

CROATIAN ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Democracy, elections, politics, and society

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Interview with Professor Anđelko Milardović

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(Abstract) Croatia has been having problems for almost twenty years in problems and finally, now has the end of them in sight. The number of unemployed is growing, people are displeased and constituencies are polarized between two largest parties. In the interview with Professor Milardović we have tried to touch upon most important topics and to address issues and questions regarding the Croatian political scene. We touched upon the elections (local, parliamentary, and presidential) as well as the Croatian accession to the European Union. In July 2013, Croatia will become new member of the European Union. Croatian accession will affect its position in the South-East Europe, as well as the relationships with the neighbouring countries: Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Keywords: Croatia, European Union, minimal definition of democracy, elections, position of Croatia in the region, euro scepticism, Croatia relationships with the neighbouring countries, political oligarchy.

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I. Political situation in Croatia

1. How do you assess the level of democracy in Croatia?

Democracy is a political theory. It is not an unambiguous type, because there are several types of democracy: constitutional, participatory, representative, minimum, extended, strong.. There are many types of democracy, so any debate on democracy first involves defining the very type of democracy. It is just the

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rule of the majority; it can be a tyranny of the majority, as Tocqueville² wrote in his book, "Democracy in America". Democracy demonstrates itself on a relation between the majorities and minorities, as well as on the relation between minorities and majorities. Democratic societies respect the voices of different minority groups, but at the same time democracy is the rule of the majority. The principle of the majority or minority can be seductive when talking about democracy, because there may be a majority rule, looking from a purely numerical point of view, like for example, that the majority always rules, but in fact majority can never ever rule. Majority can rule only in the case of direct democracy, when there is a small number of people, where there is and an open space for discussion and decision. However, in the case of societies, especially in the case of bigger ones, we talk about representative democracy which has its advantages and disadvantages. So, every discourse on democracy starts with the defining the democracy type. In the representative democracy, when speaking of the minority-majority, majority-minority relations, the minority can have actual control because they are the representatives of the given minority; they deal with their own interests, and not with the interests of the citizens. Therefore, they are a part of a political oligarchy. For example, one minority is powerful because they have everything they need: they have financial, political, economic, cultural and other resources - these resources make the minority a powerful one and within a democracy, in fact are dealing with oligarchy. It is important to distance ourselves from the popular definition of democracy because when one enters into the theory of democracy, then it is a more complex story.

When it comes to Croatia, as in most countries, one can talk about the minimum definition of democracy. Minimal democracy was defined by many theorists, from Schumpeter³, Przeworski⁴ and by Karl Popper⁵. Minimal definition of democracy includes: regular elections, devolution, and understanding that one party wins and the other one loses. These are three most important factors and everything else falls into the field of pure simulation of democracy in the post-election period with a very high political participation of the spin techniques, that is, induced conflicts, producing pseudo-events and mass culture. For example, with the help from of Suleiman the Magnificent, Wind Rose, Lara's choice, Mexican soap operas or even football. On the one hand, with the help from commercials and advertising politicians, a simulation of democracy is created in the post-election period; especially regarding economic advertising which tricks us to buy things and eventually go into debt. On the other hand, we have political advertising which encourages people to vote for a minimal democracy. The formula is simple: work, buy, consume, pray (refers to the Church), and vote. Previously mentioned things refer to the minimal definition of democracy, that is, democracy with the lowest possible mode or type of political participation.

2. *What was, in your opinion, the decisive political event in Croatia in 2012?*

The first major event was the establishment of the new Parliament and the legislative executive and authorities in which the members of our society placed great hopes concerning social changes because of the great economic and social crisis. These expectations were high and unfortunately, as usual followed by disappointment.

Do you think that the plan was unsuccessful?

The plan is nominally a plan, but it is shown that this is still an action without conception.

Do you think the plan of action should have been prepared before the election?

The plan was supposed to be done. If someone wants to govern, and deal with serious business, then one has to make serious preparation. Turned out that this government did not make serious preparations-instead they launched Plan 21 into the public, which has not been yet realized. The prime minister came out with a very interesting buzzword that he, in fact, did not promise anything and, therefore, nothing was done. People should ask the Prime Minister how he came to power, because in a democracy, one is elected because of the power of his or her words, and not by using not with the usage of weapon, dung forks, poles, tanks, and cannons. People were, in the context of semiotics, politics, and semiotics of democracy, following the word.

Promises?

Yes, actual promises.

3. *Could you briefly draw parallels between the current and the former government?*

The former government had a different ideological underpinning. The previous government was Christian-democratic-conservative in orientation, which ruled Croatia in a total of 16 years and is largely

² Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) French political scientist, classical liberal political tradition.

³ Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950) Austrian American economist and political scientist.

⁴ Adam Przeworski (1940, Warsaw) Polish-American professor of political science, deals with the theories of democracy and political economy.

