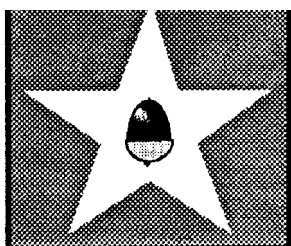


Conflict Studies Research Centre

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**Croatia:
Three Elections
and a Funeral**

June 2000



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REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Three Elections and a Funeral The Dawn of Democracy at the Millennial Turn?

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REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Three Elections and a Funeral **The Dawn of Democracy** **at the Millennial Turn?**

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Introduction

Croatia's passage into the new millennium was marked by the death, on 10 December 1999, of the self-proclaimed "Father of the Nation", President Dr Franjo Tuđman; by make or break Parliamentary Elections, held on 3 January 2000, which secured the crushing defeat of the former president's ruling Croatian Democratic Union, yielded victory for an alliance of the six mainstream opposition parties, and ushered in a new coalition government strong enough to implement far-reaching reform; and by two rounds, on 24 January and 7 February, of Presidential Elections which resulted in a surprising and spectacular victory for the charismatic Stipe Mesić, Yugoslavia's last president, nonetheless considered by many Croats at the start of the campaign as an outsider, a man from the past. These turn of the century events are viewed as beneficial for the development of genuine democracy in the newly independent state, as heralding the dawn of a vibrant "Democroatia", and thus smoothing the way for the country's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. This paper reviews the events and affirms - albeit cautiously - such positive hopes for the future.

President Tuđman Laid to Rest

Born in 1922, Franjo Tuđman fought with Tito's partisans, was promoted colonel at the age of 23, became Yugoslavia's youngest general at 38, and was later appointed Chief Political Commissar by Tito. A revisionist historian, Dr Tuđman was convinced that official estimates of 600,000 Serbs, Jews and Gypsies massacred by the Croats in the wartime Ustaše concentration camp at Jasenovac and elsewhere were a gross exaggeration. He insisted that the real figure was no more than 70,000 and proclaimed that a great historical injustice had been perpetrated on Croatia. Tuđman was one of the founders of the Croatian nationalist movement known as Maspok (masovni pokret/mass movement) which, during the "Croatian Spring" of 1971, called for greater economic autonomy and for constitutional reform to loosen Croatia's ties to Yugoslavia. Tito's crackdown was harsh; he crushed the movement utterly: its leaders were 'purged', the Croatian cultural organisation Matica Hrvatska was dismantled, Croat dissidents fled Yugoslavia in droves, and Tuđman was twice jailed. For nearly twenty years Yugoslavia's second largest republic - mute, cowed, fearful and, above all, resentful - was known as the "Silent Republic", and the brooding Tuđman, though he received preferential treatment both in prison and outside it, remained a political outcast. Even though he was considered a dissident under communism, Tuđman was allowed to have a passport

on which he travelled extensively in the 1980s, establishing links with, and above all extracting financial backing from, the highly politicized Croatian diaspora.

Tudjman's party, the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ), was founded in 1989. At the first party conference, attended by many Croatian émigrés, and held in Zagreb in February 1990 at a time when Milošević was whipping up national hysteria and ethnic hatred, Franjo Tudjman (election slogan: 'God in the Heavens and Tudjman in the Homelands') promised to deliver Croatian statehood and to foster Croatia's spiritual rebirth. The HDZ won an absolute majority of mandates in the first multi-party elections held in April 1990 - 205 of the parliament's 356 seats to the reformed communists' 73. In May, Tudjman was inaugurated as the first democratically elected President of Croatia. The new "Christmas Constitution" of December 1990 proclaimed Croatian sovereignty, authority over armed forces, and the right to secede from the federation; it also changed the status of Serbs in Croatia from that of a "constituent nation" to a national minority. Moreover, Tudjman's rhetorical excesses revived bitter memories of the ultra-nationalist and virulently anti-Serb Ustaše regime (calling for one third of Serbs killed, one third expelled and one third converted to Catholicism) that ran the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) as a Nazi German puppet state during World War II. Ever ready to defend the wartime regime and to celebrate its president, Ante Pavelić, as a Croat patriot, Tudjman regarded the NDH as part of the historic aspirations of the Croatian people for an independent state.

Thanks to Tudjman, Croatia achieved its dream of statehood. The declaration of independence was made on 25 June 1991 and it was recognised by the international community in January 1992, by which time, however, as a result of the descent into ethnic conflict in disintegrating Yugoslavia about a third of Croatian territory was in the hands of the Croatian Serbs.

"Thank God my wife is not a Jew or a Serb", Tudjman once remarked. He also showed little regard for Bosnian Muslims. Tudjman believed that Bosnia-Herzegovina belonged to Croatia, calling the republic a "national state of the Croatian nation", while Muslims were, in fact, Croats who had accepted Islam. Warlords both, Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tudjman had plotted to seize and partition Bosnia at secret talks in Karadjordjevo already in March 1991. A twisted, messianic nationalist, Tudjman subsequently sought to realise his vision of a Greater Croatia at Bosnia's expense.

Tudjman's greatest moments of triumph perhaps followed the Croatian Army's lightning strikes (Operations Flash and Storm) in May and August 1995 which recaptured most of the territory that had been held by Croatian Serb rebels since 1991. "The Man who Wins" read the caption on the hundreds of posters depicting a jubilant, exultant Franjo Tudjman, displayed throughout the Republika Srpska Krajina that was no more. Hundreds of thousands of Croatian Serbs fled the Krajina rather than risk staying to live in their homes under Zagreb's rule. Parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for 1996, were brought forward to October 1995 so that Tudjman and the government could capitalise on the military victory. The elections reconfirmed the supremacy of the HDZ which captured 44% of the votes cast, and secured 75 of the 127 seats in parliament (see Annex A).

