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Blanuša, Nebojša

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## Internal Memory Divided: Conspiratorial Thinking, Ideological and Historical Cleavages in Croatia. Lessons for Europe

**Nebojša Blanuša**  
Faculty of Political Science  
University of Zagreb  
Croatia

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### Abstract

This paper explores the main cleavages of the Croatian body politic, their interrelation and consequences for political behavior and collective identities through the two nationally representative surveys conducted in 2007 and 2012 in time of parliamentary elections. The results show significant relationship between recent political cleavages, expressed through conspiracy theories, and the one from the Second World War. Analyzed conspiratorial interpretations, as well as historical legacy of military affiliation of ancestors in the Second World War are substantial predictors of party preferences. But, predictive power of these interpretations varies due to the level and issues of party competition in these two elections. Furthermore, different type conspiracy theories promote different political values, goals and identities and express wider political antagonism between nationalism and democratization. Also, analyzed conspiracy theories are highly correlated to the perception of “simulated democracy”, which is the common problem of newly established democracies, as well as the symptom of more global political crisis.

**Keywords:** conspiracy theory, Croatia, historical legacy, political cleavages, simulated democracy.

### 1. Introduction

Conspiratorial interpretations are a part of everyday politics and have been highly present in politics since ancient times. From Homer's theory of society (Popper, 1972), through great religious metaphysics organized against conspiracy of some cardinal Evil (Groh, 1987), and many historical examples, usually with lethal consequences (Neumann 1957/1992, Pipes 1997), conspiracy theories, along

Corresponding Author: Dr. Nebojša Blanuša, Assistant Professor  
Affiliation: Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb  
Address: Lepušićeva 6, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
e-mail: [nblanusa@fpzg.hr](mailto:nblanusa@fpzg.hr)

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with real conspiracies, culminated in modern revolutions, wars and political movements (Koselleck 1959, Hofstadter 1965, Pigden 1995, White 2002, Byford 2006). Political crises, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are fertile grounds for their appearance (Lasswell 1948, Moscovici 1987, Arendt 1951/1999). However, the apocalyptic role of conspiratorial thinking and acting found its extreme realization in the Nazi regime<sup>1</sup>. There are numerous examples of similar function of Conspiracy Theories (CTs) in both the communist and the democratic world<sup>2</sup>. In other words, democratic societies are not “vaccinated” against these perils, especially societies undergoing democratic transformations.

Two lines of research and explanation of CTs’ popularity in the contemporary world can be discerned. The first line that originates from history<sup>3</sup>, political science<sup>4</sup>, social and political psychology<sup>5</sup> holds conspiratorial discourse as a particular ideological tradition usually related to radical politics of Fascism, Nazism, aggressive nationalism, populist movements etc. Contrary to this “localizing” approach, another line of research<sup>6</sup> explores CTs from the perspective of literary and cultural studies. It observes CTs as a consequence of postmodern culture. Their historical conditions of existence lie in the globalized world of late capitalism where CT is an ideological apparatus used for personification of impersonal forms of control and establishing of rules. CTs express an ideological desire for undertaking a “cognitive mapping” of totalities on various societal levels. As such, they express radical doubt in the way of acquiring knowledge and authorities which convey it, to a large degree because of a sense of diminishing the abilities of human agency. So, in contrast to the first approach that mostly pathologises CTs, this one asserts them as a reasonable attempt to comprehend and position itself in this ever growing and threatening world. In the line of depathologizing of CTs, I propose an approach that will simultaneously avoid acceptance of CTs as facts and their mere reduction to a phenomenon of mass hysteria. In this way, CTs will be considered beyond the opposition between delusion and hidden truth. This approach considers CTs as social “facts”, i.e. more or less popular interpretations of politics regardless of their conclusiveness, but as powerful cultural and political narratives prominent in various media (cf. Arnold, 2008: VIII). From this perspective, they sketch antagonistically conceived relationships, reduced on the level of front between friends and foes, and in a distilled way glue the experience of political reality. Such conspiratorial narratives could be studied as symptoms of social mentality, but also as particular manifestations of wider political cleavages.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the main cleavages of the Croatian body politic, their interrelation and consequences for political behavior and collective identities. The origins of these cleavages stem from different historical points in time. The first one is the result of the national division in World War II. In this research it is presented as the memory of one’s own ancestors’ military affiliation in that war. The second cleavage stems from the memory of politically controversial events which occurred during the last 23 years, a period which is formative for Croatian democracy. This cleavage is explored through the beliefs in popular Croatian conspiracy theories from that period. Briefly, it manifests itself on one side as the perception of the so-called internal and external enemies and, on the other side, as the perception of corrupted behavior of the government. Accordingly, here we have the memory of two

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<sup>1</sup> After having gained power, Hitler tried to defeat the alleged conspiracy of the Elders of Zion by his own (and his fellows’) counter-conspiracy.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the “Red Scare”, 9/11, the theory of Saddam’s weaponry of mass destruction, recent interpretations of the EU crisis, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Representatives of this approach are Davis (1960), Hofstadter (1965), and Pipes (1997).

<sup>4</sup> Representatives of this approach are Lipset & Raab (1970), and Lee (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Representatives of this approach are Billig (1978), Robins & Post, (1997), and Glick (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Representatives of this approach are Jameson (1992), Dean (1998), Fenster (1999/2008), Knight (2000), Melley (2000), Arnold (2008), and Bratich (2008).

historical turning points, the first one from World War II and the second one from the recent time. They have been researched through the answers of Croatian citizens to questions collected in two surveys. The first one was conducted in 2007 and the second one in 2012, both in time of parliamentary elections. In this paper I will explore the relevance of these memories for the interpretation of the past, the present behavior and the future prospects concerning identity.

## 2. Hypotheses

The main hypotheses are:

- (a) Psychologically, these two cleavages are in a relationship of mutual reinforcement. From one direction, the older cleavage is partly reproduced in the recent one. So, the memory of one's own political heritage influences the interpretation of the recent political events. It functions as a perceptual filter for the interpretation of recent events. But, a reverse relationship is also possible in which the recent cleavage finds its continuation from older times. Here, the recent cleavage projects itself into the past which functions as a *posteriori* explanation of the present. There is no consensus on the interpretation of these events and the divided memory of them is a resource for further crystallization of the older cleavage and for deepening of the recent one.
- (b) The recent cleavage expressed in conspiracy theories is constitutive for the present left-right cleavage in the Croatian body politic. Therefore, the belief in conspiracy theories is substantial predictor of party preferences. But predictive power of these interpretations will vary due to the level and issues of party competition.
- (c) Conspiracy Theories are not all the same. According to their content and inner structure, we can predict whether they promote a closed out ethnic identity and authoritarian values or an open unfinished identity, critical skills and democratic values.

