

***New Times?: Towards a Political Economy of ‘Civil Society’ In Contemporary Croatia.***

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**Abstract**

This article critiques orthodox approaches to civil society in Croatia adopting a political economy approach which is concerned with struggles over possession of different ‘capitals’. The historical continuities and ruptures in the relationship between ‘civil society’ and ‘nationalism’, in the context of ‘formal politics’ and ‘everyday life’ are addressed. The article suggests that the impact of relationships between local, national and global discourses has been problematic and remains complex and contested.

**Summary:**

A critique of dominant approaches to ‘civil society’ in Croatia can be based on a political economy approach which is concerned with struggles over possession of different ‘capitals’ by different groups in society. Debates about ‘civil society’ in Croatia are central to an understanding of processes of ‘democratization’, in terms of the linkages between so-called Formal Politics and the Politics of Everyday Life. Contestations over ‘civil society’ in the 1990s cannot be understood without addressing their historical underpinnings in terms of social movements in the 1980s, and the nature and extent of the ‘Yugoslav exception’. *HDZ*’s ability to label civil movements and NGOs as ‘Yugo nostalgic’ and anti-Croatian, and to mobilise different constituencies, was crucial to the success of its hegemonic project, amplified by the contradictions of global discursive and funding structures. Globally resonant meanings, themselves articulating a form of antipolitical politics were unable, often, to accommodate lived experiences at local level. Recent political changes suggest the emergence of a new moral technocratic project, but the parameters of this remain unclear.

## ARTICLE

### Essential Civil Society?

This article constructs a critique of dominant approaches to civil society in Croatia which pose questions such as ‘Is Croatia developing a Civil Society?’, ‘How extensive is it?’, and ‘What are the constraints impeding its full development?’. All of these are underpinned by that most ubiquitous of workshop questions: ‘What is Civil Society?’. These questions all depend on quasi-absolutist and quasi-empiricist notions of civil society and, therefore, fail to consider the concept as complex, contingent, and historically-specific, and as a set of discourses constantly being defined and redefined in diverse kinds of social relationships. The approach adopted here follows Katherine Verdery’s classic work where she focuses, in the Romanian context largely although not exclusively, on “the political economy of the symbolism” around notions such as ‘civil society’ (Verdery 1996:105). Unlike Verdery, whose focus tends to be *only* on discursive forms and the work which symbols of ‘civil society’ perform for opposition intellectuals and politicians, this text is concerned with a political economy which connects these discourses with a range of organisational practices, and examines the varied ways in which civil society debates have played out and been institutionalised in contemporary Croatia. If ‘civil society’, like ‘nation’, are both “key symbolic operators, elements in ideological fields” *and* “organizational realities” (Verdery 1996: 105), then the stakes are truly high – out of which will emerge both the symbols and organisational frameworks of future contestations.

Whilst it is tempting to follow John Keane, a theorist whose influence on civil society debates in Croatia and other post-Yugoslav countries is long-standing if controversial, in seeing ‘the protagonists of civil society’ as engaged in “a continuous struggle against the simplification of the world”, whereas nationalists are engaged in “a continuous struggle to undo complexity” (Keane 1996: 126), this is, in itself, only another discursive claim which needs to be analysed and set in a wider social context, one which connects local, national and global social relations. Indeed, as both Keane and Verdery’s work demonstrate, the connections between ‘civil society’, ‘nationalism’, and ‘violence’ can be quite unexpected. Refusing essentialist explanations of these connections, seeing all as “historically constituted forms of social classification”, and each as in danger of being “misrecognized and naturalized as a prime mover in social life” (Appadurai 1996: 140), helps to maintain a focus on “social practices and cultural patterns” (Povrzanović and Jambrešić Kirin 1996: 9) which are both in a constant state of negotiated flux, and subject to diverse regulatory and disciplinary structures.