In the June 1997 presidential elections, characterised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as "fundamentally flawed" and "free but not fair", Tudjman won his third term as president with more than 61% of the vote (see Annex C). Never a great enthusiast for free speech, Tudjman had long since

clamped down on the independent media and stifled internal dissent, regarding the political opposition as "cattle with small teeth", mere "geese in the fog". After the elections, however, support for Tudjman and the HDZ fell sharply amid widespread allegations of corruption, cronyism and nepotism, particularly with regard to the privatisation of state-owned assets. (Tudjman believed that the nation's wealth should be concentrated in the hands of 200 families that were loyal to him and his party.) Croatia's economy was, in fact, in crisis: rising unemployment accompanied declining standards of living, especially for people on low or fixed incomes; a series of scandals unleashed a crisis of confidence in the banking sector; foreign debt amounted to \$9bn and the government saw fit to impose a 22% value added tax as ordinary Croats struggled to make ends meet.

As Tudjman wrestled with the problems of an ailing economy, the euphoria of independence was fading fast. To the considerable frustration of the international community, Tudjman's Croatia continued to renege on its promise made in the 1995 Dayton agreement to facilitate the return - little more than a trickle - of refugee Serbs. The HDZ's cosy relationship with Croat hardliners in Bosnia prolonged tensions and jeopardised international peace-making efforts in that shattered country. Zagreb's refusal to extradite indicted war criminals to The Hague was accompanied by speculation that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was moving closer to indicting Tudjman himself.

In the best of Bolshevik traditions, denial and deception enshrouded Tudjman's sickness and death. Upbeat reports on the president's health - "tiredness and a cold; Tudjman is running the country from the hospital" - were greeted with ever greater scepticism both in Croatia and abroad. (American doctors had discovered Tudjman's stomach cancer in November 1996, when details of his condition were leaked and reported on CNN.) Towards the end, rumours spread that the hospital-bound Tudjman was not alive; the announcement of the president's death came as no surprise.

During a three day period of national mourning the rhetoric of the ruling HDZ hailed Franjo Tudjman as the greatest son of the Croatian people, founder and first president of the Croatian state. Free transport was provided for mourners from provincial cities to travel to Zagreb, where - amid considerable pomp and ceremony - Tudjman was buried at Mirogoy Cemetery on 13 December 1999. "One funeral is worth 1,000 election rallies", wryly observed a spokesman for the political opposition, referring to the ruling party's appeals for a sympathy vote in honour of the late president. Croatia's international isolation was painfully evident at Tudjman's funeral, at which - with most western countries sending only their ambassadors - Turkey alone was represented by its head of state.

Many, probably most, Croats will indeed remember Tudjman as the man who made Croatia. But they will also remember him as a pompous tyrant whose twisted brand of nationalism showed he cared little for an open society and human rights. A lover of luxury and obsessed with the trappings of power, he succeeded, in his final years in power, in leading Croatia into international isolation, in wrecking his country's aspirations for prosperity, democratic development, and integration with the west. Croatia could hardly wait for life after Tudjman's death to begin.

Parliamentary Elections 2/3 January 2000

Background & Legislative Framework

Amid intense public and parliamentary debate on electoral reform throughout 1999, on 25 May the governing HDZ and the six mainstream opposition parties known as the "Opposition Six" signed an agreement to develop a consensus-based legislative framework for the upcoming parliamentary elections. This agreement also included a commitment to restructure Croatian Radio-Television (HRT) as a public broadcaster. With regard to this issue in particular, as well as many others, the HDZ and the Opposition Six were unable to agree on draft legislation and Parliament recessed for the summer without having adopted a new electoral law. On 29 October, with 74 votes for, 23 against, and 3 abstentions, Parliament finally passed the HDZ-designed Law on the Election of Representatives to the Croatian State Parliament. As had happened in the elections of 1995 and 1997, the ruling party changed the legal framework at the eleventh hour, and the opposition was not in favour.

The new law divided Croatia into 10 territorial constituencies with regional proportional representation of 14 seats each in the Sabor (Parliament) and a 5% threshold. This reorganization of electoral districts was clearly manipulative and intended to favour the HDZ. The capital Zagreb, for example, was divided into four constituencies in an attempt to break up the compact urban electorate and neutralize its dominant pro-opposition orientation.

A special constituency was established for the diaspora: ethnic Croats born abroad and with no permanent residence in Croatia, and often without any tangible connection to the country, are granted Croatian citizenship and the right to vote. The new legislation eliminated the fixed quota over-representation of these out-of-country voters, which amounted to 12 seats in the outgoing parliament. Instead, the number of parliamentary seats was to be determined by the average number of votes required to elect a representative in the 10 territorial constituencies. (There were to be 6 such seats in the new parliament.) Nonetheless, out-of-country voting and the representation of ethnic Croats resident abroad remained a highly controversial issue both with the opposition six and among the international community. The opposition recalled that, in 1995, the HDZ captured all 12 seats reserved for the diaspora. The international community pointed out that reserving special parliamentary seats for out-of-country voters is at variance with international norms; moreover, granting Croatian citizenship and franchise to ethnic Croats living in Bosnia and Herzegovina violates both the letter and the spirit of the Dayton Agreement. (Some three-quarters of Croatia's out-of-country voters reside in Bosnia and Herzegovina.)