⁵ Karl Popper (1902, Vienna, Austria-Hungary - 1994, London) one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century.

responsible for the present situation. The former government most significantly created the state, but simply failed in the formatting of Croatian society. The tragedy is that the new government, which has had a chance to get out of the hopeless position, simply did not take advantage of the given opportunity. Thus, with the method of social comparison, we could say that there has been a shift of power on the world-view level, though that is also debatable, but in fact nothing has changed to make the citizens feel better. That is the problem.

II. The political situation at the local level and local elections 2013

1. *In the local elections of 2009, two electoral bases polarized between the HDZ and the SDP. How do you comment on that, do you think that could be an indicator of democracy lacking from the Croatian society? Did the political events in 2012 change something in the distribution of forces between the major parties?*

The fact is that there are two poles which is the result of polarization in society. It is also a result of twenty years of polarization created by the two big parties that have colonized the social and political space of the Croatian society, not leaving opportunity to other political parties to come to the fore. The two largest parties initially divided the space, and then the sphere of influence. They are well-organized with a strong infrastructure, with strong patronage aspects of their work, that is, with clientage politics - that is, who is not within the two parties cannot play. It takes someone from the outside to penetrate as a third stream. During the last parliamentary elections, a third current appeared - the Labour Party. I think that the Labour Party will strengthen more and more because the social democratic option has ceased to be a social democratic option - it has turned into a pure neo-liberal one. My basic criticism of the Croatian Social Democrats is that they lost identity in a way that they oriented more towards neo-liberal ideology, neoliberal politics and thus they associated with a neo-liberal party, HNS. A third force is on the horizon, which is good considering that the two big parties colonized society in political and interest terms. Two biggest parties are not even competition to each other anymore, they function more like sister parties. This is the political oligarchy which cooperates in different ways when the lights turn off.

2. *In May 2013 local self-government elections are going to be held. What results do you expect?*

I do not follow local elections, but the principle of local, presidential, and parliamentary elections, in essence, is the same. This is a one-times-four single political participation of the citizens when they are dealing with different political bids. The main problem of the elections and minimal democracy is a kind of post democracy in which depolitization takes place. There are no more discussions on public issues and problems; there are no more ideological debates or political confrontations. Politics has become the technique and technology of establishing power and domination. Politicians have become entrepreneurs in the politics. Some among them actually are businessmen, such as Berlusconi. Politics became a combination of populism, show business and media. In democracy governed by media, politicians behave like typical political traders who offer their wares on a trace of political opinion polls because they need them. Politicians cooperate with the media and the whole political process of establishing democratic bodies and democracy rests on staging or theatricalizing. Ultimately, politics and democracy in post-modern age are nothing but an integral part of the society of the spectacle. One of my colleagues said: "What's the difference between Obama and Lady Gaga?" They both come as part of a mass cultural production; they use the PR, the scene, the stage, propaganda, advertising, and use similar spin techniques. Lady Gaga and Obama both send messages to the masses. Obama and Lady Gaga are in a similar position, only the messages are different in semiotic sense.

3. *How do you assess the political rearrangement of relations in Istria?*

I think this is not a crisis, but simply a struggle for power and influence in Istria. There is an old option, IDS (Istrian Democratic Assembly), and the other party SDP who seeks to gain influence. This is purely the principle of winners or losers, and that is democratically legitimate. What is democratically legitimate, cannot be called a crisis. The crisis would be to abolish the option of choice. Then it would not be democracy, it would be the crisis of democracy. Another actor came on the scene, SDP, who wants the same as competing IDS. In this political match, the only thing that matters is who will win and who will lose. Polish political scientist, Przeworski, argues that some will lose, according to the theory of rational choice, while others will win. There is no third option.

III. Croatian positions in the European region

1. *In your opinion, what is the position and role of Croatia in south-eastern Europe?*

From July 1st, 2013, if all goes well, there will be new geopolitical circumstances and, thus, new optics on the Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans. Thus, in the context of the new optics, Croatia will become a full member of the European Union. In this way, it is drawn out from the concept of the Western Balkans, and after July 2nd will find herself on the *western balcony*,⁶ that is, in the European Union. New geopolitical realities will emerge, and Croatia will, as a former part of the Western Balkans, find herself in the new position in relation to the countries of the Western Balkans. In this way, Croatia will become attractive whether as a transit society or a society in which it will be desirable to live and work. Croatia will enter the system of the European Union under the rules that must be followed and will have the same problems as the other members of the European Union. Croatia will live under the same roof as the other members, but of course it will not have the same status as the most developed countries. It will be like in Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania and Ireland the Third League West. The Second League West are Spain, Czech Republic, Austria and Italy. First division of the West belong to the most advanced: Germany, France, Great Britain, and Poland. New realities should be approached extremely rationally and fairly, and what is seen - needs to be said. These are the new realities in the European Union, which I also displayed in my new book called "Three essays on Euro skepticism" - the semiotics of euro skepticism. From 1st of July, the macro-regional concept will be redefined given the new geopolitical realities. The fact is that Croatia will become a new member of the European Union. How will she continue to act with the rest of the Western Balkans depends on governments on the other side of the border.