A useful base for a political economy approach to transformations and transitions in contemporary Croatia is provided by Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley’s work on elites in post-communist societies. Heavily reliant on Bourdieu’s work (especially Bourdieu 1984), the authors focus on the relationship between various ‘capitals’: social, political and cultural, as much as economic; and on the complex relationships between what might be termed ‘moral capital’, resting on ‘value claims’, and ‘technocratic capital’, resting much more on ‘mastery over procedures’ (Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley 1998: 20-36). Posed in this way, it becomes important to ask which groups, and in what ways, are best able to negotiate the transition between different social formations, based on the supposition that, indeed, “those who maintained their relative social trajectories in the face of change were those who

possessed more than one kind of capital and were able to convert resources when the social assets defining success were altered” (Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley 1998: 22).

This article suggests that debates about ‘civil society’ in Croatia are central to an understanding of processes of ‘democratization’, in terms of the linkages between so-called Formal Politics and the Politics of Everyday Life. As such, they ignite the blue touch paper under contested notions of ‘memory’, ‘identity’, and ‘community’ in a time of fractionalisation, crisis, and war. These debates pre-date the rise to power of *HDZ* and the Presidency of Dr. Franjo Tuđman and continue apace after Tuđman’s death in December 1999. But there is no doubting the significance of these debates during Tuđman’s period in office, in which the establishment of what Renata Salecl has termed ‘a moral majority’ (Salecl 1994: 226) can be seen as operating both ‘within’ and ‘against’ ‘civil society’. These operations can be seen as a central plank of the construction of new forms of authoritarian populism through social movement activity which sought to colonise everyday commonsense. Indeed, for long periods, strands of *HDZ* were far more successful in forging a dynamic linkage of ideas, movements and organisational forms than were their opponents, although conditions for this struggle were far from those of a ‘level playing field’.

This article, based on six years of research, activism, and policy advice work in and about Croatia, is underpinned by the author’s complex positioning as a kind of ‘outsider-insider’, seeking to develop an anthropology or ethnography of social meanings, and tracing the connections between local, national and global discourses. Anecdotal material is, thus, treated as seriously as statistics, in seeking to uncover some of the complexities of the political economy of civil society more often masked by one dimensional explorations of the topic. Inevitably, the account is highly selective and partial, but also seeks, above all, to promote a method of analysis which can be critiqued and/or built on by others, as appropriate.

### **Remembering and Forgetting: Historical Continuities, Ruptures and the Politics of Nostalgia**

In documents, workshops, meetings and discussions led by personnel from a range of international agencies since 1991, the notion that Croatia, as a part of former Yugoslavia, was a *tabula rasa* regarding ‘civil society’ has been reiterated *ad nauseam*. Some Croatian intellectuals and technocrats, through a kind of profound historical forgetfulness more or less accidental in different cases, have reproduced the same basic idea, jointly constructing a kind of *Amnesia International* (Fritz 2000). In many ways, the struggle between remembering and forgetting regarding the historical continuities of ‘civil society’ in Croatia, takes us to the heart of the political uses and abuses of the concept in the 1990s. Moreover, the ruptures coincident with the more fundamental fragmentation of the Yugoslav Federation itself, reveals the potency of labelling those mobilised around ‘civil society’ as ‘Yugo-nostalgic’.

In a sense, the most important point here regarding pre-1991 Croatia, in the aftermath of the decentralised 1974 Constitution, is its position as ‘between Slovenia and Serbia’. For a long period, the notion of the ‘Croatian silence’ itself indicates a self-perception of a lack of dynamism in wider socio-cultural activities in the aftermath of the suppression of the Croatian Spring. Whilst there is no parallel path in Croatia to Slovenia in the 1980s, where the term ‘civil society’ was actively claimed by a range of diverse social movements, and even found its way into Party (League of

Communists of Slovenia) discourse as early as 1985 (Mastnak 1994: 100), there were a whole raft of initiatives in the mid- to late 1980s, and some even earlier, all relatively autonomous from the ruling structures, not all of which are explainable in terms of Zagreb being only two hours from Ljubljana.