The election law established a separate constituency of 5 seats for ethnic minorities, but reduced the Serb ethnic minority quota from 3 to 1. The continued existence of special parliamentary seats for national minorities allowed for the creation of separate ethnic voter registers, with the associated potential risk of intimidation and discrimination.

For the first time the new law introduced multiparty election commissions (at all levels), a move that increased public confidence in the electoral process. Also for the first time in Croatia, non-party domestic observers were permitted to monitor polling on election day.

The deteriorating health of President Tudjman following his hospitalisation in early November prevented him from officially calling elections by 21 November 1999 for the previously scheduled date of 22 December. According to Article 97 of the Croatian Constitution there are three cases in which the President's functions could be temporarily assumed by the Speaker of Parliament - death, resignation, or permanent incapacitation. On 24 November, Parliament met in extraordinary session and adopted, with 85 votes for and 28 against, a new constitutional law on the temporary inability of the President to carry out his duties. The governing HDZ was able to muster the 85 votes necessary to pass the constitutional law (a two-thirds majority) with the support of several members of right-wing and fringe parties, while attempts to reach a consensus with the opposition six failed. The next day, and following consultations with the President's medical advisers regarding circumstances which might support a declaration of temporary incapacitation, the government duly informed the Constitutional Court, which ruled confirming the President's temporary inability. On 26 November, the Speaker of Parliament, Dr Vlatko Pavletić, was proclaimed acting President for the duration of Tudjman's temporary incapacitation, in accordance with the terms of the new constitutional law. On 27 November, Dr Pavletić, in his capacity as acting President, called elections for the House of Representatives for 3 January 2000, with out-of-country voting to take place on 2 and 3 January.

The opposition parties had strongly objected to the election date proposed unanimously by the Presidency of the ruling HDZ, terming it "unacceptable". The European Union was "dismayed" at the news and "regretted that the elections [would] now ... take place on the Monday immediately after the New Year holiday weekend", for "such a polling day is not customary in established democracies and calls into question the government's commitment to free and fair elections."

Late on 10 December 1999, Dr Franjo Tudjman died and a three-day period of mourning was declared. The death of the Head of State occurred as the electoral campaign was about to begin and as the parties' candidate lists were about to be presented to the State Electoral Commission.

Political Parties and the Political Climate

Tudjman and the HDZ had enjoyed unchallenged power since the first multi-party elections held in 1990. The HDZ held the majority of seats in both Houses of Parliament (see Annexes A and B) and controlled the County Assemblies in all but four of Croatia's twenty counties, as well as the City Council in Zagreb.

Since 1998, six left-orientated/centrist opposition parties (the "Opposition Six") had been working to coordinate their views on electoral legislation and other major political issues with the aim of presenting a coherent alternative to the policies of the government and the party in power. The Opposition Six was composed of two blocs known as the "two plus four": the left-oriented Social Democratic Party (SDP) in formal coalition since August 1999 with the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSL); and the centrist, so-called Poreč Group (the Liberal Party/LS, the Croatian People's Party/HNS, and the Istrian Democratic Congress/IDS) which formed a coalition with the Croatian Peasants' Party/HSS in late September 1999. It was difficult to identify major policy issues on which the parties which made up the Opposition Six substantially differed. More than anything else, they were united in their goal of excluding the HDZ from power and in hopes of remaking the political system through constitutional reform. Since late 1995 the focus of the electorate had shifted markedly from wartime-era issues to social and economic concerns, like the

high rate of unemployment, non-payment of salaries, bank failures and disillusionment with the ailing welfare system and the highly politicized privatization process. The Opposition Six seemed set to benefit from the ever growing socio-economic discontent.

Right-wing parties included the Croatian Party of Right (HSP), in coalition with the Croatian Christian Democratic Union (HKDU), and a third party, the Croatian Pure Party of Right (HČSP). The right-wing bloc adopted a more radically nationalist platform than the HDZ but tended to vote in parliament with the party in power.

No less than 55 parties were competing in the 1999 parliamentary elections. A brief note on some of the more important of them may be found below.

Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)

Founded by Tudjman in 1989, the HDZ quickly became a mass movement and dominated Croatian politics for the next decade. Tudjman and the HDZ ousted the communists in 1990, won independence in 1991/92, and defeated rebel Serbs in 1995. There had been no change of government in Croatia since the fall of communism. From the very beginning the HDZ beat the patriotic drum and latterly regarded itself as the sole custodian of 'state stability', as the only party capable of resisting attempts to 'push Croatia back into the Balkans', and alone able to secure 'the road from victory to prosperity'. The HDZ programme was based on an affirmation of the achievements of the party and claimed to offer the only clear and convincing solutions to the problems confronting Croatian citizens, society and state. By far the best organised of all of Croatia's political parties, support - especially among older voters, rural voters, and voters in war-affected areas - was strong throughout the country, and particularly so within the Croatian diaspora. However, in the run-up to the elections the party's image (following sustained and widespread allegations of corruption) was at an all-time low, and following Tudjman's death the HDZ was starting to split apart into three main factions. Nonetheless, as the party in power the HDZ was resolute in exploiting to the full all the resources at its disposal.

Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP)

The SDP, led by reformist ex-communist Ivica Račan, is the successor to the communist party which lost the first multi-party elections in Croatia in 1990 and peacefully handed over power to the HDZ. Currently the strongest opposition party, the SDP signed a coalition agreement with what had become the second largest party, the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLs), in August 1999. (The SDP had managed to displace the HSLs as the most popular alternative to the ruling party since 1997.) The SDP/HSLs coalition (the "two" in the "two plus four") campaigned under the slogans "Choose change" and "Croatia is moving on", in hopes of exploiting the perceived need among broad sections of the electorate for a clean break with the past. The SDP concentrated on issues of social justice, promised to resolve scandals and scams, and to establish honest structures "which will work for the benefit of all citizens". Račan was the coordinator of the association of the Opposition Six.

Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLs)

The HSLs is ideologically closer to the centre than the SDP and closer, too, to the HDZ with which, at city level, it has sometimes formed coalitions and shared power. The party programme emphasised new jobs, economic recovery, a better future for young people, and the fight against crime. Dražen Budiša, a moderate nationalist and former communist-era dissident, is leader of the HSLs.

Croatian Peasants' Party (HSS)

A party that can boast historical traditions and enjoys impeccable nationalist credentials, the HSS has a large membership and is the strongest party of the "four" in the "two plus four". The HSS focuses on agricultural issues and has strong support in Western Slavonia and other rural areas where agriculture is especially well developed. Farmers' rallies and demonstrations condemning government policy in the agricultural sector culminated in a nation-wide strike in June 1999. Zlatko Tomčić is president of the HSS.

Liberal Party (LS)

In late 1997 the Liberal Party split off from the HSLs as it could not agree with the HSLs policy of forming local coalitions with the governing HDZ. The LS programme highlights new job openings, regular pension payments, and seeks a fresh influx of capital investment along with Croatia's integration into European institutions. Vlado Gotovac, an intellectual and former dissident, is leader of the LS, which is a member of the "four".

Croatian People's Party (HNS)

The smallest of the parties that comprise the "four", the HNS focuses on development of the market economy, opening up new jobs, orientation towards Europe, and promises a review of the privatisation process "to see who has illegally taken possession of Croatian capital". Radimir Čačić, a well-known businessman, is leader of the HNS.

Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS)

The most important regional party in Croatia, the IDS dominates political life on the Istrian peninsula. De-centralisation, a sensitive regard for the multi-ethnic character of Istria, and the protection of human rights (especially for Italians who make up nearly 10% of the Istrian population) are major elements in the IDS programme. Like other member parties of the "four", the IDS focuses on social issues (jobs, pensions and health) and promises a clean-up of the privatisation process and other shady affairs. IDS president is Ivan Jakovčić.

Croatian Party of Right (HSP)

In coalition with the Christian Democrats, the HSP is a right-wing nationalist party which appeals to extremist sentiment. The HSP does not welcome the return of the Serbs to Croatia and seeks to terminate Croatia's cooperation with the ICTY in the Hague. Support is strong in war-affected areas settled by Croats from Bosnia. Anto Djapić is leader of the HSP.

Croatian Christian Democratic Union (HKDU)

The HKDU programme promotes a robust nationalism and popular christianity based on the principles of the Roman Catholic Church. Marko Veselica is president of the HKDU.

Croatian Pure Party of Right (HČSP)

Led by Ivan Gabelica, this right-wing, nationalist party stands for a free, independent and powerful Croatia.

Serb People's Party (SNS)

The SNS was founded to promote understanding between Croats and Serbs in Croatia and to draw attention to the plight of Serbs whose rights were being ignored. Led by Milan Djukić, the SNS claims to be the voice of all the Serbs who

regard Croatia as their homeland. The SNS is critical of the Danube Region Serb parties and the Serb community remains politically divided.

Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS)

A local party founded in 1997, the SDSS has its power base in Vukovar and is led by Vojislav Stanimirović.

Serb Democratic Party of Baranja (SDBS)

Another local party, the SDBS split off from the SDSS in mid-1998 and enjoys strong support in Osijek-Baranja county.

Alliance of Primorje and Goranski Kotar (PGS)

A regional party representing the Gulf of Kvarner, the PGS was established in Rijeka in 1990 and has had one seat in the Sabor ever since.

Media, Campaign, Public Opinion Polls and NGOs

As in previous elections, though somewhat improved, the news and editorial coverage of Croatian Radio and Television (HRT), the state broadcaster consisting of Croatian Television (HTV) and Croatian Radio (HR), was clearly biased in favour of the ruling party. On HTV, for example, of a total of 29 hours and 40 minutes of current affairs programmes and election-related programming monitored by the Düsseldorf-based European Institute for the Media, almost 17 hours 45 minutes were devoted to the HDZ and HDZ-affiliated officials - nearly 60% of the total time monitored. The total time for the Opposition Six and affiliated officials - by contrast - was a mere 7 hours and 18 minutes.

In contrast to previous elections, opposition parties did receive equal access to mandatory broadcast slots on HTV as determined by the new law. But there was little real debate on controversial issues in the special broadcasts devoted to individual parties; and the programmes covering all the parties running in a constituency, while indeed securing equal treatment for all (all party representatives received the same amount of time and were asked the same questions), accomplished little to increase voter information or stimulate voter interest. A far more lively and more balanced coverage of election issues was provided by the private electronic media which were also engaged in voter education. In general, the print media offered voters more informed debate on political issues and embraced a far broader range of topics than the electronic media.

The official campaign period began on 14 December 1999 (the day after Tudjman's funeral), though informal campaigning had started several weeks earlier. The official campaign ended 24 hours before election day, when a period of campaign silence ensued. During the campaign silence which lasted until the end of election day, no campaigning and no publication of opinion polls or of preliminary election results is allowed. On 1 January, HRT broadcast pictures of the late President Tudjman with the caption "Do not betray him". Voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina (where elections were also held on 2 January as well as on 3 January) were able to receive HRT transmissions from Zagreb; such a broadcast was a violation of the campaign silence period.

