

Flirting with Fascism: The Ustaša Legacy and Croatian Politics in the 1990s

Vjeran Pavlaković

Abstract

The collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe the late 1980s created a political vacuum that was filled by resurgent nationalist movements, which proved fatal for a multiethnic country such as Yugoslavia, where the desire for democratic change was accompanied by independence efforts in the two northernmost republics, Croatia and Slovenia. The communist fall from power “breached the dams of memory and counter-memory, which fundamentally changed the collective identity present in the region.” In Croatia this was most evident in the renewed debate over World War Two, specifically the vilification of the communist-led, and multiethnic, Partisan resistance and the rehabilitation of the Ustaše as legitimate Croatian patriots. This “flirting with the Ustaše” (*koketiranje s ustaštvom*) not only revolted many of Croatia’s potential international allies, but seriously damaged relations with the country’s Serb minority, haunted by memories of Ustaše atrocities against them in the 1940s and already under the influence of Slobodan Milošević’s propaganda apparatus in Belgrade. This article examines the political context of Croatia in the 1990s which fostered the rehabilitation of the Ustaše as an expression of Croatian nationalism at a time of democratic transition across Eastern Europe. While debates over the Ustaša movement have extended into the spheres of education, monuments and public space, graffiti, symbols, commemorations and public rituals, and even popular culture, this article focuses on the role of this extreme nationalist organization in the political life of post-communist Croatia.

Keywords: World War Two, Croatia, fascist symbols, Franjo Tuđman, radical right movements, Jasenovac, Ustaše

“I was always an advocate for tolerance,” asserts Anto Djapić in the film *Korijeni za budućnost (Roots for the Future)*, which premiered in Zagreb on 26 March 2007 as an allegedly serious documentary about a Croatian politician. Yet this biographical portrait of Djapić, the president of the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP – *Hrvatska stranka prava*), was not an impartial political sketch of Croatia’s largest right-wing party and its leader, but an election-year marketing tactic with the goal of whitewashing the HSP’s unquestionably intolerant past. There was hardly any mention of the HSP’s use of symbols and discourse associated with the pro-fascist Ustaša movement in the 1990s.¹ Whereas Franjo Tuđman, Croatia’s first democratically elected president, epitomized hard-line Croatian nationalism to the outside world, his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ

¹ The Ustaša (plural: Ustaše) movement, after the Croatian word for “insurgent”, was formed in the early 1930s by an HSP deputy, Ante Pavelić. This radical Croatian separatist movement was dedicated to the violent destruction of the Yugoslav state.

– *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*) was not the most radical party to appear after the return of a multiparty system to Croatia in 1990. However, Tudjman's policy of national reconciliation among Croats, bitterly divided over their World War Two past, allowed for the de facto rehabilitation of the Ustaše and the return of their iconography, chauvinistic rhetoric, and extreme nationalist ideology to the political arena. The HSP publicly distanced itself from the Ustaša movement after 2000, but, as this article shows, during Croatia's war for independence and immediately afterwards, the ghosts of World War Two had reappeared in the political landscape.

The collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe the late 1980s created a political vacuum that was filled by resurgent nationalist movements, which proved fatal for a multiethnic country such as Yugoslavia, where the desire for democratic change was accompanied by independence efforts in the two northernmost republics, Croatia and Slovenia. The communist fall from power "breached the dams of memory and counter-memory, which fundamentally changed the collective identity present in the region."² In Croatia this was most evident in the renewed debate over World War Two, specifically the vilification of the communist-led, and multiethnic, Partisan resistance and the rehabilitation of the Ustaše as legitimate Croatian patriots. This "flirting with the Ustaše" (*koketiranje s ustaštvom*) not only revolted many of Croatia's potential international allies, but seriously damaged relations with the country's Serb minority, haunted by memories of Ustaše atrocities against them in the 1940s and already under the influence of Slobodan Milošević's propaganda apparatus in Belgrade. During the Homeland War (1991–1995), as the Croats call their war for independence, and in the immediate postwar years, Ustaša as well as Četnik (Serbian nationalists also dating to World War Two) imagery became prevalent, reflecting the deterioration of Croat-Serb relations.

Even though at times it seemed to be sliding towards an authoritarian extreme nationalist state modeled on the Ustaša regime in the 1990s, modern Croatia is undoubtedly democratic and founded on the antifascist values embedded among the core principles of the European Union. The Ustaša revival was never as prevalent as Serbian wartime propaganda, or even some Western media accounts, reported in order to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of an independent Croatia. Croatia's constitution from 1990 refers to the Partisan historical legacy, not the Ustaša one. Open association with the Ustaša past has diminished significantly as EU membership becomes more of a reality, even though pro-fascist symbols and individual incidents have not completely disappeared from Croatian society. President Stjepan Mesić, speaking at a commemoration on 22 April 2007 for the victims at Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp operated by the Ustaše, noted that Croatia will not be a normal country as long as Ustaša and Nazi graffiti appear in Zagreb, Ustaša leader Ante Pavelić is celebrated as a Croatian patriot, and antifascism is criminalized.³ But most importantly is that in the political arena, even the once most pro-Ustaša parties such as the HSP have turned away from openly associating themselves with that chapter of Croatia's past.

This article examines the political context of Croatia in the 1990s which fostered the rehabilitation of the Ustaše as an expression of Croatian nationalism at a time of

² Maja Brkljačić and Sandra Prlenda, eds., *Kultura pamćenja i historija* (Zagreb: Golden-Marketing, 2006), p. 14.

³ For a summary of the speech, see *Novi list* (Rijeka), 23 April 2007, p. 3; and *Glas Javnosti* (Belgrade), 23 April 2007, online version at www.glas-javnosti.co.yu.

democratic transition across Eastern Europe. Why did Tudjman, a former Partisan general, allow the resurgence of Ustaša symbols and ideology in a Croatia seeking to become part of the democratic West? What political parties chose to cast themselves as the inheritors of a movement that was ignominiously defeated at the end of World War Two and associated with some of the most horrific atrocities of that conflict? While debates over the Ustaša movement have extended into the spheres of education, monuments and public space, graffiti, symbols, commemorations and public rituals, and even popular culture, this chapter focuses on the role of this extreme nationalist organization in the political life of post-communist Croatia.

The Ustaše and Narratives of World War Two

Although recent Croatian political history has been dominated by the idea of statehood – the loss of the independent medieval kingdom in 1102 and centuries of foreign rule are key motifs that were emphasized from the beginning of modern political activity from the Croatian national renaissance in the nineteenth century onward – achieving independence was primarily sought through peaceful, political means. Nevertheless, some extreme Croatian nationalist groups have sought, under the motto of “the Croatian state above everything else,” to use violence in creating that state. The most infamous of the Croatian radical right political movements was indisputably Ante Pavelić’s Ustaša organization. Founded in exile by Pavelić either in late 1931 or early 1932, the Ustaša solution to the Croat question was built exclusively on an anti-Yugoslav orientation and tied to Germany’s revisionist policy towards Europe’s Versailles system.⁴

The Independent State of Croatia (NDH – *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*) was created on 10 April 1941, just a few days following the Axis invasion and destruction of royal Yugoslavia. Pavelić quickly established a brutal dictatorship that passed racial laws against Serbs, Jews, and Roma, built a system of concentration camps (the most notorious one being the Jasenovac complex), and violently repressed any opposition to his regime.⁵ While many Croats initially welcomed the NDH as salvation from the Serb-dominated Yugoslav state, the totalitarian methods of the Ustaša regime quickly revolted the majority of the population. Even though the NDH’s borders encompassed all of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Srijem region, the country was recognized only by the allies of Germany and Italy, was divided into military occupation zones by those two powers, and had most of its Dalmatian coast and islands ceded to Italy.

The price for the creation of a quasi-independent state was rule by a government which had fully adopted the Nazi-fascist ideology of its two main allies, with the consequence that both Croats and Serbs flocked to the multiethnic, communist-led Partisan movement as the war dragged on. The Ustaše stayed loyal to Hitler until the end, and while much of the leadership, including Pavelić, were able to escape to the West after May 1945, tens of thousands of others associated (or allegedly associated) with the regime suffered

⁴ The date for the beginning of the Ustaše is often given as 1929, the year when Pavelić went into exile. Fikreta Jelić-Butić argues that the Ustaše as a loose movement was founded in 1929, but the actual organization, *Ustaša – hrvatska revolucionarna organizacija* (UHRO), was created in 1931 at the earliest. See Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (Zagreb: SN Liber, 1978), pp. 21–24; and Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret: od nastanka do travnja 1941. godine* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), pp. 112 – 119.

⁵ For a recent overview of the NDH in English, see Sabrina P. Ramet, “The NDH – An Introduction,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 7, no.4 (December 2006).

in postwar communist massacres, death marches, or other types of persecution, which is symbolically commemorated as the Bleiburg massacre and the Way of the Cross.⁶ Croats in particular were saddled with the guilt of the Ustaša crimes, even though by the end of the war hundreds of thousands of ethnic Croats had fought in the Partisan ranks. The victorious Partisans established a communist dictatorship that owed everything to the successful struggle against foreign occupiers and their domestic collaborators, and thus the narrative of World War Two became the cornerstone of the newly reunited Yugoslav state. The division of Croats into those who had been on the side of the Partisans or on the side of the Ustaše, the winners and losers of the war, was to have a considerable impact on Croatia when democratic change finally swept away the communist monopoly on power and history.