The component elements of these movements and initiatives, when listed, appear similar to those in Slovenia, and certainly there were mutual influences, but their content and meaning was somewhat different. There were a number of highly innovative and progressive media initiatives, notably the weekly *Start*, the student newspaper *Studentski List*, the periodical *Polet*, and, in the latter part of the 1980s, Zagreb's *Radio 101*, later to become Tuđman's *bete noir*. In addition, ecological movements were established, notably *Svarun*, an ecological and peace group formed in 1986, an antecedent to the current *Zelena Akcija* (Green Action) formed in 1987 in Split and in 1989 in Zagreb (Green Action 2000: 86). Perhaps the most important, and certainly the longest established, strand was the development of a range of women's organisations and neo-feminist activism beginning, perhaps, with the 'Women and Society' section of the Croatian Sociological Society founded in 1978 (Feldman 1999: 8), continuing with a strong presence in both academic and popular publishing, notably through the work of Lydia Sklevicky, Slavenka Drakulić and Vesna Kesić, and, in the late 1980s, leading to the establishment of an SOS telephone hotline for women, victims of violence, in Zagreb.

The annual conference on 'Social Theory' held under the auspices of the Inter-University Centre in Cavtat, near Dubrovnik, throughout the 1980s, also deserves mention, bringing together leading critical social theorists from Yugoslavia with intellectuals from Western Europe, including John Keane. It can, in retrospect, be seen as having established a clear differentiation between intellectuals focused on 'civil society' and social movements, and those more structural and marxist in orientation, particularly leading members of the theoretical journal *Praxis* who, in Serbia in the late 1980s, were to take a dramatic turn towards nationalism (Magaš 1993: 49-73; and 125-30).

A more nuanced analysis of these movements is beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is important to note a number of key differences from movements in both Slovenia and Serbia. Firstly, the networks were, often, women-led and predominantly young, undoubtedly factors in the flexibility and creativity of practices but, also, probably implicated in the relative isolation from real centres of political power. Secondly, the movements were, overwhelmingly, Zagreb-based and intellectual/philosophical. Thirdly, there was no real consciousness or focus on 'national' questions and a primacy of choosing whether to be 'Croatian' or 'Yugoslav' simply was not at issue – the groups were both and neither. These were city elites conversing with other city elites be those in Ljubljana, Belgrade, Paris or London.

Crucially, leading activists from these groups were instrumental in the formation of the major civil initiatives from 1991 linking opposition to war with practical action, based around *Antiratna kampanja Hrvatska* (the Anti-War Campaign, Croatia or *ARK, H*), with many of the same limitations and possibilities also inscribed from those earlier experiences (Teršelić 1997). Moreover, the complex inter-relationships within and between these groups, and others with similar and different aims, in the

context of competition for donor funding in the 1990s, an issue which we note later, cannot be fully explained or understood without this historical dimension. The close interpersonal relationships, both of trust and mistrust, within what continued to present itself as a civil 'scene', were often lost on outsiders. Indeed, the theatrical notion of a 'scene', itself suggested the felt and constructed autonomy and introspection of the networks.

Even beyond these specific movements, it can be argued that, in anthropological terms at least, 'civil society' thrived in Croatia and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in various ways and at a variety of levels, in the post Second World War period. This approach precisely challenges the exclusivity of the 'magical' notion of 'civil society' as, itself, a weapon in the armoury of would-be new (and sometimes old) elites (Hann 1996). Part of this is based on a banal truism that nowhere can political power exist without at least some kind of accommodation to, and tolerance of, everyday social organisation. Of course, the counter argument from Western-oriented political science is that, in socialist societies, dominant state structures sought to abolish or reduce the importance of the private sphere and to over-politicise all social activities. Even here, what goes on in a Pioneer group and what is meant to be rarely coterminous. However, this debate is even more complex in former Yugoslavia and its constituent Republics, given its self-presentation, as the title of a popular film released in 1983, as *Nešto između*, or 'something in between' West and East.

The 'Yugoslav exception' in terms of 'civil society' covers at least four different elements, in addition to the most obvious one of socialist self-management, none of which have been researched extensively in terms of their relevance for contemporary debates. The first is the direct experience of activism during and in the aftermath of the Second World War and, in particular, the formation of Partisan clubs and veterans' associations which continue to be active today. The second, in part directly linked to the first, is the formation of women's organisations, initially the Anti-Fascist Front of Women (*AFŽ*) during the Second World War, and later Active Woman (*AŽ*) which, whilst formally linked to the Party structure, and increasingly forced into the role of a Communist 'mass organisation', did provide specific experiences of organising for women throughout Yugoslavia (Jancar-Webster 1990). Thirdly, from the 1970s, there was a strong development of professional associations some of which, in the social and health sphere, began to point to inadequacies in state based provision as well as re-asserting old hierarchies and notions of professional superiority, or claims to 'technocratic capital', which were to be crucial in the 1990s. Fourthly, youth organisations formally linked to the Party became increasingly sites of relatively autonomous actions and positions, notably student groupings.

