21. Croatia. The Rise of Populism on the Path From Communism to European Integration

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Introduction

The development of modern civil society in Croatia is full of radical social and political conflicts and changes. In the 20th century Croatia was a part of five different states and political systems: The Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary (1867–1918); the authoritarian Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/ Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–1941); the fascist Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945); and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1991); and, since 1991, Croatia has been an independent, democratic republic, which joined the European Union in 2013 as its youngest member. Each new stage in the modernization of Croatian society involved a dramatic institutional, cultural, symbolic, and discursive breakup with the legacy of the previous period. Given the authoritarian and totalitarian nature of the political systems until the 1990s, populism, as well as many other modern political phenomena, was not the subject of scientific research. After Croatia began its democratic transition, the concept of populism (usually carrying a derogative meaning) became more frequent in everyday use. Accordingly, scientific interest for this phenomenon grew. Nevertheless, empirical research on populism and populist political communication in Croatia remains sparse, although it could be of especial interest: Unlike most other post-socialist countries, the transition from communism to democracy took place under war circumstances (the Homeland War from 1991 to 1995). Nonetheless, despite limited academic research, we can conclude based on some pioneer attempts to analyze populism and populist political communication in Croatia that populism has been present on the domestic political scene during the last couple of decades. According to the research, contemporary Croatian mainstream politicians often send populist messages. Recent developments on the political scene, corresponding with the economic crisis that began in 2009, confirm that populism has emerged in Croatia as an ideology. Therefore, we can posit the thesis that populism will be of increasing importance in the near future.

Research on Populism in Croatia

Croatian authors who dealt with populism rarely went further than broadly describing the term, using various definitions. They include Cipek (2008), Grbeša (2010), Milardović (2004), Šalaj (2012a, 2012b), and Zakošek (2010), who refer mainly to the Canovan-Taggart-Mudde framework (see Chapter 2 in this volume). But among them, there is still no agreement on the definition of the concept of populism as a political phenomenon. At the same time, empirical studies in Croatia that seek to identify populist actors on the domestic political scene are rare. In contrast, the labeling of numerous political actors as populists—usually in a derogatory sense—is a frequent occurrence in the Croatian media and in public political communication.

Milardović (2004), a political scientist, is the only author to have published a monograph on populism in Croatia. In his book, he deals with the phenomenon of populism and its relation

to the process of globalization. After describing numerous theoretical approaches to populism and citing numerous definitions of the concept, he concludes (referring primarily to Canovan [1981]) that populism represents a movement or a form of politics that mainly appeals to the people,. In accordance with Wieviorka (1993), however, he emphasizes that Canovan's typology omits *national populism* as well as numerous types of Southern European regional populisms, in which romantic, regional, organicist ideas and conservative elements of resistance to modernization and metropolization intertwine with national emancipation (sometimes with democratic and sometimes with separatist characteristics) (Milardović, 2004, pp. 17–18). Milardović elaborates on different typologies of populism and its numerous forms in democratic political systems. He looks at populist parties across Europe and relations between globalization, democracy, and populism, focusing on forms of populist resistance to globalization. He devotes particular attention to the anti-globalization movement as a source of populism—both for the radical right, which opposes migration and multicultural societies on behalf of national identity, and for the radical left, which criticizes liberalism as a driver of globalization. Therefore, Milardović's reference to Altermatt (1997) is pertinent, since for Altermatt, populism expresses anti-intellectualism, idealizes rural communities, emphasizes alienation, and puts the principle of nation above freedom, which is followed by elements of xenophobia. Populism in general is characterized by appealing to the people and by revolt against the establishment, with an aim of defending the interests of "little people" (Milardović, 2004, p. 21).

Regarding the emergence of populism in Croatia, Milardović (2004) considers Canovan's (1981) typology suitable for his historical analysis. Milardović states that populism emerged in Croatia in the early 20th century as an agrarian movement led by Stjepan and Antun Radić. It evolved into a dominant Croatian political party during the interwar period (1918–1941). Milardović further recognizes populism in Ante Pavelić's "right-wing populist" (fascist) dictatorship (1941–1945), as well as in the "left-wing populist" (communist) dictatorship (1945–1990). Finally, he holds that the first decade of the contemporary Republic of Croatia was characterized by the authoritarian populism of its president Tuđman (1990–1999) (Milardović, 2004, pp. 147–148). Thus, Milardović posits that populism dominated the domestic political scene throughout the 20th century. We can therefore conclude that he approached the phenomena of populism as a form of political style, although he did not operationalize or discuss it as such. That approach, however, is evident from his stance on contemporary Croatian political parties and movements, formed after the introduction of democracy: He claims that almost all of them are more or less populist, which is, according to him, a consequence of delayed modernization, the establishment of the nation-state, the shortcomings of democratic institutions, and the process of re-traditionalization, which started in the 1990s (Milardović, 2004, p. 148).