The pre-election campaign was rather short; it was also overshadowed by the death of the late president and interrupted by public holidays at Christmas and New Year. To some extent, Tudjman's death diverted media attention from campaign events, impeded serious and sustained discussion of substantive issues, and perhaps

induced a general sense of uncertainty among the electorate. At all events the campaign was noticeably subdued and lacking in dynamism and intensity. For all that it was the first time since the war that elections in Croatia turned upon concrete questions of policy rather than on nationalistic, or war-related considerations. All political parties had the opportunity to present their political programme to the electorate, fundamental freedoms were respected, and the campaign was conducted in an atmosphere of calm and tolerance.

Numerous public opinion polls consistently predicted victory for the opposition. Typical were the results of a series of polls conducted by the public opinion research agency PULS between April and November 1999. According to the November sample comprising 4,000 respondents throughout the country, the Opposition Six would secure an absolute majority with 53%, while the electoral rating of the HDZ was 24%.

PULS Poll Results: April-November 1999

	April	June	November
SDP/HSLs	23+8 (31%)	22+9 (31%)	35%
HDZ	19%	18%	24%
HSS/LS/IDS/HNS	10+3+1+2 (16%)	8+3+2+2 (15%)	18%
HSP/HKDU	3% (HSP only)	4+1 (5%)	6%
Undecided	26%	18%	15%

(Coalitions were not yet formed when the April/June polls were taken.)

The desire for political change was especially pronounced among first-time voters and the unemployed. The favourite slogan of the HDZ Youth Organization exalting Croatian youth as "the winning generation" had clearly lost its resonance for first-time voters. In mid-October PULS conducted a poll among the unemployed and first-time voters to determine which party/coalition they would vote for. Based on a sample of 1,800 persons, the results of the poll showed that 59% of first-time voters and 57% of the unemployed supported the Opposition Six. Other data are given below.

Results of PULS Poll of First-Time Voters/Unemployed: October 1999

	First-Time Voters	Unemployed
SDP/HSLs	37%	37%
HSS/LS/IDS/HNS	22%	20%
HDZ	12%	13%
HSP	7%	7%
Undecided	20%	18%

These were the first national elections in Croatia that domestic, non-party observers were allowed by law to monitor at all levels. 12 non-government organizations (NGOs) were registered to observe the elections. All sought to secure people's participation in the elections, their access to party political information, and to ensure that the elections were free and fair. By far the most significant was the NGO known as GONG (Gradani organizirano nadglednju glasanje, Citizens Organized to Observe Elections). Together the NGOs provided nearly 6,000

domestic non-partisan observers of which 5,600 were from GONG. GONG was able to cover 65% of the polling stations in Croatia with all-day monitoring, while the remaining polling stations were toured by GONG mobile teams. So-called parallel voting tabulation, - ie observation of the count and reporting of the results for statistical analysis - was conducted by GONG in 15% of polling stations.

In addition to NGO election observation activity, an association of more than 100 NGOs formed Glas (Vote) 99 to conduct a voter education programme and to encourage voters to participate in the polls. There is no doubt that the widespread, active involvement of domestic NGOs in voter education and election observation was a significant improvement on earlier elections, helped to generate a climate for open political debate, and contributed towards the high voter turnout, while also increasing public confidence in the electoral process.

Parliamentary Election Results and International Reaction

With a turnout of more than 70%, the Croatian electorate voted decisively in favour of the former opposition in the parliamentary elections held on 2/3 January 2000. The crucial factor in the defeat of the HDZ was the formation and maintenance of the Opposition Six bloc (comprising the "two plus four"), which effectively united all the major political parties with the exception of the right-wing coalition against the party in power. The HDZ admitted defeat shortly after the announcement of preliminary results, while SDP President Ivica Račan acknowledged that "the winners will face the difficult task of justifying voters' confidence in them". A new political era was beginning.

The SDP/HSLs coalition won 47% of the seats in parliament (71 of a total of 151) with the HSS/LS/IDS/HNS coalition gaining almost 16% of the seats (24 of 151). The former governing HDZ secured 46 seats (30% including all 6 seats from the diaspora vote). The right wing parties won 5 seats through the HSP/HKDU coalition. The national minorities elected 5 additional representatives. (For further data on parliamentary election results see Annex D.)

At 11 polling stations there were more ballot papers found in the ballot boxes than the number of voters having voted, and elections at these polling stations were repeated on 16 January. The requirement to re-run elections did not change the results of the elections in any of the constituencies but it did delay the announcement of the final election results until 19 January.

The OSCE Election Observation Mission deployed over 350 short-term observers from 30 OSCE participating states and visited more than 1,200 of the 6,500 polling stations across Croatia, as well as all 29 polling stations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The OSCE findings emphasized a number of important concerns that fundamentally impeded Croatia's democratic development including the representational rights of ethnic Croats living abroad (law on citizenship), the disenfranchisement of individuals with the right to Croatian citizenship (primarily ethnic Serbs living in BiH and FRY as refugees), and issues associated with the representation of national minorities (see p5 above). Other concerns included the late adoption of the electoral law, the accuracy and transparency of voter registers, state media bias, campaign financing provisions, choice of election date, and the sheer complexity of the electoral system - there were 10 different types of polling station established for different categories of voters and as many as 16 different kinds of ballot papers. Excessive voter throughput at some polling stations in BiH raised concerns about

the integrity of the process: in Čapljina some 6,000 voters were processed on the first day - one voter every seven seconds!

