A rich mix of nativism and populism, with an extremely sharp victimology narrative of the Croatian people, were transferred from the ubiquitous legacy of the former Croatian president Franjo Tuđman. The influential combination of nationalism with populism that he propagated made independent Croatia and has not been challenged by any Croatian government so far.²¹ Let us recall and compare election slogans of his party, the CDU before the first elections in Croatia in 1991 that established the independent state of Croatia when he held a speech on Grobničko polje in Istria with an appraisal of the number of people from that place who gave their life for Croatia; and the first elections after his death in 2000 with his picture on election posters with a child in his arms and the slogan: “All for Croatia, Croatia for nothing” (Markovina 2018: 158). The final stage of overemphasised victimology during Tuđman’s rule was the establishment of the Ministry of Croatian Veterans in 1997, which increased to 200 employees in 2015 – and which fought even for a law for the preservation of privileges of the children of veterans attending university.

Tuđman, a historian by profession, used the populist matrix under which the CDU was portrayed as an example of ‘true Croatian people’ in contrast to the dominant Serbian elite, which was seen as the main threat to the survival of the Croatian nation. Next to Tuđman’s nativism of winning the “hundred year dream of the Croatian people to become independent,”²² the main establishing feature in the political strategy of CDU, with obvious right-wing omens from the 1990s, was to break free from the Serbian ‘corrupted elites’ and bring back the Croatian ‘people’ to their “historical right” and

War (*Domovinski rat*) and started to accelerate only after Tuđman’s death (see further: Pešić 2017: 165–169). In that period, the country faced a new wave of political changes and was freshly fed by a new injection of nationalistic hatred against Serbs.

²¹ On the authoritarian and nationalistic rule of Franjo Tuđman see: Helmerich 2005. Also see: *Review of Croatian History*, Thematic Block: Franjo Tuđman: 20 Years Later, 2021.

²² Compare Tuđman’s speech on the first anniversary of “Storm” on August 5, 1996. https://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/Govor_Franje_Tu%C4%91mana_prigodom_prve_obljetnice_Oluje_5._kolovoja_1996 [accessed: May 2, 2022].

“historical territories.”²³ Furthermore, the CDU as Tuđman’s main legacy, and overall Croatian political life in general can be understood as periods of de-Tuđmanisation and re-Tuđmanisation.²⁴ In the further development of the cult of Tuđman and his vision of Croatia, political representatives from both right and left of the spectrum have been complicit,²⁵ such as the left-of-centre SDP, but also certain conservative and far-right parties and movements. In line with that, completely different candidates – from social democrat Zoran Milanović to far-right Tomislav Karamarko who radicalised the CDU in 2015, and Andrej Plenković who brought the CDU back to Christian democracy and a more sober right-wing position – emphasised that their path was to fulfil and maintain Tuđman’s legacy in their winning speeches after elections.²⁶ “If I had been in Tuđman’s place in 1990 and in the years immediately following, I would probably have acted like him. But if Franjo Tuđman were in my place today, he would probably act – or act – just like me,” Karamarko said in an interview after winning the parliamentary elections (Hudelist 2015). Prior to the parliamentary elections, intra-party elections were held in the CDU in March 2020 in which Plenković won. Highlights of his speech included the following key points: Tuđman, patriotism, family, and demography. With the original slogan “Brave for Croatia!,” again in his winning speech, Plenković emphasised that Croatia needed a government that would pursue a policy of Croatian sovereignty that inherits the policy of Tuđman (Lechpammer 2020).

The achievement of those ramifications of Tuđman’s legacy resulted in losing a proper understanding of Tuđman and his role in the Yugoslav antifascist legacy through the political discourse of Milanović who, in the role of president, at the same time refused to visit Tuđman’s grave but claimed in

²³ For thorough programmes of the 34 parties for the parliamentary elections in 1990, see: Veselinović 2018.

²⁴ A further in-depth analysis of Croatian political life as de-Tuđmanisation and re-Tuđmanisation is presented in: Čulić 2014.

²⁵ On December 10, 2019, several Croatian institutions (which including historians, sociologists, political scientists, etc.) organised the round-table discussion “Franjo Tuđman: 20 Years Later.” Their presentations showed that Tuđman’s heritage still draws attention and prompts various reactions among the Croatian public, ranging from disapproval to unconditional approval. See: *Review of Croatian History* 2021. Thematic Block: Franjo Tuđman: 20 Years Later.