To corroborate these hypotheses, I will first introduce you to my research of CTs and other indicators of political cleavages. I'm interested in CTs in the realm of politics as an exclusion device, that is to say, as a tool for defining a threat to collective values and interests in order to maintain identity of one's own group or society. It is the mode of interpretation for defining the enemy in order to define oneself as the opposite of that enemy. Hence, CT is the compact enunciation of the friend-foe political relationship and it should, therefore, be studied as a manifestation of political cleavages. Also, as an attempt at uncovering the hidden, discovering a secret, „shedding light“ on the supposed abuse of power CT is a sort of symptomatic reading of the reality wherein it is assumed that, under the influence of the undeclared (hidden) interest (in domination, exploitation, etc.) there is a gap between the „official“, public meaning of some interpretation and its „actual“ intention, where there is a tension between the explicitly enunciated content of the text and its pragmatic presuppositions (Žižek 1994: 10). This kind of reading of the “true” reality, a sort of “behind-ology” (Spark 1998 in Bratic 2008: 15), also reveals the stereotypical (or petrified) images of the criticized agents and beloved objects of their endangerments. I will also try to read these symptomatic readings symptomatically, as the signs of wider political cleavages and their various manifestations.

## 3. Few words about the research method

Croatian CTs have been researched through discourse analysis of the most influential Croatian political weekly magazines in the period from 1990 to 2007. The most prominent CTs have been selected for the survey research of the representative samples of Croatian citizens at the end of 2007 (n=1081) and beginning of 2012 (n=1002). The first survey was conducted before and the second one after parliamentary

elections<sup>7</sup>. Selected conspiratorial interpretations of actual politically relevant events, processes or behaviours of participants in the political life of Croatia or otherwise regarding Croatia in the last two decades, were translated into statements suitable for answering on the scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* and arranged in chronological order. **Table 1** shows basic results obtained from the two surveys.

#### 4. Results

**Table 1.** Croatian Conspiracy Theories in two surveys: 2007 and 2012.

	2007 (%)			2012 (%)		
	Strongly and somewhat disagree	not decided	Strongly and somewhat agree	Strongly and somewhat disagree	not decided	Strongly and somewhat disagree
a) Presidents Tudjman and Milošević have arranged the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Karadjordjevo.	20	27	53	15	45	40
b) The murder of Josip Reihl Kir <sup>8</sup> was organised by Croatian extremists to whom the war with the Serbs was convenient.	24	44	32	12	67	21
c) In the course of aggression against Croatia, some great powers deliberately undermined its independence in order to preserve Yugoslavia.	7	18	<b>75</b>	6	40	<b>54</b>
d) Vukovar was sold in 1991 as part of a secret plan of territory swap.	32	28	40	15	43	42
e) Transition to market economy and privatisation were mostly the result of conspiracy between the Mob and the Government.	7	18	<b>75</b>	4	31	<b>65</b>
f) Crimes against civilians in military operations Flash and Storm are an expression of a carefully planned ethnic cleansing policy of the Croatian Government at that time.	62	21	17	44	37	18
g) The International Court in the Hague was founded with the intention of punishing those responsible for the disintegration of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, abolish distinctions between the aggressor and the victims and conceal the real role of great powers in this conflict.	17	27	56	12	41	47
h) For more than a decade, the World Bank, IMF, and other international institutions have been economically and financially colonising Croatia.	14	34	52	11	49	40
i) Under the guise of patriotism, the underground intelligence works only for its own interests and settling accounts with non-sympathizers.	15	35	50	8	53	39
j) The so-called human rights activists who are recruited from yugonostalgic groups and collaborators of foreign secret services are the most dangerous enemies of Croatia.	39	31	30	26	49	25
k) Since the mid 90's, the parties which were then in the opposition, have been deliberately destabilizing the country and endangering its independence.	50	31	19	30	48	22
l) The European Union is a conspiracy of big business the aim of which is to destroy national states.	46	28	26	29	42	29
m) Far from the public eye and, contrary to the desire of its citizens, Croatia is attempting to join a new Balkan federation through regional integrations.	59	26	15	33	45	22

The analysis of the prevalence of beliefs in particular conspiratorial ideas reflects the controversy of opinions on the majority of events and processes contained in this scale. Only two theories can be denoted as consolidated conspiracy theories in 2007, the one claiming that great powers had undermined

<sup>7</sup> Some of results that will be presented in this paper have been conducted in previous waves of the same research project.

<sup>8</sup> Josip Reihl-Kir was a well-known pacifist, chief of police in Osijek (city in the eastern part of Croatia), murdered in 1991 by a member of Croatian Army.

the process of independence of Croatia (75% support) and the one defining transition to market economy and privatisation as conspiracy of the Mob and the Government (75%). In 2012 research they are as well the most acceptable CTs among Croatian citizens. There is significantly more disagreement and dilemmas as to whether other events and processes derive from conspiracies, which makes them a sort of spectres of society the existence of which lacks consensus. Replication of this research in 2009 on a representative sample of citizens of Zagreb revealed the same results, and to a certain degree in the nation-wide survey in 2012. Most of the studied events and processes are controversial for Croatian society even the two decades after they took place which may be an indication of certain lines of more global and permanent political cleavages.

**Table 2.** Factorial structure of Croatian conspiracy theories in two surveys: 2007 and 2012.

	2007		2012	
	Government conspiracies during the 90'.	Conspiracies of internal and external enemies	Conspiracies of internal and external enemies	Government conspiracies during the 90'.
a) Presidents Tudjman and Milošević have arranged the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Karadjordjevo.	.786			.809
b) The murder of Josip Reihl Kir was organised by Croatian extremists to whom the war with the Serbs was convenient.	.771			.807
c) In the course of aggression against Croatia, some great powers deliberately undermined its independence in order to preserve Yugoslavia.		.450	.386	
d) Vukovar was sold in 1991 as part of a secret plan of territory swap.	.695			.736
e) Transition to market economy and privatisation were mostly the result of conspiracy between the Mob and the Government.	.658			.581
f) Crimes against civilians in military operations Flash and Storm are an expression of a carefully planned ethnic cleansing policy of the Croatian Government at that time.	.493			.488
g) The International Court in the Hague was founded with the intention of punishing those responsible for the disintegration of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, abolish distinctions between the aggressor and the victims and conceal the real role of great powers in this conflict.		.584	.635	
h) For more than a decade, the World Bank, IMF, and other international institutions have been economically and financially colonising Croatia.		.569	.734	
i) Under the guise of patriotism, the underground intelligence works only for its own interests and settling accounts with non-sympathizers.	.541		.458 <sup>9</sup>	.453
j) The so-called human rights activists who are recruited from yugonostalgic groups and collaborators of foreign secret services are the most dangerous enemies of Croatia.		.744	.741	
k) Since the mid 90's, the parties which were then in the opposition, have been deliberately destabilizing the country and endangering its independence.		.657	.760	
l) The European Union is a conspiracy of big business the aim of which is to destroy national states.		.685	.534	
m) Far from the public eye and, contrary to the desire of its citizens, Croatia is attempting to join a new Balkan federation through regional integrations.		.592	.695	
% of the explained variance	22.4	22.2	25.1	21.0
KMO	0.776		0.784	
Bartlett's test of the significance of the correlation matrix	$\chi^2 = 2958; df = 78; p = 0.000$		$\chi^2 = 2313; df = 78; p = 0.000$	