By 1989, it was clear that the communist system that had been maintained by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe was crumbling rapidly, and that multiparty democracy was inevitably going to replace the one-party state that had characterized this region throughout the Cold War. The winds of change did not bypass Yugoslavia, which had broken free from Soviet control in 1948 but had nonetheless been ruled by communists whose legitimacy rested on the charismatic leadership of Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), the watchful eye of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA – *Jugoslavenska narodna armija*), and the myths of the Partisan struggle during World War Two. Tito's death and the systematic attacks on the ideology and founding myths of communist Yugoslavia (such as "Brotherhood and Unity", the purity of the Partisans, and the denial of postwar crimes against real and alleged collaborators) left the JNA as the only pillar propping up the country, which would eventually be used by Milošević in his attempt to carve out a Greater Serbia from the ruins of the Yugoslav state.

The liberalization of the political arena in the late 1980s was accompanied by challenges to the historical narrative monopolized by the communist regime. Not only historians, but journalists, émigré memoirists, and publicists of questionable academic integrity launched into a public debate on all of the taboo themes of communist Yugoslavia, of which World War Two, the nature of the Ustaša regime, and the liquidation of the communists' political opponents were especially emphasized. The flurry of historical revisionism, in an atmosphere where everything associated with the communist system was rejected, meant that *a priori* all communist historiography was inherently flawed irrespective of its scholarly soundness. Suddenly the Ustaše, fascist collaborators and the losers of World War Two, were being rehabilitated simply because they had been vilified by communist scholars and politicians for nearly five decades.

The debate about Croatia's recent past quickly became a political issue as well, after the Croatian communist leadership decided to allow multiparty elections at the Eleventh Party Congress held in December 1989. A number of political parties had already been founded or restored that year, such as the Croatian Social Liberal Party, the Croatian Peasant Party, and the aforementioned HDZ, all of which noted the so-called "national question" as one of the key issues in post-Titoist Yugoslavia. For Milošević and the Serbian leadership, any kind of Croatian nationalism or efforts to challenge the

⁶ The events in Bleiburg, Austria, are commemorated every year in May, and polemics over the numbers of victims and nature of the Partisan crimes continue to the present. Some books with differing interpretations include Juraj Hrženjak, ed., *Bleiburg i Križni put 1945* (Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca Hrvatske, 2007); Josip Jurčević, *Bleiburg: Jugoslavenski poratni zločini nad Hrvatima* (Zagreb: DIS, 2005); and Marko Grgić, ed., *Bleiburg: Otvoreni dossier* (Zagreb: Vjesnik, 1990).

centralization of the Yugoslav state was depicted as the “awakening of the Ustaše,” and even Croatian communists were labeled as Ustaše by the Belgrade media.⁷ It was Milošević himself, however, who had first stirred the ghosts of Yugoslavia’s past and had undertaken numerous moves to undermine the constitutional and legal framework of socialist Yugoslavia.⁸

In 1990 two other political parties appeared that reflected the growth of both Croatian and Serbian nationalism. In February, the oldest Croatian political party, the HSP (originally founded in 1861 and banned since 1929), was renewed by Ante Paraždik, Krešimir Pavelić, and seven others in Zagreb.⁹ They chose Dobroslav Paraga, an anticommunist dissident, as the party’s first president, and openly used iconography associated with the Ustaša regime. That same month, in Knin, located in the Dalmatian hinterland, psychiatrist Jovan Rašković founded the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS – *Srpska demokratska stranka*), which mobilized Croatian Serbs by playing upon their fears of a reincarnated Ustaša state.¹⁰ Although the HSP did not participate in the first democratic elections in Croatia (held in April and May 1990 and won by the HDZ), and the SDS received few votes, their ultra-nationalist positions anticipated the radicalization of Croatian society that contributed to the violence a year later.

Tudjman, National Reconciliation, and Croatian Serb Fears

It was Tudjman’s HDZ, however, which would earn the reputation, especially internationally and among Serbs, as the embodiment of extreme Croatian nationalism even without the direct association with the Ustaše such as exhibited by the HSP. Nevertheless, two factors did reveal the HDZ’s ambiguous position on the NDH past. Firstly, Tudjman received considerable support for the HDZ from Croatian émigrés, notably in Canada, the United States, and Australia (many of whom remained sympathetic to the Ustaša regime) and encouraged the return to Croatia of individuals with ties to the Ustaše.¹¹ For example, members of the Croatian Liberation Movement (HOP - *Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret*), founded by Pavelić and other former Ustaša leaders in Argentina in 1956, registered HOP as a political party in October 1991.¹² Gojko Šušak, an active member of the émigré community and Canadian businessman who eventually served as the Croatian Minister of Defense (1991–1999), embodied the hard-line faction of the HDZ. According to Martin Špegelj, one of Šušak’s predecessors, the pro-Pavelić views of some of the émigrés “added oil to the fire of the Serb uprising,” as did “the renewal of the spirit and model of the NDH, such as when Šušak’s people

⁷ Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska povijest* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2003), p. 373.

⁸ See Vjeran Pavlaković, “Serbia Transformed?: Political Dynamics in the Milošević Era and After,” in Sabrina P. Ramet and Vjeran Pavlaković, eds., *Serbia since 1989: Politics and Society under Milošević and After* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 13–54; Robert Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milošević and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁹ Krešimir Pavelić, *HSP: Od obnove do slobode* (Zagreb: HDSP, 1995), pp. 9, 23. Pavelić, who left the HSP because of disagreements with Paraga, later accused Paraga of being a foreign agent who acted as “an Ustaša for hire,” although no substantive evidence for this allegation was ever produced.

¹⁰ Nikica Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj, 1990–1995* (Zagreb: Golden-Marketing, 2005), pp. 49–54.

¹¹ For the role of émigrés in Balkan politics in the 1990s, see Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹² *Globus* (Zagreb), 1 December 1995, p. 16. In 1995, HOP began issuing its main newspaper, *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, in Zagreb, after decades of publication in Buenos Aires and Chicago.

constantly announced the return of Domobran and Ustaša officers from emigration.”¹³ Some prominent HDZ officials were quoted making racist statements about the small size of Serbian brains, while Šušak himself greeted the crowd one year with a fascist salute at the traditional Alka competition in the Dalmatian hinterland.¹⁴

Secondly, partly as a means to obtain the widest possible support for his party and eventual Croatian independence, Tudjman promoted the idea of “national reconciliation” among Croats, which to some degree exculpated the Ustaše of their crimes in the course of establishing the NDH. National reconciliation was carried out in Germany and Italy in the post-war years, and Charles de Gaulle, president of France, called for national unity in 1950 by softening his stance toward Pétainists while maintaining the myth about the nature of the Resistance.¹⁵ According to a controversial biography of Tudjman by journalist Darko Hudelist, during his visits to North America the founder of the HDZ came to an agreement with the Croatian Franciscans to accept reconciliation as the core of his party’s program.¹⁶ The goal was, in other words, to unite all Croats, both Partisans and Ustaše and their children, against the common enemy, the Serbs. For Hudelist, Tudjman’s ideas about national reconciliation originated from the writings of Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, a former Ustaša officer and commander of the notorious Jasenovac camp, who split with Pavelić in 1955 and was influenced by the reconciliation carried out by Francisco Franco in Spain.¹⁷ Others, including Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, have argued that the idea of reconciliation originated during the student movement of 1971 (known as the Croatian Spring).¹⁸

Regardless of the ideological origins of Tudjman’s reconciliation platform, it was a vital element in uniting Croats across the political spectrum at a time when the country was threatened with destruction at the hands of Milošević and the JNA. Historian Dušan Bilandžić noted in his memoirs that in the early 1990s Croats formed “a united front for an independent and democratic Croatia...divisions into fascists and antifascists practically disappeared. Without that unity, the defense of Croatia would have been absolutely impossible.”¹⁹ In his reflections upon Tudjman’s reconciliation policy, journalist Davor Butković comes to a similar conclusion:

¹³ Martin Špegelj, *Sjećanja vojnika* (Zagreb: Znanje, 2001), pp. 126, 195. See also a similar critique of the Ministry of Defense under Šušak by Anton Tus, “Rat u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj do sarajevskog primirja,” in Branka Magaš and Ivo Žanić, *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini, 1991–1995* (Zagreb: Naklada Jasenski i Turk, 1999), p. 89. The Domobrani (Home Guards) were the members of the regular army of the NDH, whereas the Ustaše were the elite troops most loyal to Pavelić’s regime.

¹⁴ “Zagreb Race Hate Trial,” *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, Balkan Crisis Report No. 282 (21 September 2001), online at iwpr.net/?p=bcr&s=f&o=248409&apc_state=henibcr2001.

¹⁵ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 39.

¹⁶ Darko Hudelist, *Tudjman: Biografija* (Zagreb: Profil, 2004), pp. 614, 620.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 684–688. In his book attacking Hudelist’s biography, Ivan Bekavac argues that the connection to Luburić is an attempt to cast Tudjman in a pro-fascist light in order to justify the “joint criminal enterprise” theory in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indictments against Croatian generals. See Ivan Bekavac, *Izmišljeni Tudjman: O lažima, krivotvorinama i namjerama Hudelistove “biografije” prvog hrvatskog predsjednika* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2007), pp. 9–12.