²⁶ Compare their similar mentioning of Tuđman in post-election speeches: Hudelist (2015); Lechpammer (2020).

numerous speeches that “Tito and Tuđman are the best things to happen in Croatian history” (*Slobodna Evropa* 2015), and has used Tuđman for empathy concerning the poor position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and acclaimed him as a role model and protector of Croatian interests: “Tuđman would be ashamed because he knew how to defend Croatian interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Beker 2022).

The phenomenon which we can call “construction/reconstruction/existence of different Tuđmans,” as a Croatian nationalist or anti-fascist, is a process of dividing between Croatian national elites and splitting the vision of Croatian identity we witnessed in every parliamentary and presidential campaign during the 21st century. Also, by using his name vaguely or not clearly mentioning the feature they compare with or appraise him, the main Croatian politicians from the second decade of 21st century – Milanović, Karamarko, and Plenković – reduced or dispersed Tuđman to an ‘empty signifier,’ which is a usual populist weapon to get voters – or ‘confirms’ their position after elections. On that issue, nationalism/nativism and populism still intertwine decades after Tuđman’s death.

Beside the CDU as a populist radical right-wing party in parliament 1990–2000 according to Mudde’s analysis (2016: 301), there was also more radical right-wing populism in 1990s through the Croatian Party of Rights (*Hrvatska stranka prava*). They won only 5 seats in parliament, but their radical approach and populist strategy caught our attention due to their continued activities. In general, the CPR acted in Croatian political life as a radical right-wing party with elements such as: (1) authoritarianism (even militant with forming a paramilitary squad who participated in war battles), (2) extremely radical nativism (with the slogan “*Hrvatska Hrvatima/Hrvatima/Croatia to the Croats*”), (3) anti-communism, (4) neo-fascism, etc.²⁷ In the context of contemporary Croatian political life, they fell from 7.1% in the 1990s war period when their radical ideology appealed to voters, to 3% in 2003 when the right-wing CDU government prevailed again. They then coalitioned with the CDU in 2016 (Table 1, footnote 11), and finally fell to 0.44% in 2020. In line with that, they merely played the role of a proxy for

²⁷ More detailed analysis about the CPR’s mix of nationalism and populism in the 1990s, can be seen in Veselinović 2018: 250–267.

the CDU and finally atomised and perished when the Plenković-led CDU didn't need any more radical voices as they changed to European sober right politics. Without exact data to confirm but with an insight into the activities of several conservative and far-right features in Croatia, Dario Čepo made a farsighted conclusion that "right populists were especially prevalent when the CDU was in opposition, and these movements then acted as de facto proxies and surrogates of the CDU" (Čepo 2017: 17).

Croatia entered the 21st century as fertile ground for the rise of new waves of nationalism(s) and the construction of 'dangerous Others' because war was no past but reality with a scattered population – expelled or emigrated – destroyed cities and villages, war veterans, and all casualties of wars that were fought on their own territory. All these facts were used by political elites because nationalism was a well-affirmed weapon in the unification of voters/citizens. Right-wing representatives in Croatian politics primarily promoted Serbs as traditional enemies or, to be precise, a fear of Serbian hegemony/aggression. This irrational hatred didn't decrease even with the small (decreased) Serbian minority in Croatia in the 21st century: only 4.36% according to the 2011 census compared to 12.2% in the pre-war census in 1990. Despite steps towards normalising relations with the Serb minority in Croatia, the CDU is still a conservative, clientelist party, prone to corruption, nepotism, nationalist speeches by some party members idealising Tuđman and does not dare to question Tuđman's legacy.²⁸

Beside such a rich burden of nationalisms and a devotion to the authoritarian legacy, one important issue challenged the rise of populism and nationalism in Croatia, and that's Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013, and with it the establishment of a local version of the importance of national pride connected with that. Speaking about national identity, even before EU accession, Croatia was established as European (*europejski*) in contrast to a Yugoslavian identity (Pešić 2017: 147), and, in line with that, the *second important "internal enemies" of the Croatian people were Yugoslavs* as ideological and the cross-cultural category of Yugonostalgia's as dangerous for the Croatian "people" (*narod*)

²⁸ The phrase "Croatian state" is an emotional trigger in the nationalist nativist discourse "sacred" or "unquestionable value." Today's followers of the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman perceive any criticism of state policy concerning nationalism as blasphemy and high treason (Goldstein 2021: 492–514, 532).