**Note:** It has been conducted PCA with varimax rotations. All factorial saturations below 0.35 have been excluded from the representation.

On one hand, these cleavages would be a reflection of political events which took place at the time and which are further reproduced in the future, but it should also be studied to what extent some earlier historical events reflect through them and correspond with them. What is interesting in 2012 survey results

<sup>9</sup> It seems that between two surveys domestic secret services have become another internal enemy, probably due to clarification of their problematic role, especially during the second part of 90s.

is a sort of escape into “not decided” category. This could be due to the introduction of younger generations in this sample, generations unaware or without direct experience with these controversial events, as well as due to a sort of oblivion or repression of turbulent period of war and transition. Nevertheless, controversies are still present and mostly unresolved.

It is possible to look for more global and permanent cleavages by analyzing the relationships of these individual conspiracy beliefs. Factorial analysis reveals which beliefs are correlated in the minds of citizens and, if such relationships do exist, according to their common content we can infer about the character of the more global cleavages. According to that kind of analysis, in both researches results show that every CT belongs to one of the two groups of conspiratorial beliefs (**Table 2**).

These two groups of theories are named *Conspiracies of internal and external enemies and Government conspiracies in the 90's*. The first one is a reflection of the perceived threats to the accomplishments of national revolution, basically imagined as the metaphor of a body attacked by viruses which either come from the outside or are already within the body of the Nation (cf. Knight: 2001: 17). The common content of the second group of CTs is a critique of the abuse of Government power during the homeland war and processes of economic and democratic transition. This is a sort of accusation of the then governing party for violating the basic moral standards and the expectations of Croatian citizens from the new political system.

To test our first hypothesis let's look now at the relation of these cleavages to the one from the World War II.

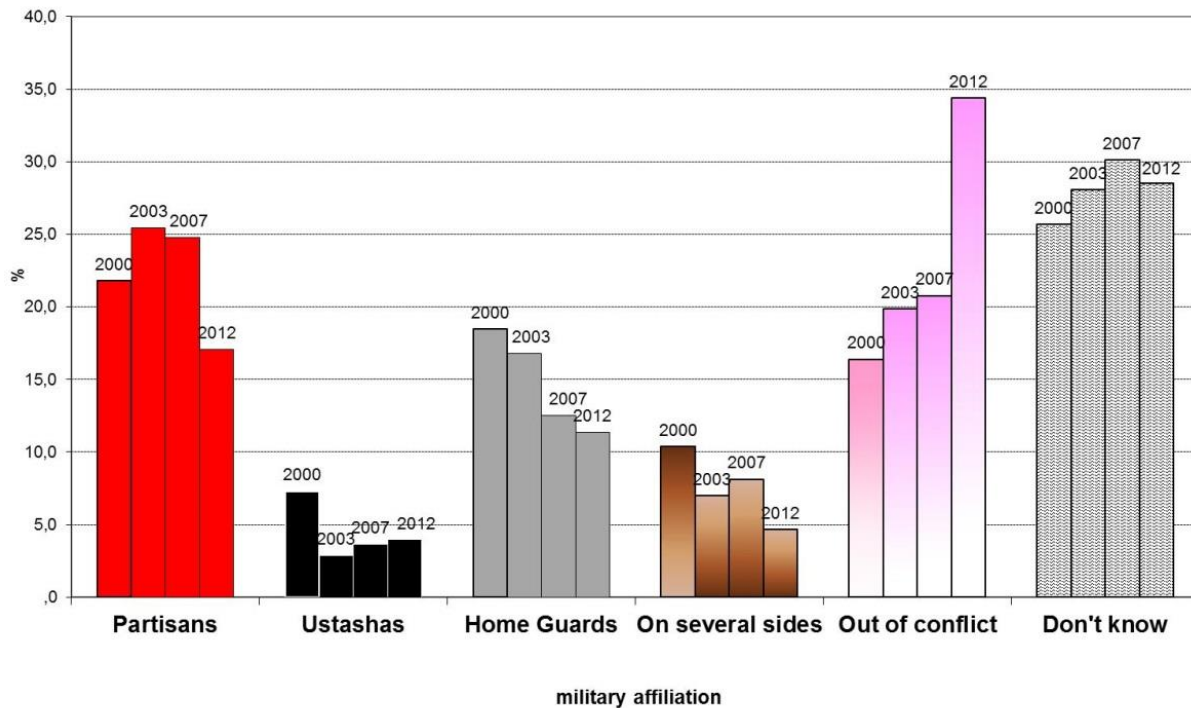
As regards the World War II cleavage, there are subjects whose ancestors were partisans (anti-fascists) and two groups whose political tradition belongs to the Independent State of Croatia (quisling formation) respectively Home-Guards (regular, mobilized army) and Ustashas (fascists<sup>10</sup>). Besides them, there are people with mixed tradition (their Grandfathers and/or Grand-Grandfathers were on different sides) and those whose ancestors remained out of the conflict.

According to our results from the last four waves of electoral behaviour studies, they are distributed in a way depicted in **Figure 1**.

The observed general decrease in the memory of these military affiliations or family political biographies is not linear for all groups. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the light of electoral success of social democratic and liberal parties at the beginning of the period, subsequent diminishing of nationalism in HDZ, as well as a strong advocacy of the President Mesić for antifascist Croatian legacy, the memory of this legacy has become more openly expressed. What is observable in the same period is a decrease in the memory of military affiliation with troops of the Independent State of Croatia. But in 2012 the increase of “out of conflict” category is surprisingly massive, as well as decrease in almost all other categories, especially in the groups with antifascist and mixed legacy. That indicates again certain repression as the function of the wish for leaving behind the traumatic past.