¹⁸ Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, quoted in Ivica Radoš, *Tudjman izbliza: Svjedočenja suradnika i protivnika* (Zagreb: Profil, 2005), p. 38.

¹⁹ Dušan Bilandžić, *Povijest izbliza: Memoarski zapisi, 1945–2005* (Zagreb: Prometej, 2006), pp. 492–493.

[Tudjman] rehabilitated a part of the Ustaša tradition, not because he believed in it, far from that, but because he believed that by involving the most hard-line faction of the Croatian emigration, it would be easier to win the war, which proved to be perfectly correct. It cannot be expected that anyone in the West would have an understanding for something like that.²⁰

Josip Manolić, one of Tudjman's closest advisors, described how reconciliation was directed specifically at the pro-Ustaša émigrés:

The Croatian leadership needed to tell those who had lost World War Two that they had no reason to be angry at the generation of Croats who had grown up in Tito's Yugoslavia, because that generation was not responsible for their emigration from Croatia. This was not a time for grieving over the past.²¹

Even Stjepan Mesić, who was elected president in 2000 and consistently worked to return antifascist values to Croatia, was shown to have cast the NDH in a positive light during a fundraising speech to the Croatian diaspora in Australia in the early 1990s. Addressing the issue in a televised speech immediately after footage of his controversial comments became public, Mesić reminded viewers of the wartime context and the need to gain the support of Croats abroad, but nonetheless deemed it an "erroneous and mistaken tactical concession of flirting with Ustaša views."²²

Tudjman, however, saw no problem in the fact that the whitewashing of Ustaša crimes was a byproduct of his reconciliation policy. Although he had fought on the side of the Partisans in World War Two and admitted that Croat antifascists had likewise fought for Croatian rights, Tudjman nonetheless promoted the view that "everyone who had been in the government of the NDH was for Croatia, out of pure Croatian feelings," among whom "there was a small number of political and ideological fascists or Nazis."²³ Thus Tudjman, who in the early 1990s did not explicitly condemn the Ustaše – whose ideology was firmly rooted in authoritarianism, violence, intolerance to other ethnic groups (namely Serbs), and eventually tenets of fascism and Nazism to ingratiate themselves with their international benefactors – created an atmosphere where it was encouraged to celebrate the Pavelić regime solely because it had fought for a Croatian state.

Tudjman's preoccupation with the idea of reconciling Croatia's divisions from World War Two culminated in plans to transfer the remains of Ustaše, as well as those killed during the Homeland War, to the memorial complex at Jasenovac, the former death camp where some 80,000-100,000 Serbs, Jews, Roma, and antifascist Croats had been killed by the Ustaše.²⁴ This plan for Jasenovac was first made public in 1992, and then

²⁰ Davor Butković, quoted in Radoš, *Tudjman izbliza*, p. 46.

²¹ *Novi list* (15 January 2007), p. 5.

²² *Novi list* (11 December 2006), p. 5. Mesić issued a direct apology for his comments in a large interview printed in *Feral Tribune* (Split), 15 December 2006, pp. 4–6.

²³ Interview with Franjo Tudjman reprinted in *Novi list* (23 April 1996), p. 21.

²⁴ The number of victims at Jasenovac has long been one of the most heated controversies about World War Two. Most scholars, based on the work of two demographers (Vladimir Zerjavić and Bogoljub Kočović) working independently, accept the number to be in the 80,000 to 100,000 victims range. See Nataša Mataušić, "The Jasenovac Concentration Camp," in Tea Benčić Rimay, ed., *Jasenovac Memorial Site* (Jasenovac: Spomen područje Jasenovac, 2006), pp. 47–48. Tudjman himself had questioned the number of victims, suggesting at times there had been only 40,000. Interview with Tudjman, reprinted in *Novi list* (23 April 1996), p. 21. On the other extreme, Serbian propaganda exaggerated the number to 700,000, or

repeated by Tudjman at the Second HDZ Party Convention (15–16 October 1993) and the State of the Nation Address on 15 January 1996.²⁵ According to him, “Jasenovac could become a place for all victims of war, which would warn the Croatian people that in the past they were divided and brought into an internecine conflict, warn them to not repeat it, and to reconcile the dead just as we reconciled the living, their children, and their grandchildren.”²⁶ Tudjman noted Spanish dictator Francisco Franco’s massive monument to the dead from both sides of the Spanish Civil War in the Valley of the Fallen (*Valle de los Caídos*) could serve as a model for the new Jasenovac, although similar memorials mixing the bones of the dead exist in other countries, such as in the New Guardhouse (*Neue Wache*) in Berlin.²⁷ His plans for reconciliation of the dead also included Croatian historical figures who were buried abroad, such as Ante Pavelić (Spain), Josip Broz Tito (Serbia), and interwar leader Vladko Maček (United States), all of whom he wanted reburied in Croatian soil; only Maček’s body was actually returned to Zagreb in 1996.

This vision of the Jasenovac memorial complex, as with other positions held by Tudjman on the NDH, omitted the fact that the majority of victims at the camp were Serbs, who were singled out for liquidation simply because of their nationality. The proposed transformation of Jasenovac was shelved after an avalanche of protests from Croatian antifascist groups,²⁸ Croatia’s Jewish community,²⁹ Walter Reich, the director of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum,³⁰ and fifty-two United States congressmen.³¹ According to Mate Granić’s memoirs, even Vice President Al Gore emphasized the political damage that would result from the Jasenovac plan, which finally convinced Tudjman to abandon it.³² The memorial complex at Jasenovac continued to spark controversies even after Tudjman’s death in 1999, as Croatia sought to confront the darkest chapters of its past, pay respects to the victims of the NDH, and recognize the contribution of the antifascist movement to modern-day Croatia, without becoming subjected to political manipulation.

Whereas the policy of national reconciliation could help ethnic Croats heal the bitter wounds of the ideological divide from World War Two, Croatia’s Serbs saw something far more ominous in the HDZ’s rhetoric of reconciliation. In the article “What Serbs Fear,” SDS leader Rašković emphasized that “for the Serb people, the publicly proclaimed national reconciliation creates the sense that the Ustaše have been forgiven,” and that the “Ustaša core” of the HDZ was increasing Serb paranoia of a return of the NDH.³³ Since a significant number of pro-Ustaša émigrés had supported the reconciliation platform as a way to reverse the defeat of 1945, Tudjman’s embrace of national reconciliation to the degree that it was one of the centerpieces of the HDZ ideology was

even 1,000,000 Serbs allegedly killed at Jasenovac, a figure that some Serbian media continue to use to this day. See *Glas javnosti* (23 April 2007), online version at www.glas-javnosti.co.yu.

²⁵ See *Vjesnik* (Zagreb), 27 May 1992, no page number; *Vjesnik* (24 November 1993), no page number; and *Feral Tribune* (22 January 1996), p. 5.

²⁶ Interview with Tudjman, reprinted in *Novi list* (23 April 1996), p. 21. While Tudjman envisioned Croatian war dead from various sides to be buried at Jasenovac in separate graves, opponents of the idea accused him of “mixing the bones of the dead.”

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁸ *Vjesnik* (22 April 1996), p. 1.

²⁹ *Feral Tribune* (22 January 1996), p. 5.

³⁰ Walter Reich, “A Plan That’s Bad to the Bone,” *Wall Street Journal* (3 April 1996), p. A14.

³¹ *Panorama* (Zagreb), 3 June 1996, pp. 58–59.

³² Mate Granić, *Vanjska politika: Iza kulisa politike* (Zagreb: Algoritam, 2005), pp. 143–144.

³³ Interview with Jovan Rašković, in *Danas* (Zagreb), 29 May 1990, p. 14.

interpreted by them as a green light for the rehabilitation of the Ustaše rather than “forgetting the past” as Luburić had advocated in his writings.³⁴ Furthermore, Tudjman’s entire concept of reconciliation was an attempt to reconcile two diametrically opposed ideologies, and not an effort to reconcile living individuals, most importantly Serbs and Croats who were increasingly divided over the renewed debate on the traumatic past.

It was Tudjman’s comments about the NDH in a speech at the First General Convention of the HDZ (24–25 February 1990) which played into the hands of Milošević, who sought to manipulate the Croatian Serbs’ collective memory of the Ustaše for his own political agenda. His most controversial statement was that “the NDH was not just a ‘quisling creation’ and a ‘fascist crime,’ but an expression of the historical yearnings of the Croatian people for their own independent state.”³⁵ For Slavko Goldstein, a respected Zagreb publicist, this speech was one of Tudjman’s greatest mistakes, because for Serbs in Croatia the NDH could only be a criminal fascist state, and therefore any relativization of that fact could bring into question the future of Serbs in a Croatia led by the HDZ.³⁶ Even though in the same speech Tudjman commented on the positive contributions of Croatian communists and antifascists, the media, especially in Belgrade, focused exclusively on the portions about the NDH.³⁷ Pro-Ustaša comments by other hard-line HDZ members reinforced the perception that the Croatian government elected in the spring of 1990 was actively revising the historical narrative of World War Two with the goal of legitimizing the Pavelić regime.