All the other works reviewed for this chapter were published in scientific journals or in conference proceedings, but the authors, unlike Milardović, approached populism not just as a political style but as a political ideology as well. For example, Cipek (2008), referring to Rensmann (2006), defined populism as a political ideology whose major feature is anti-elitism; anti-elitism aims at preserving group identity while struggling against "dangerous others" and appeals to common sense and to a simplified, black-and-white perception of reality. Cipek, referring to Freeden (1996), observed that this conception of populism was minimalist (Cipek, 2008, pp. 34–35). Zakošek (2010) and Šalaj (2012a) have a similar approach to populism. Zakošek (2010, p. 7) also referred to Rensmann, pointing out that populism has a vertical and a horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension consists of distorting the people's will "from the inside," while in the horizontal dimension, populism

turns against external menaces. In addition, Šalaj (2012a, p. 29; 2013a, p. 145), referring to Canovan (2002) and Mudde (2004), posits that populism as an ideology has a low level of intellectual consistency and refinement in comparison to, for example, liberalism and conservatism. He also points out that differences between various forms of populism stem from different features of both anti-elitism and the struggle against "dangerous others"— which depend, in turn, on the characteristics of a particular elite or of the "dangerous others" against which populists are acting. This variation allows populist movements and actors to occupy different positions on the political spectrum, from the radical left to the radical right (Šalaj, 2013a, p. 134).

Šalaj (2012a) posited that a negative perception of populism dominates public opinion. This negativity is evident in the work of Zakošek (2010, p. 8), who contrasted populism with democracy. Zakošek stated that populism polarizes society, stigmatizes political opponents in the name of the "moral majority," encourages intolerance, undermines democratic political institutions, and imposes pseudo-solutions that aim for the authoritarian transformation of society. Šalaj noted, however, that this kind of negative perception of populism neglects its positive aspect as a liberal corrective to democracy. Likewise, Šalaj (2013a, pp. 138–139) thinks of populism as an indicator of, first, the non-functioning of the current political system and its deviation from democratic ideals and, second, the domination of elitist principles in contemporary politics. At the same time, he agrees with Pasquino (2008) and Abts and Rummens (2007), who claim that populism incorporates elements of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. He also agrees with Urbinati (1998), who emphasizes the importance of differentiating between populists who soften their attitudes after they come to power and those whose rule turns into a dictatorship.

Šalaj (2013b), referring to Hawkins (2009) and Jagers and Walgrave (2007), also approached the theory of empirical research on populism using case studies. While he proposed a Croatian political party such as the Croatian Laborists for a possible case study, he did not conduct actual research. He did, however, conclude that the frequency of the party's appeals to the people as an element of the party's rhetoric should be determined first, after which it would be necessary to identify the elites and "dangerous others" whom the party opposes in its discourse. We consider Šalaj's paper to be theoretical, but a couple of other empirical papers have contributed to the definition of populism in Croatia, most of them based on case studies. Zakošek (2010) wrote about Bandić's presidential campaign in 2009. This paper, however, is more of a personal review of Bandić's policy than thorough scientific research on his political communication during the campaign. A similar assessment applies to Kasapović (2010), who labeled Mesić (Croatian president 2000–2010) a populist, without offering any empirical argumentation.

Unlike them, Grbeša and Šalaj (2014) used content analysis of a total of 192 interviews of selected Croatian politicians published in the press from May 2009 to June 2013. In our judgment, this work represents the highest quality research on populist communication in Croatia so far, thanks to its scope and thoroughness; other work mainly consists of reviews of individual politicians' or parties' rhetoric and lacks thorough analyses or theoretical explanations of the phenomenon. Grbeša and Šalaj focused on three elements of populism when conceived as political ideology: *an explicit appeal to the people, anti-elitism,* and *references to "dangerous others."* They also focused on three elements of populism when conceived as a political communication style: *attempts to demonstrate proximity to the people by speaking directly to them; using more subtle cues, such as* referring to Jagers and Walgrave (2007); and *using empty signifers.*