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10 Croatian nationalist terrorist organization that came to power after the German invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941. The Ustasha deported and murdered hundreds of thousands of Serbs and tens of thousands of Jews and Gypsies (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2001, 661).



**Figure 1.**  
Memory about family military affiliation during the II World War: longitudinal changes 2000-2012.

But different affiliation is not merely a dead legacy. It also implies a different perception of the political leaders from that period, namely Josip Broz Tito, leader of the partisans and latter president of Yugoslavia, and Ante Pavelić, leader of the Ustasha movement and president of the Independent State of Croatia (**Figure 2**).

These perceptions are in accordance with political legacy. The most profound differences are between those with fascist and anti-fascist political legacy<sup>11</sup>. Through the time interesting changes are discernable on the right part of the spectrum. Differences in evaluations of Tito and Pavelić among citizens with Ustasha tradition have diminished. The question is if this change could be attributed to the abandoning of Manichean frame of thinking and gradual adopting of historical facts about these two leaders? To answer it we would need a new and more nuanced research on perception of these two historical protagonists.

<sup>11</sup> Such data has been collected in surveys of 2003, 2007, and 2012. Results of ANOVA for evaluation of Ante Pavelić: (2003)  $F=34.216$ ;  $df=1105, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ ; (2007)  $F=31.471$ ;  $df=1030, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ ; (2012)  $F=9.972$ ;  $df=847, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ . Results of ANOVA for evaluation of Josip Broz Tito: (2003)  $F=15.514$ ;  $df=1130, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ ; (2007)  $F=18.170$ ;  $df=1051, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$  (2012)  $F=7.860$ ;  $df=910, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ .



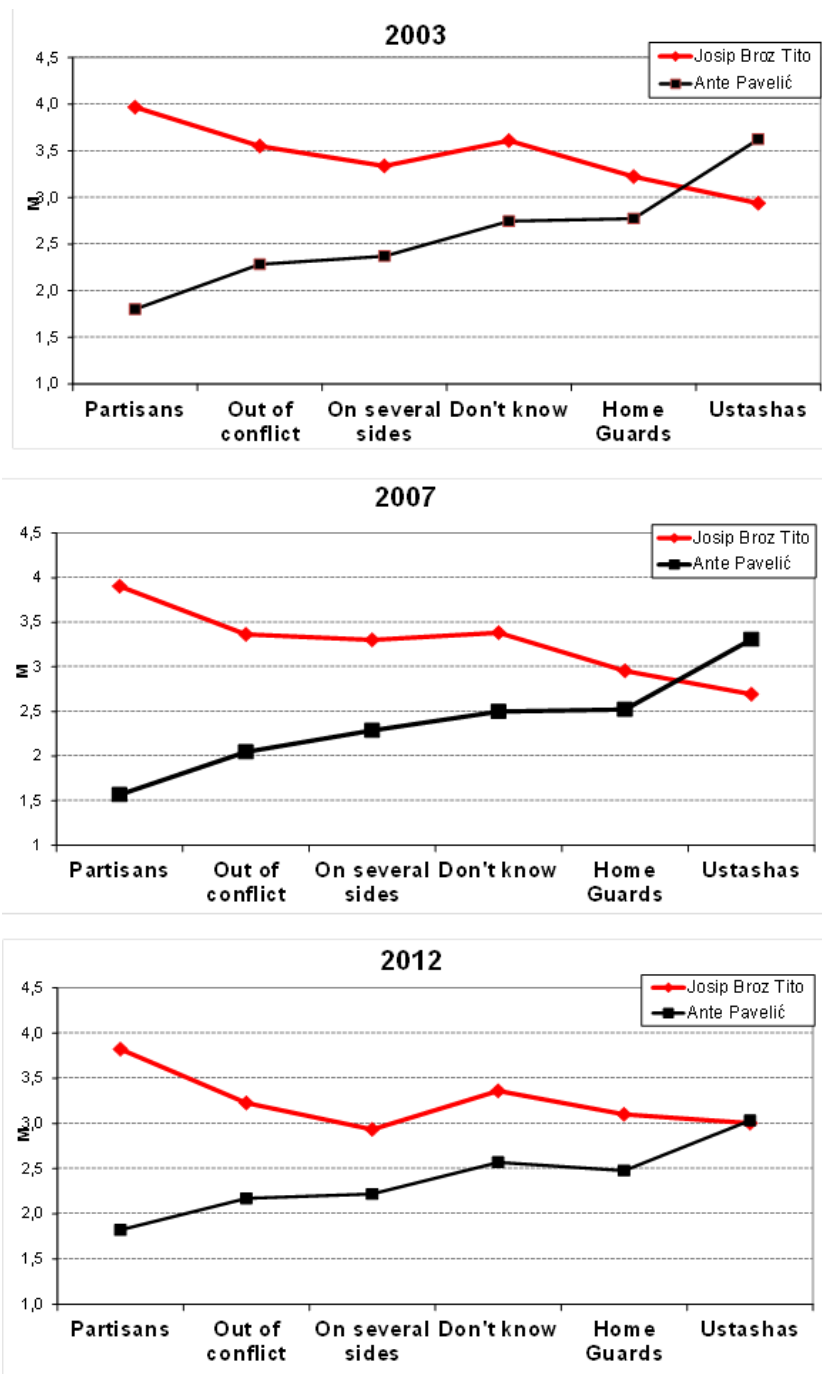


Figure 2.