Tudjman’s apparent rehabilitation of the NDH, compounded with the actual increase of pro-Ustaša imagery in Croatia,³⁸ provided plenty of material for Milošević’s propaganda apparatus, which sought to portray the HDZ government as the natural descendant of Pavelić’s regime. Belgrade television aired speeches of Tudjman and Pavelić one after the other,³⁹ while *Politika* and *Politika ekspres*, Belgrade newspapers which were read extensively in the regions of Croatia with Serb majorities, carried extensive articles about Ustaša atrocities, Croatian national symbols, and the Jasenovac concentration camp, often placed next to articles about Tudjman and the HDZ.⁴⁰ Milošević’s tactics in manipulating the collective memory among Croatian Serbs was quite obvious. An article in the influential Zagreb weekly *Danas* warned

the continuous media uproar, particularly from Belgrade, seeks to portray everything happening in Croatia as a reflection of “the spirit of the Munich beer hall” and “the arrival of fascists.” Every exaltation of some Croatian rabble-rouser is welcomed support for that effort. The consequences are fear and uncertainty among the Serb inhabitants in Croatia.⁴¹

³⁴ Slavko Goldstein, “Pomirenje,” *Erasmus* (Zagreb), No. 2 (June 1993), p. 15.

³⁵ Text of the speech reprinted in Andjelko Milardović (ed.), *Političke stranke u Republici Hrvatskoj* (Osijek, Zagreb, and Split: Pan Liber, 1997), p. 40.

³⁶ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2007), pp. 372–373.

³⁷ Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj*, p. 58.

³⁸ Reporter Ines Sabalić noted how objects with Ustaša symbols were being openly sold on Zagreb’s main square with no reaction from the authorities, which she evaluated as being “a very bad move on the part of Croatia from a propaganda perspective.” *Nedjeljna Dalmacija* (Split), 23 June 1991, pp. 8–9.

³⁹ Florence Hartmann, *Milošević: Diagonala ludjaka*, trans. by Hvalenka Carrara d’Angely (Rijeka: Adamić, 2002), p. 165.

⁴⁰ Mark Thomson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Avon: Article 19, 1994), p. 71.

⁴¹ *Danas* (12 June 1990), p. 7.

Despite evidence that even individual cases of Ustaša resurgence was contributing to the destabilization of Serb-Croat relations, Tudjman refused to explicitly denounce the crimes committed in the name of the NDH.

Serbian intelligence agents in Croatia were also assigned to carry out attacks and disinformation campaigns to discredit the new HDZ government. The counter-intelligence service (KOS) of the Yugoslav People's Army destroyed Jewish graves in Zagreb's Mirogoj Cemetery in order that "the Croatian authorities would be represented and shown as being pro-fascist," while plans to launch terrorist attacks against the synagogue in Zagreb were prevented when the agents were discovered and had to flee to Belgrade.⁴² Defamation of the Croatian government's image was accompanied by the well-documented arming of Serb rebels from JNA weapon depots, likewise organized by Milošević and his associates.⁴³

Decisions by the new Croatian government regarding new or restored national symbols both antagonized Croatia's Serbs and seemed to confirm the hysterical rhetoric in the Serbian media. First and foremost was the use of the traditional *šahovnica* (chessboard) coat-of-arms as the dominant national symbol. Even though Serbs associated the *šahovnica* exclusively with the Ustaše, it was a historical Croatian heraldic symbol that remained in use through the socialist period, albeit crowned with a red star.⁴⁴ Already convinced that Tudjman was intent on reviving the NDH to solve Croatia's "Serb question," in the summer of 1990 Serb police officers in the Krajina region led by Milan Martić refused to "wear Ustaša insignia on their uniforms," i.e. *šahovnica* badges, precipitating the Krajina's rebellion against Zagreb.⁴⁵

Other symbolic steps taken by the new government included reintroducing the World War Two-era *kuna* as the currency, using official vocabulary that evoked the Ustaša regime, and the renaming of streets and squares, most notably the Square of the Victims of Fascism (*Trg žrtava fašizma*) in September 1990.⁴⁶ Concurrently, Croatia's antifascist movement was vilified in the press and in new textbooks, while some three thousand monuments, statues, and plaques commemorating the Partisan movement were

⁴² Testimony of former intelligence agent Mustafa Čandić at the trial of Slobodan Milošević (11 November 2002) about "Operation Labrador", transcript available at www.un.org/icty/transe54/021111ED.htm, p. 12,736. Čandić also described how "Operation Opera" used doctored footage of Croatian politicians and images of alleged Serbian victims to convince viewers of Serbian television that the HDZ government was fascist.

⁴³ See the indictment of Franko Simatović "Frenki" and Jovica Stanišić (IT-03-69), online version at www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/sta-2ai051220e.htm. See also the documentary on the history of Serbian paramilitaries operating in Croatia, *Jedinica* (Vreme, 2006).

⁴⁴ Marijan Grakalić, *Hrvatski grb: Grbovi hrvatskih zemalja* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod matice hrvatske, 1990), pp. 35–36. According to Marcus Tanner, the union with the Habsburg Empire in 1527 was the first time the *šahovnica* was used as the emblem of Croatia. Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 35. For use of the *šahovnica* in socialist Yugoslavia, see Reana Senjković, "The Use, Interpretation, and Symbolization of the National," in *Ethnologia Europaea*, Vol. 25 (1995), p. 78, fn. 2.

⁴⁵ Laura Silber and Alan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 98. See also transcripts from the trial of Milan Martić (IT-95-11), notably the testimonies of Lazar Macura and Ratko Ličina in August and September 2005, www.un.org/icty/cases-e/index-e.htm.

⁴⁶ For Slavko Goldstein, the changing of Square of the Victims of Fascism's name "symbolically marked the beginning of the neo-Ustaša offensive." *Feral Tribune* (17 May 1999), online version at www.feral.hr/arhiva/tmp/1999/713/fas1.html.

damaged or completely destroyed.⁴⁷ Reflecting on the events of the 1990s, ethnologist Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin noted how she and her colleagues

did not understand why the newly introduced (and formerly suppressed by force) old Croatian symbolism frightened the Serbian population in Croatia. We noticed only that the right of a nation to have its symbols had been used by the Serbian propaganda against us.⁴⁸

But it was precisely the combination of traumatic collective memory, Tudjman's policy of Croatian national reconciliation and ambiguous position on the NDH, and concerted efforts of Belgrade to destabilize Croatia which made Ustaša symbols, or perceived Ustaša symbols, a significant component in the deterioration of interethnic relations. Had Tudjman and the HDZ been more sensitive to Croatian Serb concerns, it is unlikely that war could have been completely avoided, since numerous scholars and trials at The Hague have shown that Milošević had decided to use force to retain control of Yugoslavia, or as much of it as possible, regardless of the political constellation in Zagreb. Yet it is not unreasonable to believe that much of the brutality and ethnic hatred could have been mitigated by an explicit condemnation of the Ustaše and a curbing of extremism.

While HDZ rule in the 1990s permitted the symbolic return of the Ustaše into public space and political life, even Tudjman's harshest critics agree that the one-time Partisan general did not seek to recreate the NDH. The Croatian constitution of 1990 emphasized state continuity with the Partisan movement and recognized the republican borders established in communist Yugoslavia, *not* Pavelić's NDH. Slavko Goldstein observed that Tudjman

was not an Ustaša or an anti-Semite, nor was he a radical Serbophobe. He was fervently obsessed with the ambition to become the creator of an independent Croatia, to expand its borders as far as possible, and to serve as its absolute leader.⁴⁹

In the course of achieving those goals, he was willing to tolerate the revival of pro-Ustaša ideology in Croatia's young democratic system, and in the 1990s this was epitomized primarily by one political party: the renewed Croatian Party of Rights.

Ready for the Homeland

In February 1990, Dobroslav Paraga, an anti-Yugoslav dissident who had served a number of years in communist jails in the 1980s, was asked to lead the newly revived HSP after the Croatian communist leadership decided to allow multiparty elections. Although they drew upon the legacy of Ante Starčević, the nineteenth century founder of

⁴⁷ Croatia's antifascist organization meticulously documented the destruction of World War Two monuments in Juraj Hrženjak, *Rušenje antifašističkih spomenika u Hrvatskoj, 1990–2000* (Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca Hrvatske, 2002).

⁴⁸ Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, *Ethnology, Myth, and Politics: Anthropologizing Croatian Ethnology*, trans. by Jasna Čapo Žmegač (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 101.

⁴⁹ Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, p. 374. Goldstein and the other guests (scholars Ivo Banac, Nikica Barić, and Ivan Bekavac) of *Epicenter*, a talk show aired 7 January 2007 on Nova TV, reached a similar conclusion during the program which was devoted to the discussion about Tudjman.

the HSP commonly referred to as the “Father of the Homeland” (*Otac Domovine*), HSP members increasingly used the iconography of the Ustaše in their publications and public appearances.