Given the lack of similar previous studies, Grbeša and Šalaj (2014) included five mainstream politicians in their sample, along with the politicians who were already labeled as populist in the media. Those mainstream politicians were Pusić (minister of foreign affairs since 2011 and president of the Croatian People's Party), Karamarko (president of the leading opposition party, the Croatian Democratic Union, since 2012), Kosor (former prime minister and former member of the Croatian Democratic Union, currently an independent member of parliament [MP]), Josipović (Croatian President 2010–2015), and finally Milanović (acting prime minister and president of the Social Democratic Party). Politicians who are usually labeled populists and who were included in the research were Tomašić (former president of the right-wing Croatian Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević and EU member of parliament [MEP]), Gabrić (president of the newly established National Forum), Kerum (entrepreneur, mayor of Split 2009–2013, president of the Croatian Civil Party and an MP), Grubišić (independent MP and priest), Bandić (mayor of Zagreb 2000–2002; 2005–the present), and Lesar (MP and former president of the Croatian Laborists).

Based on their analysis, the authors concluded that despite the initial thesis, Tomašić and Gabrić could not be considered populists, since there was no appeal to the people or anti-elitism in their rhetoric. Accordingly, the authors identified only four populists on the Croatian political scene: Bandić, Grubišić, Kerum, and Lesar. Their common characteristic was a frequent appeal to the people. Contrary to Kerum and Grubišić, the authors could not determine the presence of anti-elitism in the cases of Lesar and Bandić. On the other hand, Zakošek (2010, pp. 8–9) posited in his paper that Bandić's presidential campaign (2009–2010) was the biggest populist challenge in Croatian contemporary history, stating that all populist elements were present in his political rhetoric. At the same time, Kasapović (2010) considers Mesić, a former president of Croatia, to be the most prominent populist in the country because he successfully created the impression that he was an "ordinary citizen"—"one of us"—whereas the reality was, according to Kasapović, far different. Besides these authors, Obućina (2012) also dealt with populism in Croatia, but indirectly. He labeled as populist two right-wing parties (the Croatian Pure Party of Rights and the Croatian Democratic Assembly of Slavonia and Baranja) and concluded that populist radical right parties have little direct influence in Croatia and no or only minor parliamentary success.

Given the small amount of research done on populist actors in Croatia, contextual factors relevant to their existence on the domestic political scene have not yet been thoroughly researched. Cipek (2008, 2009), Zakošek (2010), and Šalaj (2012a) emphasized the impossibility of realizing democratic ideals in contemporary Croatian society, such as the participation of all citizens in political decision making, which they see as the major cause of populism. While Cipek referred to Benhabib's (2002) thesis on the "paradox of democratic legitimacy," Šalaj cited Taggart (2002), commenting that besides these generic sources of populism, various contextual sources, such as different economic or political crises, have a strong impact on the emergence of populism. Šalaj (2012a; 2013a) points out that charismatic leaders are often at the forefront of populist movements, the influence of which grow in parallel with growing support from the media.

Other than Cipek, Zakošek and Šalaj, only Milardović (2004) dealt with this issue, trying to explain the emergence of contemporary populism in Croatia in the context of its conversion from a one-party to a multi-party system. He emphasized the importance of the historical circumstances during the fall of socialism across Europe, while in the context of Croatia, he

highlighted national-romantic and expansive as well as national-defensive populism. He stated that the emergence of modern populism in Croatia was a reaction to the Great Serbian populism that was evident in the 1980s in the ex-Yugoslavia, just prior to the first democratic elections held in Croatia. Croatian political parties were thus formed based on various polarization patterns. The first polarization pattern (1989–1992) was linked to the relationship of Croatia versus Yugoslavia, when pro-Croatian and pro-Yugoslav parties formed. The second polarization pattern was a division of political parties in Croatia between the left wing (Social Democratic Party) and right wing (Croatian Democratic Union, Croatian Party of Rights). The third polarization pattern (1992–1995) was between the Croatian government and the rebel Serbian minority (the Serbian Democratic Party was active in the organization and mobilization of the rebels). The fourth polarization pattern (1992–1999) was created between the metropolis (Zagreb) and other regions, resulting in the emergence of different regionalist parties demanding decentralization. The fifth polarization pattern (1995–1999) was based on the ideological conflict between labor and capital. So, according to Milardović, Croatian political parties were established under those circumstances, while their populist character is a consequence of their goal to attract voters. It is interesting to note, however, that parties have not tried to focus on specific segments among potential voters, in the belief that such a strategy would only diminish the electoral base; after all, they aim to win over the whole nation (Milardović, 2004, pp. 146–147). Milardović thus perceived the populist style of communication in most of the political actors on the Croatian political scene, but unfortunately, he did not conduct an in-depth analysis.