Together with more mundane groups and societies: folklore, dance, Scouts, sports' clubs, and so on, all of these organisations can be seen as contributing to social capital in Putnam's sense of the term as "features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 1995: 67 and Putnam *et al.* 1993) and, indeed, to have provided some of the templates for social organisation in the 1990s. Indeed, one could go further and assert that informal community-based forms of reciprocity, as in joint actions to build a house or communal property, are also relevant here. These diverse claims and ascriptions to 'civil society' were not key movers in the *HDZ*-led nationalist project, which mobilised older dissidents, some religious groups, and

sections of the diaspora. In addition, of course, *HDZ* constructions against ‘Yugo-communist nostalgia’ limited the space for effective opposition from within these groupings, amplifying internal limitations.

Nancy Boym’s seminal distinction between ‘utopian’ and ‘ironic’ nostalgia (Boym 1994) helps us to understand the complexities here. If a ‘civil society’ project is suspicious of ‘utopian’ nostalgia precisely because of its “reconstructive and totalizing” nature, preferring to be ironic in the sense of being “inconclusive or fragmentary” (Boym 1994: 284), then the possibilities of building any kind of alliance against conflict and nationalism are severely limited. Indeed, the way in which ‘civil society’ discourses present themselves as quintessentially modern and new, make them more likely to be vehicles for a particular elitist notion of ‘progress’, most obscenely connected with the ‘shock therapy’ medicine which some societies in transition have been forced to swallow, leading us inexorably to explore the relationship between global, national and local discourses.

### **Civil Society at War: nationalising the local; globalising the national?**

The idea that international actors only appeared in Croatia in connection with the war events of 1991 would be a further example of the ‘amnesia’ noted above. Indeed, a more nuanced account would need to address, *inter alia*, the role of UN agencies, and international volunteers, in the aftermath of the Second World War; the role of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the 1970s, particularly (Young 2000): and Amnesty International’s support for political dissidents such as Franjo Tuđman, Vladimir Šeks, Dobroslav Paraga, and indeed, in Serbia, Vojislav Šešelj, throughout the 1980s. Nevertheless, the extent of what, elsewhere, I have termed ‘the global amplification and restructuring of the conflicts, and their assimilation into various kinds of transnational discourse’ (Stubbs 1998: 2.20), was unprecedented from 1991. To state simply that the war events coincided with ‘the age of globalisation’ is unhelpful since it is the plurality of forms of discourses and practices which is most relevant.

The success of *HDZ*, for much of the period, in labelling ‘civil society’ and emerging Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as part of an ‘anti-Croatian international conspiracy’ is a phenomenon worthy of exploration since, in itself, it relied upon particular kinds of transnational relations, notably with elements of the diaspora, and, indeed, with elements of what could be considered part of ‘civil society’. *HDZ*’s hegemonic project, in which it played a variety of roles as an organiser, mobiliser, supporter, and hi-jacker, of specific social movements, can be explained, in part at least, by the fact that it was much better, for much of the 1990s, at connecting particular local experiences with an exclusivist national project than its opponents were at challenging this with more inclusive meanings. The ability of *HDZ* to circumscribe the frame of political discourse and reference, was facilitated by its control of popular mass media, but also by the support of important sports’ personalities (Miroslav Ćiro Blažević, Goran Ivanišević, Iva Majoli, *et al*), and popular musicians, with Croatia records able to issue a 17 track ‘Best Of *Rock za Hrvatsku*’ as early as 1992 in which support for Croatia *per se* blurred into support for *HDZ* (Pettan 1998: 19). Some elements of newly created organisations, notably the Croatian population movement, and various ‘homeland war’ organisations, including *HVIDRA* (Croatian Veterans, Disabled in the Homeland War), can also be seen as ‘civil society’ extensions of the *HDZ* hegemonic project and crucial to its impact.