in the EU and in their existence in the international environment. With the recent entrance of Croatia to the Eurozone, Croatia was internationally widely presented and called an 'Adriatic' country as *differentia specifica* to other ex-Yugoslav 'Balkan' states, and as a part of Central and Mediterranean countries that left their regional partners in South-Eastern Europe. In line with that, Karamarko said: "Until the SDP renounces Josip Broz Tito and his crimes, there will be no true European social democracy in Croatia. And they, not only do not renounce Tito, but Milanović makes him a hero, comparing him to Tuđman. This is historical revisionism, because during his dictatorship Tito said that the Sava would flow towards Triglav rather than Croatia being independent, and Tuđman is the father of the modern Croatian state. From this attitude towards Tito, the SDP is still dominated by the Yugoslav nostalgic approach" (Hudelist 2015). Further, he declared "I would not even call it Yugoslavism, in the traditional sense of the term, but – a cynical departure from the Croatian state! [...] They simply graft European thought onto their old Bolshevism, and that is the whole 'wisdom' of their attitude and approach. They did not love Croatia then, as they do not love it now" (Hudelist 2015). To conclude, we agree with the observation of historian Dragan Markovina that "nothing captures the collective paranoia of the Croatian right in relation to Yugoslavia than the slogan on the Veterans Tent in Savska Street on the occasion of the 2014/2015 elections: 1991 against Yugoslavia, 2014 against Yugoslavia" (Markovina 2018: 173). Therefore, the final post-EU populist confrontation promoted by the biggest parties in Croatia is "European, modern, Croats" against internal enemies – "Yugoslavians" who could lead Croatians on the wrong path – again, with extreme nativism since Yugoslavia was supposed to be brotherhood of different nations, with nationalism forbidden. Although, in political analysis, we could expect that representatives of these narrative of the confrontation between "new European Croats" and "Yugoslavs" could be based on a criticism of communism/socialism/bolshevism, these narratives were devoid of deeper analysis, often even reduced to empty signifiers and with a deep denial that modern Croatia was developed by reformed communists.

In line with that, in the next section of this chapter, we will focus on the conservative and right-wing values promoted by representatives of the HM and OBF which we found scientifically rewarding for understanding the ramifications of right-wing populism on both the 'supply' and 'demand' levels.

RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN CROATIA: PROXIES OF CDU AND THE CROATIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH?

As the CDU dominated the Croatian parliament and politics as a radical right populist party from 1990 to 2000,²⁹ and then interchanged with the SDP from 2000 to 2020, with a high percentage of winning all circles of elections (2000–2020) and being regularly present among the winners, second and third-placed parties in elections for the parliament and president (compare Table 1 and 2), there's no room to talk about any pluralism in political life of Croatia. For several election campaigns, they used the slogan "It's Known – CDU" ("*Zna se – HDZ*"), which even culminated from 2007 in a party song,³⁰ not questioning voting for them. Still, in between the underestimated dimension of the rise and development of right-wing populist features in Croatia within junior coalition leaders/movements/organisations that grew and were supported in their early phase by the two biggest parties in Croatia, most of them also by the omnipresent CDU, as being a catch-all party for several conservative and right-wing movements/parties/initiatives.³¹

On the one hand, it is widely underestimated that numerous right-wing movements and organisations entered the political arena in coalition with the CDU. In line with that, the civic organisation, the OBF movement's history should be emphasised starting with their leader Željka Markić as the first president of the far-right party Croatian Growth or Hrast-Movement for Successful Croatia (*Hrast* as acronym from "*Hrvatska raste*"/Croatia Grows and oak tree too) and later being a part of the 'Patriotic' coalition led by the CDU in 2015.³²

²⁹ Compare the periods of HDZ rule with 16 other European radical right parties from 1980 until 2014, with almost the same period for the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*) 1998–2000 as another representative of post-communist transformation history (Mudde 2016: 301).

³⁰ "Zna se," CDU party song from 2007: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLwN3tXcwsY> [accessed: May 2, 2022].

³¹ See more about the connection of conservative and right-wing parties with the CDU and its behaviour in: Čepo (2017). Also, see the in-depth analysis of the chameleon nature of the biggest parties in Croatia in: Mikucka-Wójtowicz (2019).

³² In 2021 they merged into an entity called Croatian Sovereignists (*Hrvatski suverenisti*) with two more right-wing parties – Croatian Conservative Party (*Hrvatska konzervativna stranka*) and Generation of Renewal (*Generacija obnove*).