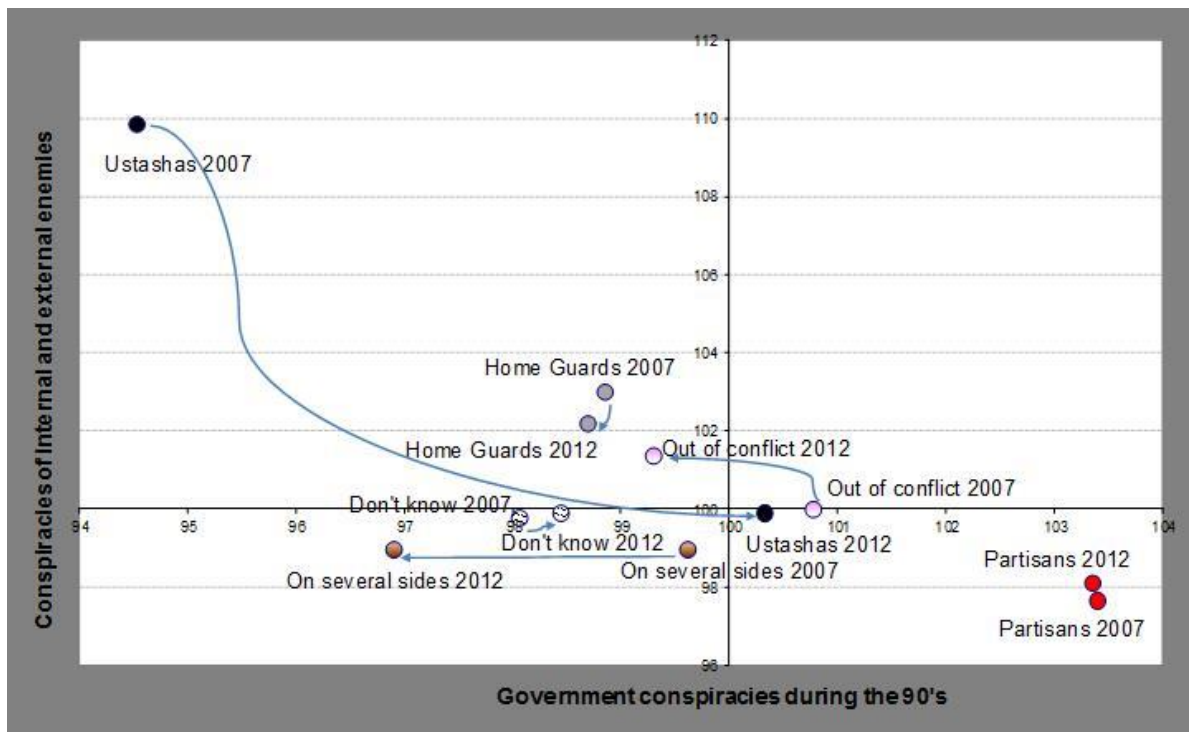
Evaluation of World War II political leaders from perspectives of different political legacies in three surveys.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Y-axis represents average results on the scale from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive) evaluation.

a) Interesting results are obtained as regards the relation between the political legacy and propensity to certain conspiracy theories referring to recent Croatian past (**Figure 3**).

The conducted variance analyses for the 2007 results show considerable differences among groups regarding both dimensions of conspiratorial thinking<sup>13</sup>.

Subjects with an anti-fascist legacy believe more in Government conspiracies in the 90's in respect to those belonging to the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) tradition, either home guards or ustashas (fascists). The situation is opposite when we analyze beliefs in conspiracies involving internal and external enemies. This belief is the strongest and considerably more pronounced in subjects belonging to the ustasha tradition, then those of the home guard tradition, and finally those belonging to the anti-fascist tradition.



**Figure 3.**

Beliefs in conspiracy theories and family political tradition of family from the World War II <sup>14</sup>.

These results clearly indicate that in 2007 the belief in two kinds of Croatian conspiracy theories was partly an expression of the historical cleavage dating from World War II. The question is in which

<sup>13</sup> For government conspiracies in the 90's:  $F=10.136$ ;  $df=858, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ . For conspiracies involving internal and external enemies:  $F=11.397$ ;  $df=858, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ .

<sup>14</sup> Results for both dimensions are expressed by means of standardized values ( $M=100$ ,  $sd=10$ ).

manner it has manifested itself: as previous perceptive priming or as a subsequent interpretation of the past. We can generally assume that, according to historical experience, or sedimented memory there existed potentials for such a perception, but a significant role was also played by the president Tudjman's informal politics of "reconciliation" which non-selectively rehabilitated the ustasha movement making it a positive point of identification, not only in the sense of absolving the patriotic motivation of members of this tradition, but also, in one part of them, with regards to the identification with fascistic ideology, both in the old and in the new generations.

As regards the preference of certain types of conspiracy theories, this would imply that a specific memory of the political past partly influenced the readiness to perceive some subjects, groups, or factors as potential enemies, but this memory was also the symbolic resource for the subsequent devising of relationships through the vocabulary of the past - especially ethnic intolerance – as well as for the inclination to tolerance of criminal behaviour, „privatisation“ of the state, and violation of civil rights. But, was it siege mentality that made them turn a blind eye to the respect of morals or are we here dealing with hypocrisy. I will try to answer that question in the last thesis' argumentation.

But in 2012 significant changes happened for several groups<sup>15</sup>. The most profound is in group with fascist legacy. In 2007 they were at the "national" front, defending it from internal and external enemies, but in 2012 they've abandoned such position and became moderately critical toward politics of HDZ during the 90's. General discreditation of HDZ corruptive politics as well as its interpretation of recent past, along with ideological transformation of this "legacy group" from extreme nationalists to some more conventional ideology may be the reasons for these changes. The results are in accordance with these assumptions. From 2007 to 2012, voting support for HDZ in this group has decreased from 60,6 % to 33,5 % and the number of declared nationalists decreased from 10,5 % in 2007 to 0 % in 2012. In the same period their identification has significantly increased with liberalism (from 7,9 % to 18,4 %), social-democracy (from 13,2% to 19,4%) and Christian democracy (from 52,6% to 55,1%).

Other changes, especially for "out of conflict", "don't knowers" and mixed legacy groups are in the line of indecisiveness if the Government during 90's has been involved in the unacceptable behaviour. Only two groups, of Partisan and Home Guard legacy have shown stability in their opposite perception of recent history.

Now, one could say these memories are indeed mutually related, but do they really matter in the context of present political behaviour?

For that purpose, I will now explore the relevance of the Second World War cleavage as well as of the recent cleavage - expressed through the two types of CTs - for the electoral behaviour in Croatia in 2007 and 2012.

In order to determine the differences in the voting behaviour among groups of different political legacy, chi-square tests, along with Contingency Coefficients are conducted. Results in the next table show that this relationship between voting behaviour and political legacy is significant and moderate as well as in accordance with left-right cleavage in Croatia.