Photographs of Ante Pavelić adorned the offices of the HSP, its members wore black uniforms, the greeting *Za dom spremni* [“Ready for the Homeland,” the Ustaša equivalent of *Sieg Heil*] was used regularly and adorned the HSP’s emblems, and the party’s leaders gave the fascist salute after speeches and meetings. The HSP organized commemorations every 10 April in recognition of the founding of the NDH, and the leadership of the party was not referred to as the presidency, but as *Glavni stan* (military headquarters), a term used during the NDH. Ivica Oršanić, an émigré who had organized the HSP in Canada, was quoted as saying that if his party would win the elections, “it would propose that the parliament cancel all legislation from 1945 until the present, since for us [HSP members] there exists only the NDH.”⁵⁰ Initially the HSP was cautious about its connection to the Ustaše – Paraga told one interviewer in the spring of 1990 that the HSP did not support the Ustaša government, only the creation of an independent state on 10 April⁵¹ – but as the situation radicalized, HSP leaders proudly declared that “the HSP never concealed its ties to the NDH, 10 April, or the Ustaša movement.”⁵²

Although the extreme right-wing centered around the HSP eventually splintered into several parties due to internal squabbling, during the early 1990s there was a clear sense among the followers of this political option that the break-up of Yugoslavia would permit the resurrection of the NDH. While Tudjman was still discussing the confederation option as a solution to the Yugoslav crisis, the HSP was energetically demanding an independent Croatia in its publications.⁵³ Furthermore, the party leadership called for a Greater Croatia within its “true ethnic borders,” i.e., that Bosnia-Herzegovina should be absorbed into the Croatian state and that the eastern border would be formed by the “natural” boundary of the Drina River.⁵⁴ According to Krešimir Pavelić, Paraga prepared a “Charter on the Renewal and Establishment of the NDH” that was read in Ljubuško (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and “made absolutely clear that the newly established Croatian state was a continuation of the Independent State of Croatia that ceased to exist in 1945.”⁵⁵ This was even more radical than Tudjman’s model of a Greater Croatia, which was based on the Banovina Hrvatska of 1939 and included only those regions with Croat populations, such as western Herzegovina and the Posavina region. The cover of *Hrvatsko pravo*, the HSP’s official newspaper, asked readers to choose between a map of Croatia during the NDH (and presumably under HSP rule), and a map of Croatia carved up by Serbian occupiers that was shown next to a picture of Tudjman.⁵⁶ Similar to the role played by the extremist Serbian Radical Party in Milošević’s Serbia, the HSP became one of Tudjman’s sharpest critics for not taking the

⁵⁰ Quoted in Živko Gruden, *Perači crnih košulja: Kronika novopovijesti, 1990–2000* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 2001), p. 36. For journalist Živko Gruden, this implied the return of racial laws and anti-Semitic legislation which had existed during the NDH.

⁵¹ *Novi list* (7 April 1990), p. 18. Paraga also denied any connection between his HSP and the Ustaša in interviews with foreign journalists. See *St. Petersburg Times* (11 October 1991), p. 2A.

⁵² *Hrvatsko pravo* (Zagreb), 20 December 1991, p. 10.

⁵³ *Hrvatsko pravo* (October 1991), p. 2. Paraga and Paradžik also insisted on using the name “Nezavisna država Hrvatska” for the new state, bizarrely denying that it had any connection to the NDH.

⁵⁴ Interview with Dobroslav Paraga, *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 November 1991), p. 10.

⁵⁵ Pavelić, *HSP*, pp. 83–84. The event in Ljubuško took place on 13 June 1991.

⁵⁶ *Hrvatsko pravo* (January-February 1993), cover.

nationalist project far enough, although could serve as an ally (or scapegoat for extreme nationalism) when necessary.

Despite the glorification of the Ustaše and the NDH, the new Croatian state, according to Paraga, “had to have a democratic, multiparty, parliamentary system.”⁵⁷ This paradox of the HSP’s position, i.e., venerating the Ustaše on one hand while simultaneously excising all of the movement’s associations with totalitarianism, fascism, Nazism, death camps, and murderous policy against non-Croats and opponents of the regime on the other hand, lies at the crux of the political rehabilitation of the Ustaše in the 1990s. The HSP leaders simply denied that the Ustaše were either fascists or Nazis.

This view of World War Two was espoused by the Croat political emigration in books and periodicals published abroad, which became readily available in Croatia after 1990.⁵⁸ Mark Biondich has analyzed how the “divided memory of World War Two” contributed to the minimizing of Ustaše crimes and blaming Croatian participation in the Holocaust exclusively on the German influence over the NDH.⁵⁹ For example, the founders of the HOP party even went so far as to allege that “the Jews in the NDH fared better than in any other European country that was involved in the war,” in spite of the fact that out of 40,000 Jews in the NDH, only 9,000 survived World War Two.⁶⁰ They also claimed that the massive crimes committed by the NDH were “accidents of war which were not the fault of Croatia, but of Germany.”⁶¹ The notion that the Ustaše fought solely for “Croatian freedom and independence,”⁶² and not as willing allies of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, is untenable in light of the documented crimes committed by the Pavelić regime and the history of anti-Semitism in the Croatian radical right press before 1941.⁶³

There is no doubt that the Ustaše had fought for an independent Croatia, and that many Croats initially supported the NDH because it meant an end to oppressive rule from Belgrade. As historian Bilandžić observed, “during the 1991–1992 phase of the war, among the consciousness of part of the population the suppressed memory of Ustaša ideology was awakened, an ideology which had always claimed that Serbs and Yugoslavia were the main enemies of Croatian independence.”⁶⁴ However, the Ustaše also installed a brutal dictatorship which openly adopted the methods and ideology of its Axis allies. Those seeking to rehabilitate the Ustaše justify the alliance with fascist and

⁵⁷ *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 November 1991), p. 10.

⁵⁸ See David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centered Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 135–138; and Mario Jareb, “Problematika Nezavisne Države Hrvatske u povijesnoj literaturi od 1990. do 1995. godine,” in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. 28, nos. 1–2 (1996), pp. 199–215.

⁵⁹ Mark Biondich, “We Were Defending the State: Nationalism, Myth, and Memory in 20th-Century Croatia,” in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), p. ?

⁶⁰ *Globus* (1 December 1995), p. 16. For a detailed history of the NDH’s treatment of Jews, see Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2001).

⁶¹ *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (Zagreb), May 1996, p. 12.

⁶² Interview with Anto Djapić, *Hrvatsko pravo* (20 December 1991), p. 10.

⁶³ Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, passim.; Ramet, “The NDH – An Introduction,” pp. 402–403; and Ivo Goldstein, “Antisemitizam u Hrvatskoj,” in Ognjen Kraus, ed., *Antisemitizam, holokaust, antifašizam* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 1996), pp. 12–53.

⁶⁴ Bilandžić, *Povijest izbliza*, p. 495.

Nazi powers because, as Ivan Grdešić has concluded in his study on the radical right in Croatia, they have

the conviction that the Croatian independent state deserves the enduring of any sacrifices and the bearing of any hardship, and that any means to accomplish the “holy” aim of Croatian national independence is allowed...It is not important what type of political system, what type of government is established but only the fact that there is the state.⁶⁵

The fetishization of the state was part of the HDZ's platform as well, as evidenced by the engraving on Tudjman's monolithic grave in Mirogoj Cemetery: “Always and everything for Croatia; our sole and eternal Croatia under no circumstances.”

By characterizing the Ustaše only as the creators of an independent Croatian state, the HSP leadership reasoned there was no shame in celebrating the symbols, dates, and individuals associated with that movement. While admitting “there were mistakes and some unnecessary violence,” Paraga insisted “the Ustaša regime was neither fascist nor Nazi.”⁶⁶ Djapić, who served as vice-president of the party in the early 1990s, told an interviewer that

if an Ustaša means being a fascist or a Nazi, then we are not Ustaše, but if an Ustaša means being a Croatian soldier and a fighter for an independent Croatian state, then we Rightists [*pravaši*] are all Ustaše and we are proud of it. It is with pleasure and honor that we greet each other with *Za dom spremni* to restore the image and respect to that Croatian soldier who forty-five years ago fought for the same thing Croatian soldiers fight for today – for a Croatian state.⁶⁷

In the HSP's press, the association between fascism and the Ustaše was repeatedly attributed to the Greater Serbian lobby or anti-Croat groups in Paris, London, Moscow, and Washington.⁶⁸ The stripping of the Ustaša movement's ideological orientation was not limited to the HSP; some HDZ deputies held similar views of the Pavelić regime. For example, Djuro Perica asserted that since “no fascist party existed in the NDH,” the “Ustaša movement was not fascist,” a conclusion that disregards the fact that all political parties were illegal from 1941–1945.⁶⁹

Whereas the restored HSP did not exhibit any anti-Semitism in the 1990s, which Djapić went to great pains to emphasize in the “documentary” *Korijeni za budućnost*, its position that Serbs were the greatest enemy of Croatia was made abundantly clear. Paraga even denied that Serbs existed in Croatia, stating that “the Serbian nation is not present in Croatia, they [Serbs] can only be Croatian citizens, which they in fact are, and if they do not want to be, then they need to leave Croatia.”⁷⁰ He also boasted in one interview of forming an “anti-Greater Serbian coalition,” whose goal was to “return Serbia's

⁶⁵ Ivan Grdešić, “The Radical Right in Croatia and Its Constituency,” in Sabrina P. Ramet, ed., *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p. 180.

⁶⁶ *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 November 1991), p. 10.

⁶⁷ *Hrvatsko pravo* (20 December 1991), p. 11.

⁶⁸ *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 September 1992), p. 15.

⁶⁹ *Panorama* (10 May 1995), p. 23.