Populist Actors as Communicators
As we can see from everything mentioned above, the research on political communication styles, communication strategies, and populist discourses in the Croatian media is modest. Again, the most comprehensive study is Grbeša and Šalaj (2014), which examines to what extent and in what ways, if at all, populism has been present in Croatian politics. The analysis concentrated on two types of politicians: the "usual suspects" who are often linked to populism (Bandić, Gabrić, Grubišić, Kerum, Lesar, and Tomašić) and "mainstream politicians" (Josipović, Karamarko, Kosor, Milanović, and Pusić). As mentioned earlier, they excluded Tomašić and Gabrić from the populist group, while they categorized the rest as "strong" (Kerum and Grubišić) or "weak" (Lesar and Bandić, based on the established absence of anti-elitism in their political rhetoric). They also found that Kerum and Grubišić— unlike Lesar, Bandić, and other mainstream politicians—did not present themselves as professional politicians during public appearances. In Kerum's and Grubišić's appearances, the populist stance dominated. Lesar and Bandić liked to combine populist and pluralist visions of politics— something that is characteristic of mainstream politicians. Furthermore, the labeling of "dangerous others" was present only in Kerum's and Lesar's public statements. For Kerum, these "dangerous others" were usually the media elite, whereas Lesar referred mainly to the economic elite.

As for political communication styles, by analyzing the content of the interviews that eleven Croatian politicians gave in selected newspapers from 2009 to 2013, Grbeša and Šalaj (2014) confirmed previous conclusions, although so-called private speech was relatively frequent also in the mainstream politicians' interviews. Its occurrence, however, was much more frequent during interviews by populist actors, particularly Kerum, Grubišić, and Bandić. The study's most interesting results were on the usage of empty signifiers during public appearances. Grubišić used them most frequently (mostly related to the sphere of moral and common good), followed by the two most prominent mainstream politicians in the research: Croatian President Josipović and Prime Minister Milanović. In the context of this paper,

Milanović's usage of empty signifiers is especially important, for he often used the terms *populism* or *populists* in the sense of "dangerous others," with no real or additional argumentation. Thus, we can conclude that the use of populist style and rhetoric was strongly present, even in the case of mainstream politicians (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2014).

When we analyze their results in the context of Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) populist rhetoric's typology, we can conclude that Grbeša and Šalaj (2014) identified all of three populist elements in the case of Kerum (appeal to the people, anti-elitism, exclusion of out-groups), which is why he can be considered as a representative of *complete populism*. In Grubišić's political rhetoric, "dangerous others" were not present, so he can be considered as a representative of *anti-elitist populism*. Lesar did not use anti-elitism in his political appearances, which is why he can be considered as a representative of *excluding populism*. Bandić's public appearances were characterized by frequent appeals to the people but not by anti-elitist appeals or by the identification of "dangerous others"—which is why we can think of him as a representative of *empty populism*. Zakošek's (2010) analysis of Bandić's populist rhetoric differs somewhat from the conclusions of Grbeša and Šalaj, primarily due to certain differences in the understanding of the concept of populism as a political style. Thus, regarding the analysis of Bandić's political communication style, both these studies agreed that it was undoubtedly populist, for it included frequent appeals to the people. Zakošek (2010, pp. 8–9) identified the key elements of Bandić's public appearancse: an antiparty attitude and the emphasis on his status as an independent political candidate, as opposed to being a member of the political parties that should be blamed for the difficult situation in the country; attracting right-wing voters in the struggle against "red Croatia"; stressing the traditional attitudes of the "moral majority" (Catholics), as opposed his rival, Josipović, who is agnostic; anti-intellectualism and clientelism.

The Media and Populism
There are practically no studies on the relation between the media and populism in Croatia. The empirical studies dealing with the presentation of political actors in the media were mostly focused on the concept of the Americanization of political campaigns and their privatization (Balabanić & Mustapić, 2008; Balabanić, Mustapić, & Rihtar, 2011; Brečić, Milanović, & Šimunjak, 2012; Grbeša, 2010; Lalić, 2004, etc.). The existence of a strong link between the media and populist movements was usually noticed only in theoretical papers on populism. Thus Šalaj (2012a, p. 36) emphasized the necessity of the presence of populist actors in the mass media, basing his observations on Mazzoleni (2008) and Mudde (2004). The modern media, in order to attract an audience, have become more and more sensationalist, which simultaneously creates distrust of the political elite and brings populist actors closer to the electorate. Similarly, Zakošek (2010, p. 7) pointed out that even mainstream politicians increasingly use the media in an attempt to spread populist messages. It allows them to "reduce the complexity" of both the present social problems and the political process as such. Zakošek's observations were confirmed in Grbeša and Šalaj's (2014) study, especially in the case of populist rhetoric used by the prime minister (Milanović) and the president (Josipović), which has already been discussed.