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<sup>15</sup> Differences between groups are smaller but still significant. For government conspiracies in the 90's:  $F=6.920$ ;  $df=996, 5$ ;  $p=0,0001$ . For conspiracies involving internal and external enemies:  $F=3.593$ ;  $df=996, 5$ ;  $p=0,003$

**Table 3.** Voting behaviour and Croatian political legacy in 2007 and 2012<sup>16</sup>

	Partisans		Out of conflict		On several sides		Don't know		Home Guards		Ustahas	
	2007	2012	2007	2012	2007	2012	2007	2012	2007	2012	2007	2012
DC	0	0	0.66	0	0	0	0.99	0.8	3.96	0	0	0
HDZ	17.96	7.42	28.29	23.82	36.07	40.21	36.14	26.59	40.59	27.78	60.61	33.45
HNS	11.65	3.38	9.87	2.55	8.2	2.64	7.43	1.87	3.96	2.48	6.06	0
HSS	1.94	0.58	3.95	3.57	6.56	0	3.96	4.69	7.92	3.69	0	0
HSLs	3.88	1.29	5.92	1.04	0	0	1.98	0.43	2.97	1.86	0	3.07
HSP	1.46	3.41	1.97	2.69	6.56	4.37	4.46	2.13	3.96	4	12.12	6.6
HSU	7.77	3.15	7.89	1.9	3.28	2.69	6.44	0.91	6.93	1.66	0	0
HDSSB	1.46	0.78	1.97	3.22	0	0	1.49	1.77	1.98	10.47	3.03	0
IDS	4.85	3.25	1.97	0.96	0	0	2.97	0.5	0	0	0	0
SDP	47.57	52.62	35.53	29.98	37.7	26.89	31.68	34.99	19.8	16.7	12.12	17.91
Other	1.46	10.92	1.97	13.07	1.64	6.44	2.48	6.02	7.92	15.26	6.06	14.98
Croatian Labourists	/	4.28	/	5.41	/	7.22	/	3.52	/	8.99	/	2.49
Don't know	/	8.92	/	11.79	/	9.54	/	15.78	/	7.11	/	21.5
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2_{2007} = 122.655$ ,  $df = 50$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ . Contingency Coeff. = 0.374.  
 $\chi^2_{2012} = 162.652$ ,  $df = 90$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ . Contingency Coeff. = 0.408.

b) In order to determine the differences in the conspiratorial beliefs between voters of particular political parties conducted are simple analysis of variances. Significant differences were obtained in respect to both conspiratorial dimensions<sup>17</sup> (see **Figure 4**).

In 2007 voters of SDP and HNS are in the lead as regards belief in theories of Government conspiracies in the 90's. In the highest degree they differed from voters of HDZ among which the support of this kind of conspiracy theory is least pronounced when considering the whole sample. In terms of tendencies, these and other results mostly reflect the relation between the Government and the opposition which existed in the 90's (this applies to parties which existed at that time). Voters of the oppositional parties strongly believe in the conspiracies of the Government during 90's, but the voters of the ruling party strongly disbelieve in them. Completely opposite results are obtained for the belief in conspiracies of internal and external enemies. Voters of the strongly nationalistic parties (HSP and HDZ) were prone in 2007 to believe in this kind of CTs while voters of the social-democratic and liberal parties were reluctant to believe in them. These results suggest that the analyzed conspiratorial cleavages are constitutive as an informational base for the left-right antagonism. That is corroborated by the substantial correlation between beliefs in conspiracies and left-right self-identification of the citizens ( $r_{GC} = -.420$ ;  $r_{IEE} = .323$ ). These correlations are smaller but still significant in 2012 ( $r_{GC} = -.244$ ;  $r_{IEE} = .226$ ). Reasons for such decrease are

<sup>16</sup> Party abbreviations refer to the following parties: DC (Democratic Center), HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union – conservatives and nationalists), HNS (Croatian Peoples Party – liberal democrats), HSS (Croatian Peasants Party – moderate conservative party), HSLs (Croatian Social-Liberal Party), HSP (Croatian Party of Rights – nationalistic extreme right party), HSU (Croatian Party of Pensioners – more interest group than political party), HDSSB (Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja – regional conservative party), IDS (Istrian Democratic Assembly – regional liberal democrats), SDP (Social-Democratic Party), Croatian Labourists (recently established socialist party).

<sup>17</sup> For government conspiracies in the nineties: (2007)  $F=25.951$ ;  $df=596, 9$ ;  $p=0.0001$ , (ETA=.524); (2012)  $F=5.114$ ;  $df= 780, 14$ ;  $p=0.0001$ , (ETA=.269). For conspiracies involving internal and external enemies:  $F=7.984$ ;  $df=596, 9$ ;  $p=0.0001$ , (ETA=.326); (2012)  $F=4.668$ ;  $df= 780, 14$ ;  $p=0.0001$ , (ETA=.305).

not only in the ideological “softening” of rightist parties but also in lower level of competition between main electoral opponents due to HDZ burden of corruption affairs and loss of credibility.

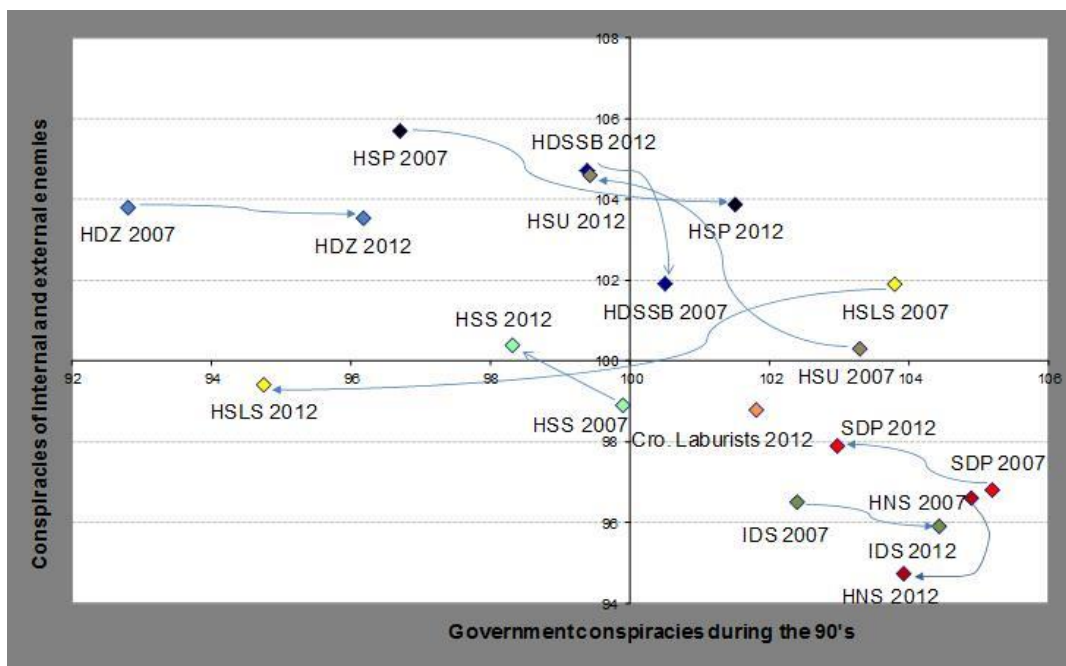


Figure 4.