⁷⁰ *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 November 1991), p. 9.

borders to those of the Belgrade *pašaluk*,” a reference to the territorial unit encompassing the region around Belgrade under Ottoman rule.⁷¹ This was no longer a defense of Croatia, but an aggressive revision of Serbia’s borders. Djapić suggested that the HSP “would establish a Croatian Orthodox Church, gathering those Orthodox individuals who identify themselves as Croats,” a move which had been attempted by Pavelić in the summer of 1942 as a way to separate Croatian Serbs (who were predominately Orthodox) from the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church.⁷² Whereas this may have only been wartime rhetoric, it left little room for doubt what would happen to Serbs in a Croatia ruled by the HSP.

HOS: A Militia in Black Shirts

Even though the HSP did not participate in the first elections in the spring of 1990, it achieved widespread recognition for activities outside of the political arena. In June 1991, as the JNA and rebel Croatian Serbs backed by Milošević attacked dozens of Croatian cities and towns, Paraga and Paradžik founded a paramilitary wing of their party, the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS – *Hrvatske obrambene snage*), which also sported Ustaša imagery. At the height of its activity in Croatia, Paraga told foreign reporters that HOS had between 10,000 and 15,000 men under arms, although the true number was probably far less.⁷³

Whereas the Serbian media characterized all Croats as Ustaše, many volunteers in HOS openly called themselves Ustaše and wore black uniforms emblazoned with Ustaša symbols.⁷⁴ Even their name was a reference to the unified military units of the NDH, the Croatian Armed Forces (*Hrvatske oružane snage*), formed in 1944. In 1991, when Croatia’s very existence was threatened by the JNA and Croatian Serb rebels, HOS volunteers played a crucial role in bolstering the fledgling military units being hastily mobilized by Tudjman’s government. Their bravery and vital contribution on the battlefield, such as the defense of Vukovar, was offset by excesses committed against civilians caught in the war zone or behind the front lines. Former defense minister Špegelj blamed paramilitary groups like HOS for pillaging, murder, and resurrecting the Ustaša movement.⁷⁵ The Serbian media had been sowing fear of Ustaše for months, and by the summer of 1991 Croatian soldiers in HOS units were actually dressing like, and claiming to be, Ustaše.

⁷¹ *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 September 1992), p. 15.

⁷² *Hrvatsko pravo* (20 December 1991), p. 10; Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Naklada P.I.P. Pavičić, 1994), pp. 113–118.

⁷³ *St. Petersburg Times* (11 October 1991), p. 2A; and *USA Today* (5 November 1991), p. 12A.

⁷⁴ Even though the HSP liked to promote the image of black-clad HOS soldiers, on the front lines members of HOS wore a variety of camouflaged uniforms, often mixing HOS, Ustaša, and Croatian National Guard (ZNG) insignia. See wartime archival photos from the Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentarski centar za Domovinski rat, fond 347 and fond 347a (August–November 1991, Vukovar front).

⁷⁵ Špegelj, *Sjećanja vojnika*, pp. 346–347. Anto Djapić denied that HOS was a paramilitary formation, and that only a few individual criminals were responsible for any possible crimes committed by HOS units. Interview with Anto Djapić, *Hrvatsko pravo* (20 December 1991), p. 10. One example was the killing of the Olujić family in Cerni near Vinkovci by five members of a HOS unit in February 1992. They were sentenced to a total of fifty-seven years in prison. See information on the trial at the website of *Centar za mir, nenasilje i ljudska prava*, www.centar-za-mir.hr/sudenjedetail.php?trialid=62&langid=1&status=E; *Jutarnji list* (28 March 2007), online at www.jutarnji.hr, and *Novi list* (15 February 2008), p. 4.

The HSP leadership openly admitted that their volunteers were displaying Ustaša insignia on their uniforms. Paraga stated in an interview that there was no shame in HOS wearing Ustaša symbols and using the greeting *Za dom spremni* (“Ready for the Homeland”).⁷⁶ The cover of a September 1992 issue of *Hrvatsko pravo*, the HSP’s official publication, featured a soldier in black wielding an automatic rifle, with the caption “Until we reach the Drina River, the Ustaša will wage war!”, alluding to the eastern border of the NDH.⁷⁷ Another issue had an article explaining that the HOS uniforms were black in honor of the Black Legion (*Crna legija*), a notorious Ustaša unit which had fought in Bosnia-Herzegovina during World War Two.⁷⁸

While the HSP had political reasons for adopting the iconography of the Ustaše, soldiers on the battlefield had different motivations. According to a journalist interviewing Croatian soldiers,

The boys in the war zone, who wear badges with the letter “U” and declare themselves as Ustaše, say that for them an Ustaša represents “the bravest Croatian fighter” and “a fighter for Croatia against Serbs and communism.” The guys in the muddy trenches experience the letter “U” or *Jure i Boban* [a song about the commanders of the Black Legion] as spitting in the face of the enemy, insolence which will enrage and terrify the enemy, who at this moment happen to be Serbs.⁷⁹

The Serbs fighting in Croatia also wore symbols from World War Two, namely the communist red star or the Četnik cockade, which likely encouraged Croatian soldiers to adopt the imagery of the Partisans’ and Četniks’ enemies, i.e., the Ustaše. While the black-clad HOS troops certainly did spread fear among Serbs, the HSP’s armed forces also threatened the unity of the Croatian Army.

The fall of Vukovar in November 1991 served as a pretext for Tudjman to begin dismantling the HOS organization in Croatia and incorporate its volunteers into the regular Croatian Army. Paraga refused to merge his units with the forces controlled by the Croatian government, and had men install a cannon in front of their headquarters in the center of Zagreb, infuriating Tudjman.⁸⁰ The Croatian president had Paraga, along with Mile Dedaković “Jastreb”, who had led the defense of Vukovar during most of the JNA’s siege of the city (September–November 1991), arrested on charges of fomenting an armed rebellion and terrorism, which were eventually dropped because of a lack of evidence.⁸¹ Tudjman also blamed HOS for the revival of Ustaša symbols, although in the opinion of British journalist Marcus Tanner, the “arrests were signs of Tudjman’s grave political weakness, not of his resolve to defend Croatia against the threat of

⁷⁶ Interview with Dobroslav Paraga, *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 November 1991), pp. 9–10.

⁷⁷ *Hrvatsko pravo* (5 September 1992), cover.

⁷⁸ *Hrvatsko pravo* (July–August 1993), p. 41. The article also showed an illustration of HOS insignia which was in the shape of a “U” with the words “Ready for the Home”, “NDH-1941, HOS-1990”, and “10 April”, the latter being the date when the NDH was established. Jure Francetić, the first commander of the Black Legion, was featured on the back cover of a 1993 issue of the paper. *Hrvatsko pravo* (January–February 1993), back cover.

⁷⁹ Ines Sabalić, quoted in Reana Senjković, *Lica društva, lica države* (Zagreb: Nova etnografija, 2002), p. 29.

⁸⁰ Granić, *Vanjska politika*, p. 28.

⁸¹ *Los Angeles Times* (23 November 1991), p. 17.

political extremism.”⁸² Tudjman had thus created the atmosphere which allowed pro-Ustaša groups to be active and welcomed the contribution of organizations such as HOS on the front lines, but was willing to sacrifice them when politically convenient.

The legal repression against the HSP, which included censorship of the party’s press, was accompanied by some unresolved murders of its members. On 21 September 1991, Ante Paradžik, one of the founders of the revived HSP and its vice-president, was killed at a police checkpoint on the outskirts of Zagreb.⁸³ The following year, as HOS volunteers fought alongside the Bosnian Army in the conflict engulfing Bosnia-Herzegovina, the commander of HOS, Blaž Kraljević, was killed along with eight other HOS soldiers in an ambush by members of the Croatian Defense Council (HVO – *Hrvatsko vijeće obrane*) near Mostar. According to Paraga and other HSP members, the assassination was planned by Tudjman and Šušak as a prelude to the Croatian-Muslim conflict and carving out the Herceg-Bosna para-state.⁸⁴

Despite the heated atmosphere of wartime and an increase of nationalism in Croatia in the early 1990s, the extremism of the HSP was never palatable to a majority of Croatian voters at either the local or national level. In 1992, the HSP received 7.1 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections, while Paraga earned 5.37 percent in presidential elections.⁸⁵ In subsequent elections the HSP barely received the minimum number of votes to enter the parliament – 5.0 percent in 1995, and 5.2 percent (while in a coalition with the Croatian Christian Democratic Union) in 2000.⁸⁶ The HDZ, encompassing both its moderate and hard-line factions, appealed to a much broader segment of voters, for whom the HSP in the 1990s did not adequately address the most important social and economic issues. Even after its defeat in the 2000 elections, the HDZ remained the strongest nationalist party in Croatia, as many Croats hold it to be responsible for the creation of the modern independent state.

Battered by Tudjman’s repression against the party in 1991–1992, the HSP was also weakened by internal disputes. By 2000 there were four “rightist” parties and several other smaller parties with similar political views on the Ustaša past. In December 1992, Ivan Gabelica, who was never a member of HSP, formed the Pure Croatian Party of Rights (HČSP – *Hrvatska čista stranka prava*). According to the party website, HČSP members are the true inheritors of Starčević’s HSP, and even though they briefly aligned with the HSP in the mid-1990s, differences among the leadership brought that coalition to an end.⁸⁷ In 1994, Paraga lost an internal party struggle with Djapić over the presidency of the HSP, and subsequently a legal battle for rights to the HSP name. He formed HSP-1861 (a reference to the date when Starčević founded the original HSP) in May 1995, and was a virulent critic of both Tudjman and his erstwhile associate Djapić. Paraga and Djapić, the latter most recently in his film *Korijeni za budućnost* (2007), continue to accuse one another of being responsible for the HSP’s use of Ustaša symbols, even though both seemed to equally embrace the iconography of the NDH at one time.