However, the rise of what Bogdan Denitch has termed 'grassroots nationalism' in Croatia (Denitch 1995) reminds us that "the phenomenon pejoratively known as the new 'ethno-nationalism' conceals a rich array of cultural processes" (Frykman 1995: 5). Some of these included new women's organisations such as *Bedem ljubavi* (Rampart of Love) which began as a spontaneous protest by mothers of Croatian soldiers around the Yugoslav Army Command building in Zagreb in August 1991 (Čale Feldman 1993: 5-23). In the public sphere, the complex range of women's identities became constructed as a battle between, from one perspective, 'patriotic' and 'non patriotic' women (including those labelled 'witches from Rio' by left intellectual Slaven Letica in the populist weekly *Globus*.) and, from another, between 'nationalist' and 'antinationalist' feminists. In many respects, this split was amplified by longer-standing political disagreements which became transposed in terms of wider responses to war including, but not limited to, interpretations of war rape. In a sense, the problem here is the limited likelihood of particular kinds of 'all-encompassing gazes', dependent upon foreign funding sources, to connect with local lived experiences, failing to embrace a 'multi-voiced ethnography of war' (Jambrešić Kirin 1999).

A wide range of protests, mobilisations, networks, movements, and groupings, became entangled in a new orthodoxy of global governance in which one form, the 'Non-Governmental Organisation' or NGO, predominated. The concept of 'civil society', itself central to Western aid programmes (Van Rooy 1998), was applied to a situation where humanitarian aid often substituted for politics, so that political processes became, at least in part, rendered non-political or even anti-political (Stubbs 1996). Hence, politics became filtered through particular structures and processes dominated by an agenda set by key actors from global and international agencies in alliance, to an extent, with sections of a cosmopolitan, urban, professional elite in Croatia. These globally resonant meanings did not, often, accommodate lived experiences at local level and, thereby, contributed to an erosion of 'the public space of political association', as groupings competed for 'recognition and resources' (Mostov 2000), with issues framed according to constructions designed to appeal to an international human rights apparatus rather than to build a constituency 'at home'. The 'fit' between a global orthodoxy of NGOs as 'non political' and a 1980s Central European notion of 'anti-politics', best defined by Konrad as "the political activity of those who don't want to be politicians and refuse to share in power" (Konrad 1986: 230), is complex, precisely because this 'new politics' reproduced elitist exclusivity in both its discourses and institutional forms.

For a considerable period, then, the regime was able to succeed in its labelling of 'Non-Governmental Organisations' as anti-governmental organisations, so much so, in fact, that the newspaper *Novi List* reported on a survey of high school and university students in Rijeka where respondents saw NGOs as 'mafia' organisations (Bagić 1999: 62). In addition, the dominant discourse insisted on the term *Udruga*, or citizens' association, as a more acceptable phrase than the Western notion of 'organisations' and Parliament passed, in 1997, one of the most repressive laws in the region regarding NGO activities (Stubbs 1997; Ivanović 1999). The notion of a full-scale conspiracy reached its apotheosis with the coverage on the current affairs tv programme *Motrišta*, itself a key vehicle for one strand of HDZ opinion, of an article, due to appear in next day's *Vjesnik* newspaper, in December 1999, of a US-led plot to

interfere in the Parliamentary elections, which turned out to be little more than an organogram of the, often confused and confusing, tangle of USAID-funded initiatives in Croatia. Throughout the 1990s, attacks on the politically-motivated activities of *HHO* (the Croatian Helsinki Committee), and the George Soros-funded Open Society Institute, also contributed to this climate.