OBF is the only populist entity in contemporary Croatia that showed a power of mass mobilisation. Besides having more than 600,000 members, just after Croatia's entrance to the EU in 2013, activists of this Catholic citizens' group handed over 749,000 collected signatures to the Parliament calling for a referendum which would enshrine in the constitution a provision according to which marriage would be reserved exclusively for women and men – to be precise they won the battle against the LGBT community for exclusively heterosexual marriage. By undermining the democratic values that were being established and cherished through the activities of SDP-led government, OBF claimed that they were the saviour of Christian legacy and values³³ and stood against violence of the 'minority' against the 'majority.' The manipulative process of choosing something they 'already have' and to prevent 'hypothetically same-sex marriage' was a huge attack on the SDP who had been fighting for more social equality and freedom from 2003, and all other political participants who were not influenced by the conservative Catholic Church.³⁴ OBF also continued to play the referendum 'game' promoting the preservation of the law on referendums as their main tool for political participation.³⁵ Both the episodic nature of the Human Shield and the populist manipulative game of OBF, failed to run the course which Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser claim is corrective of democracy, but also Kyle and Mounk who hypothetically-observed as populists' "big opportunity to deepen democracy, and to have positive effect of political system" (Kyle and Mounk 2018: 7). On the contrary: OBF showed the subversive or transgression possibilities of democracy and a misuse of the democratic institutions of referendum and the law.

³³ For the path to preservation of Christian legacy as a part of European Civilisation Process, but also protectionism and morality included in that process see: Brubaker (2017).

³⁴ CCC acted from the start of independent Croatia as a partner of the newly formed CDU and, through the 21st century developed their influence in all social fields (compare in Galić 2020: 91–92). The clericalisation of Croatian society was grounded in deep connections between the Croatian nation-building process with their medieval history and the traditional role of the Catholic Church as a partner of the State (Bešlin et al. 2020: 19). The CCC supported Croats both during the war and afterwards, but it never neglected its humanitarian duties. As a result, the CCC has been socially integrated in the newly established Croatian society and it has dominated the political and public spheres in the last decade. Still the moral authority of the CCC suffered because of its alliance with the CDU (Grzymała-Busse 2017: 145), and vice versa.

³⁵ Compare on their official site: Referendum on electoral law, <https://uimeobitelji.net/referendum-2014/> [accessed: May 2, 2022]. Further details on the activities of this organisation were recently thorough analysed in: Kahlina (2020).

Another initiative connected with the leader of this organisation is opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention against violence against women and domestic violence, along with abortion and euthanasia. As Eiermann, Mounk and Gultchin observed: “Many populist parties, especially on the right, advocate policies that may be democratic (in the sense of being popular) but also deeply illiberal: with the backing of the majority of the people, they undermine the rule of law and violate the basic rights of unpopular minorities” (Eiermann, Mounk and Gultchin 2017: 18). OBF is an example of the illiberal use of referendum as pretending to be democratic and supporting ‘majority’ rights. On the other side, HM’s leader, the musician, and entrepreneur Škoro, is an example of a politician with a long political career and an excellent example of the development of radical right-wing populist(s) in the auspices of the CDU supported by state institutions. Finally, his appearance at the state sport and culture manifestations where his general values were promoted to a wide audience demonstrate this. Although his election campaign in 2019 promoted by Croatian media as a new face and ‘independent candidate,’ Škoro had more than a decade of support from the CDU. He was first appointed as consul in Hungary by Tuđman in person from 1995 to 1997. His long career of folk musician-patriot returning from the USA to his homeland Croatia resulted in several albums of soft patriotic songs.³⁶ He succeeded in 2007 in becoming a member of parliament, as member of the CDU, and is now the vice president of the Croatian *Sabor*. Before his candidacy at the presidential elections in 2019/2020, the ideology he propagates were already present: extreme nativism, populism, Euroscepticism, authoritarianism, and conservative-right ideology, such as ‘pro-life’ policies against abortion.

In line with the *authoritarian* values he promoted, Škoro actively supported pro-fascism and Ustasha-led ideology of the ‘state’ during the Independent State of Croatia, which was exact evidence of a call for contemporary Croatia

³⁶ Besides state support of his musicianship, as being head of state records company ‘Croatia Records’ (2001–2006) and hosting one of the most popular singing shows on TV, in the first two decades of the 21st century he acted with a clear political agenda. Just to mention his duets with renowned far-right supporter through music, Marko Perković Thompson, one of them “They’re judging me’ (*Sude mi*, album *My dear/Milo moje*) in 2003 when General Gotovina’s case was a primary concern for the rise of nationalism and memory of the Homeland War, along with his singing at several CDU meetings, the last time in 2019.

to follow the path of the mentioned historical authoritarian state-to-be. In line with that, he lined up with supporters of the Ustasha greeting “Ready for the home(land)” (“*Za dom spremni*”) in regular state official events. The resurrection of this greeting and the concentration camp Jasenovac were primary topics in his presidential campaign (*Nedeljnik.rs*, November 17, 2019).