⁸² Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2001), p. 267.

⁸³ *Los Angeles Times* (24 September 1991), p. 14; and *Chicago Tribune* (7 October 1991), p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Globus* (22 August 1997), pp. 30–31.

⁸⁵ Goldstein, *Hrvatska povijest*, pp. 458–459.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

⁸⁷ www.hcsp.hr/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=3&page=1
. The HČSP flag includes the phrase *Za dom spremni* under its coat of arms.

Ante Prkačin, who commanded HOS units in Croatia and Bosnia, formed New Croatia (NH – *Nova Hrvatska*) in 1999, and ran in the 2000 presidential elections (he received 0.28 percent of the votes in the first round). Krešimir Pavelić, another earlier member of the HSP, became president of the Croatian Movement for Rights (HPP – *Hrvatski pravaški pokret*) in 2000, which was a result of the merging of several smaller parties. Mladen Shwartz's New Croatian Right (NHD – *Nova hrvatska desnica*) and the Croatian Christian Democratic Union (HKDU – *Hrvatska kršćanska demokratska unija*) were not splinter groups from the HSP, but likewise drew inspiration from Pavelić and the Ustaše. The large number of right-wing parties established in the 1990s did not reflect an increase in extremism, but rather the splintering of the most extreme nationalists as the HDZ, and even the HSP after 2000, began to distance themselves from the radical positions of the early 1990s.

International Criticism and a Symbolic Shift

Although recognized internationally in January 1992, Croatia continued to be plagued by accusations of fascist tendencies and revisionism of World War Two history. Tudjman's ambiguous position on the Ustaše was a result of his efforts to satisfy both the pro-Ustaša Croatian emigration, who were critical for financing and supporting his nationalist project, and the international community, which was shocked at the resurgence of Ustaša iconography and ideas in Croatia. As discussed above, Tudjman's national reconciliation policy sought to unite Croats who had been on both the losing and winning sides of World War Two with the common goal of creating an independent Croatia. This position alienated many Croatian Serbs and allowed openly pro-Ustaša parties such as the HSP to function without restrictions. While Croatia's image abroad was never as tarnished as Serbian propaganda sought to make it, Tudjman's flirting with fascism was frequently commented upon in the media and hurt Croatia's international standing. Responding to external pressure and criticism on his positions regarding the NDH, Tudjman gradually worked to restrain the pro-Ustaša elements in Croatia by the mid-1990s, although the black shirts, large "U" symbols, and fascist salutes did not disappear.

Whereas in Croatia the Ustaša revival was primarily experienced as anti-Serbian and a reaction to Yugoslav communism and Milošević's Greater Serbian project, internationally many observers saw it as Croatian anti-Semitism. Tudjman's own personality and early diplomatic gaffs made a bad impression on Western leaders, which influenced Croatia's image in the international community.⁸⁸ Further damage was done when foreign journalists quoted Tudjman as saying that he was happy that his wife was not a Serb or a Jew.⁸⁹ His book, *Bespuća povjesne zbiljnosti (Wastelands of Historical Reality [1989])*, which included negative portrayals of Jews in the Jasenovac concentration camp and questioned the number of victims in the Holocaust and in the NDH, angered the Jewish community in Croatia and gained him the reputation of being an anti-Semite in Israel.⁹⁰ In February 1994, Tudjman apologized to the B'nai B'rith organization in Zagreb,

⁸⁸ Albert Bing, "Hrvatska u međunarodnoj zajednici," in Zdenko Radelić, et al., *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), pp. 334–335.

⁸⁹ *New York Times* (22 November 1991), p. A31.

⁹⁰ Viktor Ivančić, *Točka na U: Slučaj Šakić–anatomija jednog skandala* (Split: Feral Tribune, 2000), pp. 113–130.

promising to remove the most controversial segments of his book in the English edition, published as *Horrors of War: Historical Reality and Philosophy* (1996).⁹¹

Despite some tentative steps domestically to improve his image vis-à-vis the Ustaša past, Tudjman's international standing suffered after the war in the former Yugoslavia came to a formal end with the Dayton Peace Accord due to his increasingly authoritarian style of government, obstruction of Serb refugee returns, reluctance to cooperate with The Hague, and continued tolerance of Ustaša rehabilitation, the latter which proved to be a major stumbling block in the establishment of formal relations with Israel. It was not until August 1997 that Croatia officially apologized to the Jewish people for the crimes committed by the NDH, which opened the path for full diplomatic relations between Croatia and Israel.⁹² Hrvoje Šarinić, Tudjman's close advisor who led the secret talks with Israeli representatives in Budapest, issued the apology personally, although he also insisted that "from the beginning the Croatian government did not flirt with the idea of an Ustaša state or the Ustaše as a movement."⁹³ A prominent political analyst commended the move as "the first time official Croatia abolished the NDH and Ustaša ideas as a part of the *acceptable* history of the Croatian people," while historian Ivo Goldstein noted that Croatia still needed considerably more "de-Ustašization" in order to join the civilized European world.⁹⁴

The arrival of Israel's first ambassador to Croatia in April 1998 prompted Tudjman to once again publicly speak out against the NDH. He insisted that "the Croatian public, both during World War Two and today, as well as the government and me personally, condemn the crimes committed by the Ustaša government not only against Jews, but against democratic Croats and members of other nationalities in the NDH."⁹⁵ Tudjman's statements coincided with the revelation that Dinko Šakić, a former commander of the Jasenovac camp, had been located in Argentina, sparking a debate over whether or not to demand his extradition to Croatia. Although the HDZ initially was silent on the case, by June 1998 Šakić was transferred to Croatia, put on trial, and sentenced to twenty years in prison in October 1999.⁹⁶ The trial indicated that Tudjman had realized the damage his ambiguous position on the Ustaša past had caused for Croatia internationally, and showed that Croatia was more willing to address the crimes of the past.

In contrast to Tudjman's increasing efforts to explicitly distance himself and the HDZ from the Ustaše regime, the HSP, led by Djapić after 1994, continued to "flirt" with the Ustaša legacy. On 10 April 1997, Djapić used the fifty-seventh anniversary of the founding of the NDH to campaign for local elections, prompting the *New York Times* to chastise Croatia for its "dangerous extremism."⁹⁷ The newspaper's correspondent noted the HSP openly used Ustaša iconography during its rally in Split, and interviewed the editor of the independent weekly *Feral Tribune*, who revealed that "these neo-fascist

⁹¹ *San Francisco Examiner* (15 February 1994), p. A11.

⁹² *New York Times* (23 August 1997), p. 14.

⁹³ *Globus* (29 August 1997), p. 6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 10. A poll conducted by *Globus* found that 68.4 percent of respondents supported the official Croatian apology for crimes against Jews during the NDH, while 15.2 percent were opposed.

⁹⁵ *Novi list* (23 April 1998), p. 4.

⁹⁶ The controversies surrounding the trial are discussed in Ivančić's book *Točka na U*.

⁹⁷ *New York Times* (28 April 1997), p. A14.

groups, protected by the state, are ready to use violence against their critics.”⁹⁸ During the debate over Šakić, one leading HSP deputy, Miroslav Rožić, suggested that the former Ustaša death camp commander should be extradited to Croatia “only so that the law for amnesty could be applied to him.”⁹⁹ Despite Tudjman’s public statements against the NDH, as noted above, the HDZ formed coalitions with the HSP at the local level, essentially condoning that party’s extremism and symbolism. Milošević’s ruling Socialist Party of Serbia was likewise willing to enter into coalitions with right wing extremist parties like Vojislav Šešelj’s Serbian Radical Party and Vuk Drašković’s Serbian Renewal Movement, which glorified the Četniks and had been some of Milošević’s most vocal opponents in the early 1990s.¹⁰⁰

The HSP convincingly became the strongest right-wing party by the mid-1990s, gathering those followers who sought a nationalist alternative to the ruling HDZ. It was particularly effective at mobilizing veterans and former refugees (both among Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina and those who were internally displaced), emphasizing its opposition to Serb returns, cooperation with the ICTY, and normalizing relations with Serbia. HSP rallies in regions with mixed ethnic populations were often a provocation in the immediate postwar period. Milan Djukić, the president of the Serbian National Party, even demanded that the parliament ban the HSP for spreading neo-Ustaša ideas and the “anti-Constitutional nature of its program and activities.”¹⁰¹ For example, during an April 1998 rally in the town of Dvor (which had been predominately populated by Serbs prior to the war), the Deputy Minister of the Interior specifically forbade the HSP to use any Ustaša symbols and the greeting *Za dom spremni*, which Djapić nevertheless uttered following his speech criticizing “Serb returnees, civic orientation, coexistence, multiculturalism, and tolerance.”¹⁰² In Knin the following year, local HSP members even threatened to use “terrorist methods” in order to prevent Serbs from returning to their homes currently occupied by Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.¹⁰³

But in spite of the clear connections with the Ustaša movement and an anti-Serb political platform, by the late 1990s Djapić realized that further open association with a pro-fascist regime was going to hinder the HSP’s chances for participation in any future Croatian government that wanted to have good relations with the EU. Responding to calls from a left-leaning regional party, the Istrian Democratic Parliament, to institute a law against Ustaša ideas (*deustašizacija*) in 1998, Djapić vehemently denied that the HSP had anything to do the Ustaša regime or its symbols.¹⁰⁴ Djapić’s erstwhile associate Krešimir Pavelić also claimed that “there are no Ustaše in Croatia that could be connected to fascism, so there is no need for an anti-Ustaša law.”¹⁰⁵ The HSP did seem to be making a conscious effort to reign in the public display of symbols related to the NDH, so that during a speech in front of a thousand supporters in Zagreb in the spring of 1998, reporters noted that no Ustaša iconography was visible.¹⁰⁶ However,

⁹⁸ *New York Times* (12 April 1997), p. 3.