Crucially, all of these negative messages were able to play on real contradictions in the global structures in which NGOs were working and the internal tensions of the new NGOs themselves. Hence, there were severe limitations on the effectiveness of 'civil society' discourses and forms to promote social cohesion, trust, and co-operation. Indeed, public splits within *HHO*, amidst legitimate concern about the authoritarian nature of its leadership, tended to reinforce a view of 'civil society' forms not as 'magical' solutions but as 'part of the problem'. The Soros-led notion of the importance of 'regional' structures and networks, connecting elite anti-nationalist intellectuals, primarily, also contributed to a prioritisation of virtual over real community building. The zaMir network, linked to *ARK*, *H*, was a rare example of a combination of virtual and real community-building, contributing to a "localised repertoire of counter hegemonic meanings" (Stubbs 1998: 6.2)

Donor funding primarily contributed to a recomposition of elites, most pronounced in terms of the dominance of professional-led NGOs working on 'psycho-social programmes' in the early 1990s, linked to the refugee crisis in Croatia. Charting the way in which European and Croatian psychologists and psychiatrists were able to add 'psycho-social needs' to the broad emergency relief agenda, in ways which did little more than enhance their own status, power, and privilege, is a key case study in the broader organisational and policy dimension of 'civil society'. That they were able to do so in the context of 'progressive' agendas and, in particular, certain kinds of gender-based and human rights imperatives, necessitates a degree of caution in interpreting the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the reproduction of particular hierarchies through the 'psycho-social shape': professional-user; Zagreb-periphery; urban-rural; theoretical-practical; and so on; all themselves reworking older hierarchies of cultural capital, can also be seen as contributing to an explicit depoliticising of 'civil society' and to dis-integrative processes and outcomes (Stubbs and Soroya: 1996).

In addition, groupings which began as social movements, marked by spontaneity, informality, fluidity, loose membership, absence of clear leaders, and so on, were often brought into the technocratic orthodoxy of the NGO world with its associated paraphernalia of registration, offices, managing boards, and full-time staff, tending to produce precisely the opposite characteristics. This contradiction was managed, with different degrees of success, by different groups at different times, but it also further fragmented and depoliticised processes and content of social meanings, not least because the logic of 'projects': proposals, foreign funding, and implementation; tended to remain relatively short-term and trend-based (Sampson 1996). Whilst, in many ways, it is entirely predictable which organisations, led by which individuals, were most likely to survive and grow in this competitive, privatised, world of projects, it is debatable what the social effects of the transition from 'moral' to 'technocratic' capital has been.

This was, in fact, only one part of a trend in which the 'modern' NGO began to be seen as a prime and autonomous agent in 'civil society'. Whilst it is certainly true



that, for much of the 1990s, formal opposition political parties were in disarray and tended, in large part, to accept many of the tenets of the ruling orthodoxy, it is also the case that some leading human rights personalities in Croatia, who in other circumstances might have been directly involved in political parties, preferred to work within NGOs and to focus on the perceived difficulty of getting opposition politicians to 'understand the needs of the sector'. In addition, donors tended to support a wide range of minority organisations, responding to experiences of discrimination and abuses of human rights, but rarely encouraged such groups to dialogue with authorities. In a sense, without minimising continued abuses of rights, the tendency to overstate the problems of reintegration, through a kind of 'talking up' process, is built into funding structures. Few donors followed the German Social Democratic Foundation *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* in supporting political parties, trade unions, and such like and rarely did any donors facilitate links and new kinds of partnerships across sectors. What Vesna Janković, formerly editor of the cultural politics journal *ArkZin*, has termed the 'NGOisation' of 'civil society' forms, combined with this view of the need for autonomous action, probably disrupted the potential for new forms of alliance and solidarity, and made the task of changing hegemonic social relations more difficult.

Nevertheless, the story of the elections in 1999 can be presented as the success of precisely such an alliance between a united opposition, foreign donors, and groupings in 'civil society', unprecedented in Croatia but, from a donor perspective particularly, very much informed by the defeat of Vladimir Mečiar in Slovakia. Indeed, later the same poster designs, colours, layouts, words, phrases and structures were utilised in mobilisations in Serbia for the defeat of Milošević by the *DOS* coalition. Certainly, the network *Glas '99* represented organic networking led by long-standing civil initiatives and, in particular, the *Women's Ad Hoc Coalition*, which did develop more solid links with oppositional parties. The fact that *Glas '99* consisted of 140 groups and organisations is testimony to its strength. Indeed, the choice of the 1980s song *Novo novo vrijeme* (New new times) by the rock group *Buldožer* (Bulldozer), as the network's theme song, indicates a rare combination of utopian and ironic nostalgia. In addition, albeit belatedly, a number of donors such as USAID, the British Embassy, and the Open Society Institute, sought to co-ordinate their activities to target funding and fill gaps, under the notion of the importance of free and fair elections. Nevertheless, the way in which funding became almost exclusively focused on election activities, the creation of a new technocratic election monitoring organisation *GONG*, plus a lack of faith in local groups reflected by insisting on American input at the last minute, shows the continued problems of external sponsorship of social change.