Škoro’s extreme *nativism* with several statements in then concerning the ‘real Croatian people’ and against their enemies, the Serbs, were obvious and permanent values he propagated. He presented himself in the media as a person who “belongs to the generation of Croats who fought Serbian fascism” (*Nedeljnik.rs*, November 17, 2019) and was part of a negative campaign against the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (*Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka*).

Above all, *nativism*, and *authoritarianism* were packed with the third feature of the definition of radical right populist parties according to Mudde (2016) – a *populist* strategy. To start with, the slogan of the HM representative Škoro at the elections “Let’s return Croatia to the people” (“*Vratimo Hrvatsku narodu*”) and the culmination of his message to voters in the second round “I will vote for you – the Croatian people who trusted me,”³⁷ and after elections that “the only coalition partner of HM is Croatian people” all indicate this. His construct of ‘the Croatian people’ is confronted by traditional Croatian elites, led by the CDU and SDP how he characterised them as “corrupted elites,” “ruling oligarchy,” “interest-oriented octopus” (“*interesna hobotnica*”) and a “clique.” He even cried during one election statement, “We unmasked the octopus” (*Hrvatska danas*, December 22, 2019), to fulfil the populist behaviour of familiarity with voters, but also as a common moment during his concerts.

As we pointed out, nativism, authoritarianism and populism were common in Croatian politics, and the *differentia specifica* of OBF and HM are their activities and places/space of their campaign. On the one hand, Škoro’s high percentage wouldn’t be possible without the long development of his public personality as a Croatian patriot, supported with state medals for achievements in culture (Marko Marulić Prix) and soft folk music propaganda

³⁷ In contrast to the candidates from CDU and SDP, he added “the Croatian people” on his election paper as 3rd option. See further to this action and statement in: *Telegraf.rs*, December 31, 2019.

about Croatia's natural beauty and events from Croatian history, along with the pathetic victimhood of the poor, common Croat in every one of his songs. These patriotic songs and values were promoted by him at political and cultural events, and his co-operation with Thompson made connection with far-right supporters at sports and other nationalistic events this he attended. In this example, the encounter of nationalism and populism is insufficient if studied only through electoral campaigns and results. On the other hand, the transgression of the parliamentary system by using a 'parliamentary referendum' is one other subversion of the right-wing populists OBF and belongs to period of growing populism around the world with the Trump presidency and Brexit as examples of its culmination.

Both OBF and HM, but also the CDU, were inconsistent when we approached them with a content analysis of their election campaign statements. Some CDU members also acted against the official policy of their party and promoted right-wing ideology. Beyond all mentioned conservative right populist parties and movements, we confirmed the hand-in-hand support of the CDU and CCC, and with it no possible abandonment of the nativism-authoritarianism-populism matrix in Croatia.

CONCLUSIONS

The results we found by comparing the periods 1989–2000 and 2000–2020 indicate five important conclusions about right-wing populism in Croatia in the 21st century: (1) a mix of nationalism and populism from Tuđman's legacy (1990–1999) still prevailed, (2) the HDZ acted as a party who developed conservative and radical right proxies, (3) right-wing populism transcends and inverts in many ways parliamentary systems and electoral processes as democratic institutions, (4) there's a huge influence of the CCC in Croatian politics, and (5) right-wing populism has the support of the youth in Croatia.

Besides the above conclusions being important for further political analysis of Croatian right-wing populism, the peculiarity of the Croatian case and issues that create hard battles with democratic political changes

could relate to the path of their development. On the one side, right-wing populism entities are supported by the logistically and historically confirmed CDU party (and then SDP). On the other side, it is supported by the CCC and its local network, which has demonstrated great possibilities of influence throughout whole history of independent Croatia. Another important issue we found is the underestimating of alternative ways of promotion of narratives and values that had significant influence on the population. In line with that, there's an important gap in the research of processes in which right-wing parties/movements/initiatives use national memorials and other cultural and sporting events for promotion. Therefore, their dynamic processes of splitting and gathering permanently stayed in political life was the circle that has been permanently repeating from the 1990s until now.

Finally, the consequences of the rise of right-wing populism in Croatia, under the umbrella of junior coalition partners showed the weakness of democratic institutions in Croatia. Besides an attack on pluralism with right-wing populism features, state media and institutions showed an affirmative and non-censored approach to discourse on 'dangerous Others,' hate speech between politicians, Euroscepticism, militant statements, etc.

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