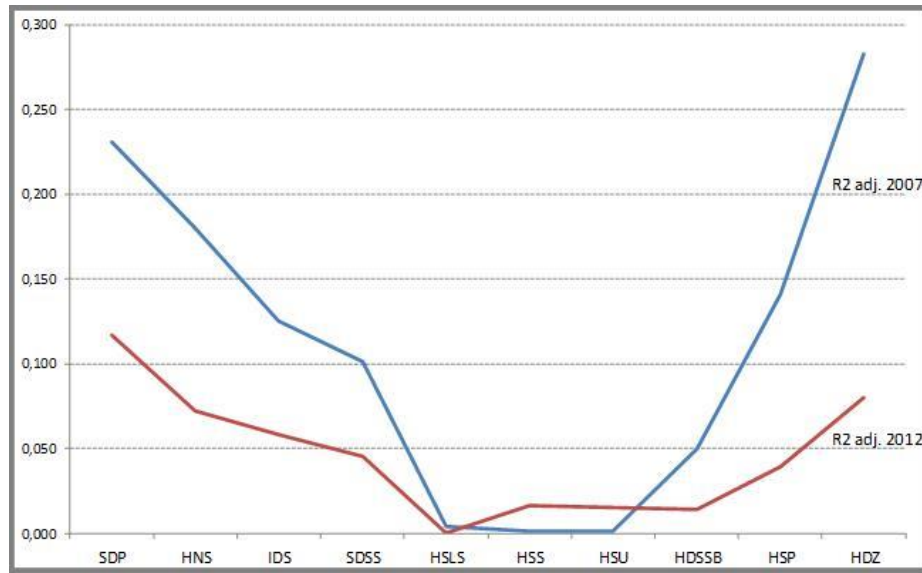
Beliefs in conspiracy theories and voting behaviour: changes from 2007 to 2012<sup>18</sup>.

In 2012 only smaller changes have occurred in SDP and HNS beliefs in both types of conspiracy theories. But, it seems that voters of rightist parties (HDZ, HSP and HDSSB) have accepted in higher degree critical stance to the role of HDZ during the period of transition and state building. Although in significant degree HDSSB lowered its beliefs in external and internal enemies of the nation, all three groups of voters are still very prone to these conspiratorial ideas. It seems that their nationalistic identity is very stable. Other interesting changes are those of HSLs and, in smaller degree of HSS. HSLs voters have shown dramatic change from highly critical opposition towards HDZ to the one of its apologetes. Not so dramatic, but in the same direction, changes have occurred in the HSS. Those parties were in the mandate from 2007 to 2011 strategic partners with HDZ, inspite of bigger inclination of their voters to the coalition with SDP. In 2011 elections those parties literary imploded. Only HSS reached only one seat in the Croatian parliament. The majority of critical voters have probably abandoned them.

Further, it is possible to clearly notice the extent to which the inclination towards conspiracy theories “influences” the attitudes towards political parties<sup>19</sup> by means of regression analyses which show interesting results (Figure 5).

<sup>18</sup> The results of both dimensions are expressed by means of standardized values (M=100, sd=10).

<sup>19</sup> We use them as an alternative variable to voting behaviour.



**Figure 5.**

Predictive "strength" of conspiracy theories for attitudes toward political parties in 2007 and 2012 surveys.

In 2007 the attitudes towards HDZ and SDP, main competitors on the Croatian political scene, and towards parties close to them, i.e. HSP and HNS respectively, can be successfully predicted by means of these theories. By beliefs in CTs it is possible to explain about a quarter of variance of the main competitors' voting behaviour. This predictive strength is of an equal degree as that of the left-right self-identification, which is one of the strongest. On the contrary, as it is shown in Figure 5, the belief in conspiracy theories does not have any predictive value for the attitude towards parties of the centre, HSLs, HSS, and HSU.

The reasons underlying this correlation can be attributed to the significance of information from the past which appear in certain conspiracy theories as the foundations for enduring evaluation of the past and recent behaviour and perceptive filter for the evaluation of future behaviour of political parties. As we have seen in the previous results, this relation partly derives from the historical-ideological cleavage in the electorate and the presumed political experience in the 90's which resulted in the current political cleavage between left and right, understood as the opposition between the Social Democratic-Liberal and the Conservative-Nationalistic pole.

Moreover, a high level of competition in 2007 elections, i.e. polarisation between the major political competitors can also contribute to the prominence of these conspiracy theories, related to the recent Croatian past. Mayor competitors were using conspiracy theories as informational sources of distinctions which are, moreover, linked to the ideological dimension important for the origin of their opposition. This information is not a relevant basis for decision making in the case of voters of minor parties whose aim is to win votes outside of this historical ideological matrix of antagonism and which are, consequently, located in the ideological center. In 2012, in the situation of predictable HDZ loss of elections, polarization based on these and similar bipolar oppositions lost its predictive "strength". But the same phenomenon as a framework of competition between mayor protagonists of Croatian bipolar party system clearly survived in smaller degree. Future is opened to its re-usage.

So far, we have seen an interrelation of cleavages from the past and recent times and their significance for the present political behaviour. What about the influence of this recently developed interpretations in terms of values and identity?

c) What kinds of political goals, values and collective identities do these conspiratorial beliefs promote? Or, more precisely, what kind of collective identifications were built on the basis of these two types of conspiratorial beliefs? In order to answer these questions CT's have been correlated to previously factorized preferred goals of citizens regarding Government politics<sup>20</sup>. Organized in more global structures, they also express the main political values. Another more global political orientation included in this analysis has been estimated through the scale of Authoritarianism.

**Table 4.** Correlations of political goals and values with types of conspiratorial thinking.

		"Organic strengthening" of the Nation (in terms of military and population growth and diaspora support)	"Europeanization" of Croatia (in terms of entrance in the EU, protection of minority rights, development of regions and decentralization)	"Fight" against societal pathologies (in terms of criminal, corruption, war crimes, violation of human and social rights)	Protection of discriminated groups (women, youth etc.)	Improvement of the life quality (in terms of social and economic status and employment)	Authoritarianism
2007	Conspiracies of internal and external enemies	0.435**	-0.385**	-0.024	0.017	-0.024	0.435**
	Government conspiracies in the 90's	-0.314**	0.203**	0.252**	0.077*	0.110**	-0.105*
2012	Conspiracies of internal and external enemies	0.158**	-0.085*	-0.050	0.017	-0.023	0.221**
	Government conspiracies in the 90's	-0.163**	-0.004	0.041	0.047	0.039	-0.097*

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

It is obvious that not all CTs are the same. They promote corresponding goals and values to various degrees in different political and social circumstances. CTs of internal and external enemies promote a closed out ethnic identity and authoritarian values. By contrast, CTs about Government in the 90's promote an open unfinished identity, critical skills and democratic values. It seems that these two types of CTs express wider political antagonism between nationalism and democratization. But this antagonism is expressed through CTs in significantly lower level in 2012. Reasons could be found in the consequences of passed path toward accession to the European Union and accepted rule of law and democratic competition. But we should be very careful in stating this because of still present potentials for "simulated" democracy, with reduced democratic institutions and norms to bare façade, often practiced by political elites, not only in young democracies these days (cf. Lengyel and Ilonszki 2012: 2).