On a more positive note, the OSCE declared that Croatia's parliamentary elections "marked progress towards meeting the country's commitments of democratic governance as a participating State of the OSCE". Moreover, "a plurality of political parties was able to compete effectively for seats in the House of Representatives," "polling was conducted in a calm and orderly manner" and "citizens were able to express their political will freely."

The US-based International Republican Institute concluded that the parliamentary elections were fair for the most part and that the irregularities reported did not materially affect the election results. The Clinton Administration had never concealed its support for the winning coalition and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer stated that the election result clearly demonstrated the ability of people in Southeast Europe to achieve democracy on their own. Broadly speaking, international media commended Croatia for conducting orderly and successful elections and hailed the evident turn in Croatia's orientation towards the West. In short, when the results of the parliamentary elections were released, the international community, like Croatia itself, breathed a sigh of relief.

Presidential Elections - 24 January & 7 February 2000

On 7 February, the Croatian electorate went to the polls for the third time within little more than a month. In the second round of presidential elections, voters elected Stipe Mesić, the candidate of the newly governing junior four-party coalition, to succeed the late President Franjo Tuđman. Mesić defeated Dražen Budiša, the candidate of the two-party coalition of Social Democrats and Social Liberals, which is the senior coalition partner in the new government. The HDZ candidate, Mate Granić, had conceded defeat after the first round on 24 January, observing that the campaign had been honourable and fair.

Nine candidates (six party nominated candidates and three independents) were able to secure the necessary 10,000 signatures of support to enter the race to become President of Croatia.

Dražen Budiša (HSL)

President of the HSL since 1990 and deputy Speaker of the outgoing parliament, Budiša was the presidential candidate of the SDP/HSL, the powerful coalition which won the parliamentary elections. For Budiša and the SDP/HSL the presidential election was "the second round of the same fight". Voters were urged to "finish off the job" they had started on 3 January and elect Budiša as president to make it possible for the SDP/HSL coalition to fulfil all its election promises.

Anto Djapić (HSP)

Djapić represented the right-wing coalition of the HSP and HKDU. One of the first members of the HDZ Central Commission, he later joined the Croatian Party of Right of which he is currently President. During the war he was leader of the HOS paramilitary group. Ten days prior to the elections, presidential candidate Djapić was stripped of his Master's degree in law on account of plagiarism. Djapić campaigned to remove all traces of communism from Croatia and to halt the belittlement of the achievements of the War of Croatian Independence. In first-

round opinion polls Djapić consistently ran fourth, but far behind Budiša, Granić and Mesić, with a rating of only 1-3%. His slogan: Nobody can have more rights in Croatia than the Croatian people.

Mate Granić (HDZ)

A medical doctor, Granić became Minister of Foreign Affairs and HDZ Vice-President in 1993. Describing his worldview as a combination of "nationalism and Christian democracy", Granić assured voters that he could cohabit with the new government and would respect parliament's decisions, adding that nobody but him and his party could guarantee a "balance of power" and continuity in policy. But Tudjman's legacy weighed heavily round his neck: on campaign walkabouts he was greeted with shouts of 'Down with HDZ thieves' and 'We shall never vote for HDZ again'. During the period 8-18 January, Granić's rating in the polls plunged from more than 30% to 16%, while Mesić's soared from less than 10% to nearly 30%. Granić's slogan: A man of vision for a better Croatia.

Ante Ledić (Independent)

The only businessman among the candidates, Ledić has no previous political career and he was never really in with a chance. Ledić's programme highlighted economic issues and he promised to fight unemployment, the brain drain, corruption and drug abuse. His slogan: A man of his word, a man of deeds.

Slaven Letica (Independent)

A personal adviser to President Tudjman in 1990/91, Letica was President of the Croatian European Movement for four years and spent six years as adviser to the United Nations on development projects in the field of public healthcare. Currently a professor at the Medical Faculty in Zagreb, health and family issues as well as European integration featured strongly in his programme. Letica ranked fifth in first-round opinion polls.

Tomislav Merčep (HPS)

The outspoken leader of the extreme right-wing Croatian Populist Party achieved a certain notoriety during the parliamentary elections when he accused a number of HDZ politicians of being "thieves, liars and garbage" - a remark that scarcely advanced the cause of reasoned political debate. To the right of the Croatian Party of Right, Merčep appealed to ultra-nationalist and extremist sentiment, and ranked sixth or seventh in the polls.

Stjepan Mesić

Stjepan (Stipe) Mesić, who had been imprisoned during the communist era, was, for a brief period in 1991, the last President of the Presidency and Head of State of the disintegrating Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. He then became the first Prime Minister of independent Croatia, but parted from Tudjman and the HDZ to found a new party, the Croatian Independent Democrats (HND), in 1994. After a rift with the HND leader, Mesić joined the HNS. The candidate of the coalition of four, Mesić painted the HDZ's Granić as a discredited bygone, warned that victory for Budiša, the candidate of the dominant coalition of two, would introduce a new monopoly, and argued that he alone as president could guarantee a balanced three-way distribution of power. "Coffee with the president", Mesić's election slogan, reflected his relaxed manner, his charisma, and evident ability to listen and establish rapport with the electorate. Of his easygoing life style and sense of humour Mesić said: "It is nicer to live in a country where the President can crack a joke than in a country where the President is the butt of the nation's jokes".

Ante Prkačin (NH)

A former successful businessman, Prkačin became a member of parliament and subsequently founded the right-wing 'New Croatia' party of which he is the candidate. Polls never gave him even 1% of the vote.