### **'Third way': a new 'moral technocratic' project?**

As the new Government elected on 3 January 2000 seeks to outline a vision, rhetorically at least, based on Blair and Schroeder's notion of 'the third way' (Kregar 2000), so 'civil society' appears set to be given primacy within a new social compact or contract. 'Civil society' now trips off the tongue of politicians and journalists much as 'nation' did in the previous period. It should be recognised, however, that elements of a new social contract were already in place during the Tuđman era, so that notions of a fundamental ideological rupture are problematic. Most importantly, in November 1998, in response to criticism from international agencies, the *HDZ* Government created an Office for Co-Operation with NGOs (*Ured za udruge*), under the auspices of the Deputy Prime Minister, Ljerka Mintas-Hodak, which initiated a dialogue with

the NGO sector, implemented a national grants scheme, and took charge of the revision of legislation, still not completed. In the last year of *HDZ* rule, the office gained considerable reputation for fairness and openness and, in particular, for extending the dialogue, and indeed central funding, to a much wider range of groups including those openly critical of Government policies and ideologies.

The results of the second annual funding competition, announced in May 2000, dispersed 20.5 million HRK (or about 5.3 m. DEM), a reduction from the 30m HRK of the previous year, to 348 programmes (out of 1145 received) proposed by 239 associations and NGOs. The average grant was 59,000 HRK (15,000 DEM) with the largest single grant, of 550,000 HRK (140,000 DEM) awarded to the Society of the Order of *Alkar* Knights in Sinj, for equipment relating to their annual competition which, during the *HDZ* years, had attained a particular politico-cultural significance. The list of grantees including, for example, both the Croatian Association of Political Prisoners (receiving a total of 408,000 HRK for 3 programmes focusing on ‘victims of communism’) and the Association of Anti-Fascist War Veterans (receiving 220,000 HRK for social programmes and for ‘guarding the anti-Fascist tradition’), makes fascinating reading, not least in terms of balancing diverse and, often, competing interests. Even though locally registered groups could apply, 75% of funding, in proportion to applications received, went to Zagreb-based organisations (Office for Co-Operation web site <http://www.uzuvrh.hr>).

The Zagreb dominance of many groups, the professionalisation of activism, and the relative absence of attention to community organising and volunteerism, continues to limit the repertoire of response to a renewed grassroots nationalism which links local hard-line politicians, disaffected and displaced Croat communities, war veterans associations, and others in a mobilisation based on ‘the defence of the dignity of the Homeland war’. In some of the war-affected areas, resembling chronic ‘zones of exclusion’ in which diverse groups compete for scarce resources, talk of ‘civil society’ continues to sound like a foreign language, even if mainstream media is now more willing and able to report seriously on the work of NGOs. The relative failure of groups to organise in defence of social rights, in a country where inequality is amongst the highest in the region, suggests the importance of new kinds of partnerships and more concern with wider constituencies than the current narrow introspection.

In addition, the current Government seems to be managing a transition to integration into global capitalism in which the horrors of *HDZ*-led isolationism are simply inverted, and every international contact embraced with open arms. However, the recent suggestion, from a prominent Minister, that ‘there is no alternative’ to membership of the World Trade Organisation, without the need for any public debate, prompted the emergence of a new coalition of forces challenging this which suggests the continued importance of seeing ‘civil society’ debates as concerned fundamentally with diverse social meanings and processes. In a sense, both the new Government, and a range of donors now focused on ‘regional stability’ are ‘in a hurry’ to achieve forms of social cohesion which fail to recognise both the legacies of the past, and the way in which dominant organisational structures continue to promote mistrust. Whether the ‘heroic’ age of ‘civil society’ has, indeed, passed, will depend as much on struggles over different kinds of capital, particularly social and cultural, as it will on the wider political space.

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