In the 2012 survey we tried to explore such perception of simulated democracy through several items. Both types of conspiratorial thinking are significantly correlated with these statements as well as with the general perception of simulated democracy (see **Table 5**).

<sup>20</sup> They are expressed in the first line of the table 4 as five groups of values and goals. Those are ortogonal facors, obtained through the Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotations.

**Table 5.** Correlations of “simulated democracy” perceptions with types of conspiratorial thinking.

		Democracy is just a guise through which rich people hold others obedient.	Parliament is just the show for the people, real decisions are made elsewhere.	Politics is very close to the crime.	The quality of democracy is not important because people are sheep anyway, in the need for shepherds.	Propaganda is to a democracy what violence is to a dictatorship.	Laws are written for weaklings.	Politicians are looking only for their own interests.	General perception of simulated democracy <sup>o</sup>
2012	Conspiracies of internal and external enemies	0.367**	0.326**	0.258**	0.367**	0.319**	0.241**	0.271**	0.436**
	Government conspiracies in the 90's	0.147**	0.099**	0.221**	0.093**	0.173**	0.105**	0.120**	0.193**

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05; <sup>o</sup> This is general factor obtained through the PCA analysis. It explains 50.14% of variance of all first-row items included in the table.

Although one could expect stronger relationship of beliefs in government conspiracies and perception of simulated democracy because of the same orientation against immoralities and corruptive behaviour of political elites, it seems that pessimistic cynicism is expressed among those concerned with Manichean way of looking at politics. Put together with other well-known, as well as, in this paper previously analyzed variables in the stepwise regression model<sup>21</sup>, the best predictors of “simulating democracy” perception are again our conspiracy theories. Along with Authoritarianism, general (mis)trust in political institutions and education they explain more than 30 % of the variance of perceiving democracy simulated.

**Table 6.** Regression of predictors of “simulated democracy” general perception.

Predictors:	$\beta$
Conspiracies of internal and external enemies	0.377
Government conspiracies in the 90's	0.223
General trust in socio-political institutions	-0.206
Education level	-0.128
Authoritarianism	0.091
R2	0.559
R2 adj.	0.308

On the first sight one could consider these results as a demonstration of “dark side” potential of conspiratorial thinking. Certainly we should be worried to see these clear signs of democracy crisis, especially because the type of conspiratorial thinking that express pro-democratic inclination appears as the relevant predictor. But we should ask ourselves what are the conditions of emergence of such experience of personal and/or collective instrumentalization and sense of exclusion from the political decision-making processes among citizens?

<sup>21</sup> In the beginning of the stepwise model included were the next predictors: beliefs in conspiracies of internal and external enemies, beliefs in government conspiracies in the 90's, four „goals and values“ variables, Authoritarianism, left-right identification (0-10 scale), three variables of the trust: general trust in socio-political institutions, trust in church vs. central political institutions (parliament, government and president), trust in „civil society“ organizations vs. repressive state apparatus, and education level. Only significant predictors are shown in the table 6.



Stability and efficacy of institutional arrangements, especially in countries weak in democratic tradition largely depend on the quality and conduct of emerging elites, their acceptance of the rules, consistent behaviour, promoted discourse and willingness to accept each other's legitimacy (ibid). All these instances are in a certain degree still problematic not only in Croatia. Furthermore, in the context of developing more global economic and political crisis, simplified explanations of political realities - especially reasons for the crisis itself - could easily fail on fertile soil of unfulfilled accomplishments. They are in a smaller degree dangerous weapon in the mouths of extremist parties, but could become lethal when the national mainstream parties try to install protectionist policies. Also, such circumstances and ways of collective thinking are suitable for development of various populist movements. Even though populism is a usual ingredient of democracy, different appeals and imageries of these movements have different political potentials. This is easily observable in our two types of conspiracy theories. Filled with empty signifiers of nation, war, peoples will etc., along with speaking from the position of (or in behalf of) the center of political power, they strive to protect a monolithically conceived system and a certain form of organically conceived community. But, this is not an instance of non-reflexive dogmatism, as it may look like at first sight, but rather a way of functioning of so called pseudo-transformational leaders and their cynical reason (Sloterdijk 1992). When pseudo-transformational leaders dominate, the use of manipulation widens, leaders override human rights and democratic institutional framework, and unbiased information is hard to obtain (Masciulli 2009: 472). Such politics citizens easily recognize, and some of them adopt the same discourse in banal or in reflexive and double-minded way. In a neglected position regarding their political education, along with totalitarian legacy and political role narrowed mostly to voting, the most ruinous consequence for their political culture would be passive acceptance of the simulated democracy, laconically expressed in the sentence:

„They know what they are doing, but they do it because, in the short run, the force of circumstances and the instinct for self-preservation are speaking the same language, and they are telling them that it has to be so.”

(Sloterdijk: 21).

In such cases vicious compatibility between citizens and pseudo-transformational elites is established. The question is:

## 5. What is to be done?

This question overcomes the case of Croatia and answer should be given at least in the context of current European political and economic crisis.

To solve the crisis and reinforce stability I openly argue for “more Europe”, more social and more egalitarian Europe with more involved citizens, not consumers or just tax payers. It also means arguing for a new frame of thinking that goes beyond the nation-state model that has prevailed in Europe since the end of the Middle Ages. That is to say beyond mythical motherlands and beyond cynicism as described by Sloterdijk as “*enlightened false consciousness*”. That is “*modernized unhappy consciousness*”, which “*has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to put them into practice*” (ibid). We can add: for the sake of its own enjoyment. To overcome that, we need cheekiness that implies courage to foster democracy beyond the bounds of nation and probably to work against the memory of their naturalized relationship in the context of critical relationship to the history. In this case, the enjoyment of subjective affiliation should be accomplished in realization of universal principles of human rights and

norms, values and procedures of liberal democracy as a basis for a shared political culture. To accomplish this, all available critical potentials should be activated.

Furthermore, in order to be functional, reality has to be created by something that is not fully actual. By this I mean that we need a sort of reflexive vision, like Victor Hugo's vision - as a motivator for achievement - imbued with open look to the past, and radical democratic values, ideals and plans for their realization, even if many of these ideas would be considered as sheer illusions by generations to come.

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