Zvonimir Šeparović (Independent)

A lawyer, Šeparović was Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1991/92 and subsequently Croatian ambassador to the United Nations. He was appointed Minister of Justice in 1999 in which post he masterminded Croatia's footdragging before the ICTY in The Hague. He ran as an independent candidate although he is a member of the HDZ. His poll rating was less than 1% of the vote.

From the very start of the campaign, it was clear that the presidential contest was going to be a three horse race. While poll ratings during the first round ranged variously from about 10% to 35% plus for the front-runners Budiša, Granić and Mesić, none of the other candidates was ever given as much as 3% of the vote. Moreover, as the first round progressed, it became evident that Granić's chances were fatally compromised by his personal links with the HDZ past that the electorate had only three weeks earlier voted decisively to reject. Reeling from that defeat, the HDZ was on the verge of break-up due to internecine squabbling, and Granić did well to garner as much as 22% of the vote (see Annex E).

In contrast to the parliamentary elections earlier in January, Croatian Radio and Television was palpably more balanced, and provided, in the main, objective coverage of campaign activities. It was regrettable, however, that the domestic NGO umbrella organization Glas (Vote) 2000 engaged in a partisan campaign with posters which evidently referred to the HDZ candidate, Mate Granić, calling for a 'Knockout in the second round' and 'Mate in two'.

Mesić emerged as victor from the first round with 41% of the vote to Budiša's 27%, and throughout the two weeks prior to the runoff most opinion polls gave Mesić a lead of more than 10%. His relaxed style but extrovert personality, sense of humour and love of telling jokes contrasted favourably with Budiša's seriousness and somewhat reproving manner, his tendency to talk down to voters and his lack of a personal touch. Budiša acknowledged his concern about his image among voters but trusted in his political message to gain the day. In fact, however, there was rather little with respect to major policy issues about which Budiša and Mesić really disagreed: both promised a European future for Croatia, a reduction in the powers of the presidency, and a clean break with the past.

A smear campaign against Mesić that hotted up in the second round ultimately backfired on Budiša, as the allegations of impropriety were so obviously "cooked up", as Mesić himself put it, by elements in the intelligence services, and personal attacks in hostile media were so evidently "below the belt". Dirty tricks, the Croatian electorate decided, belonged to the past. And so, too, did a monopoly of power. Especially during the second round Mesić had emphasized that he alone - the candidate representing the smaller coalition - could act as a "corrective factor" to prevent a new monopoly and keep the government in check. Like Croatia's Association of Unemployed Persons, many voters ultimately supported Mesić "because of the need to establish equality and balance among the two coalitions which won the elections". A man from the past, Mesić became the man of the people and, with a turnout of 61%, was elected president with 56% of the vote (see Annex E).

Post-Tudjman Croatia - A New Course

Croatia's new prime minister, Ivica Račan, promised that his six-party coalition government would take swift and decisive steps to overcome the serious economic and social crisis in the country and would strive to show Europe that Croatia is a reliable and desirable economic and political partner. "The priority is membership of the European Union and NATO", proclaimed his foreign minister, Tonino Picula, on taking office.

The new government got off to a promising start. Leading by example, it proposed a 40% cut in the salaries of the president, prime minister and other senior officials as part of a policy of austerity, in conjunction with vigorous measures to stimulate economic growth and create new jobs, and an assurance that it did not intend to reschedule the national debt. The new ministers evidently take seriously, too, their election promises to clean up crime and corruption, to eradicate the cronyism and nepotism associated with Tudjman and the 200 families loyal to him and his party, who made so free with state funds and property. Police arrested outgoing minister of tourism, Ivan Herak, and his deputy, followed by media mogul and business tycoon, Miroslav Kutle, together with a number of his business partners, on charges of embezzlement - millions of dollars had been illegally spirited abroad with very little chance of eventual recovery - and more arrests are to follow. The new interior minister has promised to "depoliticize" the secret services and to reduce the strength of the police force. The army budget will be cut as well. HDZ placemen in key positions in the media, including the director of HRT and the editor of the Zagreb daily, Vjesnik, have resigned, offering good prospects for more balanced, open and vigorous political debate.

Western support for the new government and the new president has been encouraging. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright described the parliamentary and presidential elections as an important turning point both for Croatia and the entire region - "Croatia has taken the right path" - and added that the US would increase aid for Croatia to US\$20 million this year. "We are going to help your country", said Javier Solana for the EU, who also stressed that "the change in Croatia ... is a signal for the region as a whole". NATO Secretary-General George Robertson said that the alliance applauded the political changes which recent elections had brought about in Croatia which would now shortly be able to take part as an observer in NATO's Partnership for Peace. An "enormous step" forward has been made in rapprochement with the EU and NATO - "The doors are open!" - said prime minister Račan following the talks in Brussels.

Closer to home there are better prospects, under the new leadership, for ending Croatia's disputes with neighbouring states as well as defusing ethnic tensions within the country itself. Mesić has emphasised the importance of resolving Croatia's border issues with Slovenia in the Piran Bay and with Montenegro on the Prevlaka Peninsula east of Dubrovnik. Both Račan and Mesić have pledged to reduce aid to Herzegovinian Croat separatists in Bosnia, to cooperate fully with the ICTY in The Hague, and to support the return of Croatian Serb refugees who fled Croatia during the Homeland War. The Bosnian Muslim and Serb communities in Croatia supported Mesić's election campaign and the Serb National Council (which fully supports Croatia's bid to join the EU and NATO) hails him as "a leader of a new spirit in civil relations, progress, and Croatia's movement towards national and individual security". In an interview with the Belgrade based Serbian opposition Studio B TV, Mesić urged the opposition to follow the example of Croatian democratic forces and pledged cooperation with them once they had won power.