Citizens and Populism
Systematic research on the characteristics of populist supporters and on how populist rhetoric influences citizens' attitudes, emotions, and perceptions of social reality is close to non-existent in Croatian social sciences. As with research on the relation between the media and populism, the authors dealing with populism usually note only that the lower classes and the lower middle classes are especially susceptible to populist rhetoric. They generally agree that

modern social trends accompanying the globalization process, particularly in post-socialist countries like Croatia, create a number of populist challenges—mostly because many citizens feel like "transitional losers," reaping no benefits from the redistribution of power and wealth that occurs during the transition from totalitarianism to democracy and from planned economy to capitalism (Milardović, 2004, p. 20; Cipek, 2008, p. 35).

Summary and Recent Developments
The amount of research on populism in Croatia is relatively modest. It should also be noted that some studies analyzed in this chapter have certain theoretical and methodological shortcomings. A feature that is fundamental to all of these studies is the variety of theoretical positions. Although we have noticed that most authors analyzed populism as an ideology in its minimalist conception, they have rarely operationalized it in empirical studies, so they usually do not identify populist actors on the domestic political scene. However, despite the lack of agreement in the field on the definition of basic concepts related to populism, Canovan and Mudde appear to be the most cited authors.

As for the empirical studies, we found Grbeša and Šalaj's (2014) paper to be the most important one in Croatia, while the work of other authors such as Milardović (2004), Cipek (2008), and Šalaj (2012a; 2012b; 2013a) can be understood as the basis for the future establishment of systematic theoretical and empirical research on populist political communication in Croatia. It is important to once again highlight that some aspects of populism have remained almost completely unexplored—for example, the topics on the relation between the media and populism and between citizens and populism.

To summarize, the lack of systematic scientific research on populism in Croatia has been identified as one of the key reasons for the uncritical usage of the concept in everyday political and media discourse (Šalaj, 2012a). At the same time, opinion polls indicate declining trust in democratic institutions and in the political elite (existing political parties, government, parliament, etc.,) as well as the increasing popularity of "strong political leaders"—which suggests the possibility of strengthening the old political actors and creating new populist actors. This possibility was confirmed in the first round of the latest presidential elections held on December 28, 2014. Human Wall's[1] candidate, Vilibor Sinčić[2], came third, with 16% of the vote. Following the elections, Human Wall was included for the first time in the Crobarometer questionnaire, a monthly opinion poll conducted by the agency IpsosPuls. According to the polls in the first half of 2015, Human Wall had support from between 11% to 15% of the electorate. According to these polls, it is the third largest party in the country. In 2015, Sinčić announced the candidacy of his organization for the parliamentary elections later in the year, predicting that his party would play an important role in the following session of parliament. Thus, we can only conclude that populist rhetoric has been increasingly present in Croatia, gaining more and more support from the electorate. The need for systematic scientific research on populism in Croatia is therefore both evident and essential, especially on the relation between the media and populist actors, and on the susceptibility of citizens to populist rhetoric.

Notes
1. Human Wall is an activist-political organization that prevents evictions in order to highlight the problem of repaying housing and mortgage loans. Ever since its foundation in 2012, its conflicts with the police in defence of citizens have received wide media coverage. Thus far, Human Wall has managed to stop 37 evictions in total. (Source: http://zivi-zid.org/o-nama/).

2. Sinčić came as a surprise in Croatian politics in the late autumn of 2014 when
he managed to collect 15,200 signatures required for candidacy in the presidential
elections. He based his campaign on the thesis that the two largest parties
(the governing Social Democratic Party [SDP] and the oppositional Croatian
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Democratic
Union [HDZ]) are both protecting existing social inequalities and
injustices in Croatia. As such, claims Sinčić, they are protecting the interests of the
ruling economic and political elite, primarily the banks, which are almost entirely
in foreign ownership. Next to anti-elitist rhetoric, the second key element of his
political communication is his appeal to the people's interests, which have been
suffering the consequences of HDZ and SDP demagoguery for the past 20 years.

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