⁹⁹ *Novi list* (10 April 1998), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ See Pavlaković, “Serbia Transformed?,” p. 24.

¹⁰¹ *Vjesnik* (16 June 2000), p. 5. For Djukić and other ethnic Serbs in his party, the law against Ustaša ideas would condemn any events that stimulate racial and ethnic hatred.

¹⁰² *Novi list* (9 April 1998), p. 4.

¹⁰³ *Novi list* (6 August 1999), p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Novi list* (10 April 1998), p. 9. The debate over whether or not to legally ban Ustaša symbols continues at the time of this writing.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Novi list* (20 April 1998), p. 4.

fascist salutes, Ustaša songs, and *Za dom spremni*, as well as an anti-Serb rhetoric, remained part of the HSP public repertoire.

Conclusion: An Antifascist Croatia towards the EU

Presidential and parliamentary elections in early 2000, following the death of Franjo Tuđman the previous December, were a significant turning point in Croatian history and clearly marked the end of an era. The left-leaning coalition which won the elections, led by Ivica Račan's reformed communists in the Social Democratic Party, and President Stjepan Mesić inaugurated a more pro-European foreign policy which included greater cooperation with The Hague tribunal, promises to facilitate the return of Croatian Serbs, and efforts to normalize relations with neighboring countries, namely Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The new government featured parties that had a much clearer antifascist orientation than the former ruling HDZ, and within months both domestic and international observers commented that the political atmosphere had changed dramatically.¹⁰⁷

While Croatia's political leadership made crucial reforms that quickly resulted in progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration (notably the opening of negotiations for EU and NATO membership), ideological divisions in Croatian society remained acute and debates over the World War Two legacy dominated public discourse. Reflecting on Tuđman's idea in the early 1990s to overcome those historical divides, historian Bilandžić observed that

It appears the platform of national reconciliation did not succeed. Conflicts between so-called Partisans and so-called Ustaše have flared up. The "Partisans" are convinced that they saved Croatia from Četniks and an evil fate which would have befallen the Croatian people if the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had not been defeated, while those nostalgic for the Ustaše accuse the antifascists of being criminals and servants of Belgrade.¹⁰⁸

The Square of the Victims of Fascism in Zagreb, the site of a bloody melee between "antifascists" and "anticommunists" in the spring of 1999, had its name restored, President Mesić became the first Croatian president to oversee commemorations for Victory over Fascism Day and visit Israel, textbooks were rewritten to no longer relativize Ustaša crimes, and antifascism and antifascists were no longer demonized in public to the degree that they were in the 1990s.¹⁰⁹ Paradoxically, the shift in official Croatian attitudes towards the Ustaše only provoked the use of pro-fascist symbols among those segments of society opposed to the new political course in the country. Ustaša symbols were present at public demonstrations protesting cooperation with war crimes tribunals, popular singer Marko Perković Thompson stirred controversy with the content of his songs and tolerance of Ustaša iconography at his concerts, monuments to members of the NDH regime were erected, and Ustaša graffiti continued to be common throughout Croatia.

¹⁰⁷ For example, see Tim Judah's article "Croatia Reborn" in *The New York Review of Books* (10 August 2000), pp. 20–23.

¹⁰⁸ Bilandžić, *Povijest izbliza*, p. 473.

¹⁰⁹ *Vjesnik* (11 May 1999), p. 3; *Radio Free Europe Balkan Report*, vol. 4, no. 35 (12 May 2000), online at www.rferl.org.

Most importantly, however, was that open association with the Ustaše was being purged from the political arena, not because of proposals for legal measures to ban totalitarian symbols, but because of decisions by political elites who realized their continued flirting with fascism would harm their interests as Croatia moved forward towards European integration. At the HSP's fourth party convention in February 2001, Djapić announced that the party was definitively distancing itself from Ustaša symbols which it had used to mobilize Croats during the war. "We want to remove all barriers which obstruct the HSP's transformation from a wartime party into a modern European right-wing party," Djapić told 1,200 gathered HSP members, "as well as to attract those voters who were reluctant to give their votes to our party because the [Ustaša] symbols bothered them."¹¹⁰ The HSP adopted the wolf as their new symbol, and agreed that at future meetings only official symbols of the party, which included those of HOS from the 1990s, could be displayed.

Most political parties welcomed the HSP's decision to move away from the Ustaša legacy, especially those on the left who welcomed the move as "in the interest of Croatia."¹¹¹ Others on the right, such as members of the HČSP, refused to renounce connections with the Ustaše, arguing that "the NDH was the true desire of the Croatian people for a free and independent Croatian state."¹¹² Meanwhile, the change in the HSP's iconography resulted in a shift in politics; the party increasingly focused on serious social and economic issues, including privatization, drug abuse, corruption, and the environment, which were of more interest to the majority of citizens who no longer wanted politicians to endlessly debate historical issues. Djapić also retracted earlier HSP claims on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, recognizing it as a sovereign state. Despite a steady rise in popularity since 2000, the HSP suffered a debacle during the 2007 parliamentary elections, winning only one seat in the *Sabor*, a catastrophic defeat that was blamed on the resignation of several prominent HSP deputies, Djapić's political disputes in Osijek (where he had served as mayor), and an effective election campaign by the HDZ.

The HDZ had also significantly changed since the Tudjman era. A more moderate faction in the HDZ took power in the party after the electoral defeat in 2000, rejecting the more hard-line members who were close to Šušak and his policies towards Bosnia-Herzegovina. Under Ivo Sanader, the HDZ claimed to "be against all extremism and radicalism, condemning both Ustaša ideas and communism," and promoted a more pro-European policy than under Tudjman.¹¹³ The new, "reformed" HDZ took power after parliamentary elections in 2003, relying on support from the leading Croatian Serb party, but interestingly refusing the HSP as a coalition partner despite pre-election negotiations with Djapić.

Contemporary Croatian politics has thus come a long way from the 1990s, when nationalism, including its most extreme forms, dominated the political arena. Although fascism as an ideology never had a serious level of support in the country, symbols, rhetoric, and even certain policies vis-à-vis Croatia's Serbs of the pro-fascist Ustaše had

¹¹⁰ *Vjesnik* (25 February 2001), p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Novi list* (22 September 2003), p. 8.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Novi list* (18 June 2007), p. 5. At the HDZ party conference held in early July 2007, Sanader and a number of other HDZ leaders once again insisted that modern Croatia had no reason to look at the state created in 1941, but to celebrate the independence gained after 1991. *Jutarnji list* (2 July 2007), p. 3.

returned to Croatia during its struggle for independence from Yugoslavia. Whereas Tudjman's position on the Ustaše was at times ambiguous, which amounted to toleration of the movement's rehabilitation, other political actors openly associated themselves with the NDH regime. As discussed in this chapter, by characterizing the Ustaše solely as Croatian nationalists, those seeking to cast them in a positive light attempted to whitewash history of the crimes committed against Serbs and other opponents of the regime, which has threatened the development of a democratic, tolerant, and multiethnic Croatian society. Some groups continue to use Ustaša symbols, deny the totalitarian and pro-fascist nature of the NDH, and commemorate the Ustaša regime and its followers. However, Croatia's progress towards European integration has further marginalized extreme-right wing parties and convinced all serious political actors to abandon association with the Ustaša past, enabling Croatia to come to terms with its difficult history without the politicization of the 1990s.

Summary

Contemporary Croatian politics has thus come a long way from the 1990s, when nationalism, including its most extreme forms, dominated the political arena. Although fascism as an ideology never had a serious level of support in the country, symbols, rhetoric, and even certain policies vis-à-vis Croatia's Serbs of the pro-fascist Ustaše had returned to Croatia during its struggle for independence from Yugoslavia. Whereas President Franjo Tudjman's position on the Ustaše was at times ambiguous, which amounted to toleration of the movement's rehabilitation, other political actors openly associated themselves with the NDH regime. As discussed in this article, by characterizing the Ustaše solely as Croatian nationalists, those seeking to cast them in a positive light attempted to whitewash history of the crimes committed against Serbs and other opponents of the regime, which has threatened the development of a democratic, tolerant, and multiethnic Croatian society. Some groups continue to use Ustaša symbols, deny the totalitarian and pro-fascist nature of the NDH, and commemorate the Ustaša regime and its followers. However, Croatia's progress towards European integration has further marginalized extreme-right wing parties and convinced all serious political actors to abandon association with the Ustaša past, enabling Croatia to come to terms with its difficult history without the politicization of the 1990s.