There are strong grounds for thinking that cooperation between the government, the presidency and the parliament will be good ("What Mr Račan wants, I want", said Mesić, "We belong to the same grouping"); and the newly-elected president has pledged that he will not insist on retaining presidential powers which were introduced through stretching the constitution and the laws.

As we have seen, there are grounds for optimism and hope that Croatia is steering a new course out of its self-imposed international isolation towards a brighter, more secure, and more prosperous future. But as prime minister Račan acknowledges, the new government has encountered a much more difficult situation than indicated by official data. The challenge of the detudjmanization of Croatia will not be met within a year and a day.

ANNEX A

Parties Represented in the House of Representatives/Parliament following Elections in October 1995

Party		Number of Representatives
HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union	75 (59%)
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Croatia	8 (6%)
HSL	Croatian Social Liberal Party	8 (6%)
HSS	Croatian Peasants' Party	8 (6%)
LS	Liberal Party	4 (3%)
IDS	Istrian Democratic Assembly	3 (2%)
HNS	Croatian People's Party	2 (<2%)
HSP	Croatian Party of Right	3 (2%)
HKDU	Croatian Christian Democratic Union	2 (<2%)
HSNS	Croatian Peasants' People's Party	2 (<2%)
SNS	Serb People's Party	2 (<2%)
HČSP	Croatian Pure Party of Right	1 (<1%)
SHR	Party of the Croatian Plain	1 (<1%)
IDF	Istrian Democratic Forum	1 (<1%)
PGS	Alliance of Primorje & Goranski Kotar	1 (<1%)
SDSS	Independent Democratic Serb Party	1 (<1%)
Independents including minority representatives		5 (4%)
TOTAL		127

ANNEX B

Parties Represented in the House of Counties/Parliament following Elections in April 1997

Party		Number of Representatives
HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union	40
HSS	Croatian Peasants' Party	9
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Croatia	4
LS	Liberal Party	3
HSLs	Croatian Social Liberal Party	2
HSP	Croatian Party of Right	2
IDS	Istrian Democratic Assembly	2
SDSS	Independent Democratic Serb Party	1
The President of the Republic nominates up to 5 representatives as "especially deserving citizens"		5
TOTAL		68

ANNEX C

Results of Presidential Election in June 1997

Franjo Tudjman	HDZ	61.41%
Zdravko Tomac	SDP	21.03%
Vlado Gotovac	HSLs	17.56%

Turnout: 57.68% in Croatia, 23.49% out-of-country.

ANNEX D

2/3 January 2000 Parliamentary Election Results

	Regular Constituencies in Croatia Nos 1-10	Constituency No 11 for Non- Resident Voters	Constituencies Nos 1-11
Registered Voters	3,675,703	350,372	4,026,075
Ballots Cast	2,817,470	121,362	2,938,832
Valid Votes	2,770,770	120,204	2,890,974
Turnout	76.65%	34.64%	72.99%
Percentage of vote for major parties/coalitions			
SDP/HSLs	40.85%	4.26%	39.33%
HDZ	24.37%	85.59%	26.92%
HSS/IDS/LS/HNS	15.56%	0.86%	14.95%
HSP/HKDU	5.28%	4.93%	5.26%
Number of mandates for major parties/coalitions			
SDP/HSLs	71	0	71
HDZ	40	6	46
HSS/IDS/LS/HNS	24	0	24
HSP/HKDU	5	0	5

Distribution of Seats in the Newly-Elected House of Representatives/Parliament

Party		Number of Seats
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Croatia	44
HSLs	Croatian Social Liberal Party	24
PGS*	Alliance of Primorje & Goranski Kotar	2
SBHS*	Croatian Party of Slavonia & Baranja	1
HSS	Croatian Peasants' Party	16
IDS	Istrian Democratic Assembly	4
LS	Liberal Party	2
HNS	Croatian People's Party	2
HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union	46
HSP	Croatian Party of Right	4
HKDU	Croatian Christian Democratic Union	1
Minority Representatives		5
TOTAL		151

* In constituencies 4 and 8 the SDP/HSLs ran in a coalition with regional parties (SBSH and PGS respectively).

ANNEX E

Presidential Election Results - 24 January & 7 February 2000First Round

TOTAL Republic of Croatia (incl voters abroad)		Total	Percentage
Registered Voters		4,251,109	
Ballots Cast		2,677,561	62.98
Valid Votes		2,664,349	99.51
Candidates		No of Votes	Percentage
Stjepan Mesić	HNS	1,100,671	41.11
Dražen Budiša	HSLs/SDP	741,837	27.71
Mate Granić	HDZ	601,588	22.47
Slaven Letica	Independent	110,782	4.14
Anto Djapić	HSP	49,288	1.84
Ante Ledić	Independent	22,875	0.85
Tomislav Merčep	HPS	22,672	0.85
Ante Prkačin	NH	7,401	0.28
Zvonimir Šeparović	Independent	7,235	0.27

Second Round

TOTAL Republic of Croatia (incl voters abroad)		Total	Percentage
Registered Voters		4,252,921	
Ballots Cast		2,589,120	60.88
Valid Votes		2,559,341	98.85
Candidates		No of Votes	Percentage
Stjepan Mesić	HNS	1,433,372	56.01
Dražen Budiša	HSLs/SDP	1,125,969	43.99

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