2. *The leadership in Serbia has changed. What opportunities or difficulties do you see for cooperation between the two countries?*

Croatian-Serbian relations are at a very low level, which is logical, because the president Tomislav Nikolić with his current policy creates problems. One cannot talk about normalization of relations, while he says that Vukovar is a Serbian city, that in Srebrenica did not happen what happened, or that Montenegro is still part of Serbia. President Nikolić should take back all that he said and conform to the rules. In that way, he could govern and lead Serbia in a decent way. Until President Nikolić withdraws his statements, not our president, nor the presidents of other countries will not go to Belgrade. It would mean political death for President Josipović. Even after Croatian accession to the European Union, I see no opportunities for mutual understanding. That was an option while Boris Tadić was the president, but now he is gone. Tadić and Josipović communicated on a friendly level. With respect to Bosnia and Herzegovina, when we are already talking about this macro region, there was no internal mixing. Bosnia and Herzegovina should be constituted in a way that it houses three different ethnicities, since there is an ethnic democracy.

3. *Do you think that, after joining the European Union, a similar scenario could happen in Croatia as it has happened in Slovenia?*

There is a possibility that the Slovenian scenario could happen - maybe even before the Croatian accession to the European Union. If the number of unemployed exceeds 400 000, masses will likely go out to the streets. In this sense, there are two scenarios. There is a low-intensity conflict scenario where conflicts may occur without any major changes. High-intensity conflict scenario would then lead to a chaotic situation. The way - out to the possible chaotic situation would be the early elections. I would argue for early parliamentary and early presidential elections. It would be best if they were to be held together with the local elections in May. Why? Because I do not believe in the ability of the ruling group to be able to reverse the trend in three or four months. I am just saying this rationally, without ideological discourse or with affection. Rationally speaking, in three or four months there cannot be big reversals - the only thing that can arise are new complications, given that every day there are more and more unemployed. This thesis automatically provokes the question: *Who would come to power if it comes to early elections?* The opposition is not ready. Actually, it's not so much about whether they are ready or not, but if it comes to high-intensity conflict, then everything should be saved with early elections, to eventually find an optimal governmental formula. It can be based on a grand coalition, a small coalition, the government of national unity, the government of national salvation, committee of Public Safety... To us, the citizens, it does not matter how it will be called. The only thing that matters is that the team which takes the matters into their own hands does it properly. The number of unemployed is likely to fall in May because we're not "random", but a state without a plan whose functioning depends on the climate change, because of the tourist season. In short, the government will be

⁶ Milardović, A.: *Western Balcony*. Zagreb: Pan liber, 2010

saved by the tourist season, but this is only a temporary solution. It might, however, come to the escalation of discontent even before entering the European Union. In that case, the international community will oust Prime Minister Milanović and put someone else in his position. This is called post democratic and technocratic approach to politics. This is what I see and what I can run on the basis of the facts, based on the figures, based on relationships, processes, trends and tendencies.

4. *What are the regional characteristics of Croatia? Please elaborate on the advantages and disadvantages of such a conception?*

As far as internal regionalization is concerned, after joining the European Union, Croatia will be divided into two or three statistical regions. In the new regional division, counties, who want to keep their power, are likely to oppose to the internal statistical division. For the European Union is far easier to operate with two or three macro regions, than with chipped twenty-one. In this way, it is easier and simpler to operate with the fund intended for regional development. European Union goes for the simplification, as far as the operational level is concerned. In summary, it is far easier to communicate with three macro regions than with 21 counties.

Do you think that identity of the counties could be lost in the new regional division?

I do not see why this would lead to losing the identity. As far as the identity is concerned, if the person, social group, or region wants to lose its identity, then it will. Just by entering into a new type of relations, a priori, the identity cannot be lost. It can be lost if a person accepts the loss, but still it all depends on the individual or on the social group. The mainstay is always inside, not outside. Someone from the outside may have ideas, concepts or plans that he is trying to impose, but the object of imposing can always provide resistance, so it is in everyday life.

IV. Euro skepticism

1. *Is there euro skepticism in Croatia?*

No, it is an artificial product. However, the real euro skepticism will start when Croatia joins the European Union. Then it will finally come to life; it will be derived from the real process, the relationships between the actors of the process, power relations. This is more of a prelude, foreplay on the basis of ideological discourse, and it is not based on experience. Real euro skepticism, and all that exists, is based on the experience. Things may run out of metaphysics, theology or ideology. But if it cannot be empirically verified, then there is not much foundation.

2. *After the Croatian accession to the European Union, what will be its foreign policy?*

Croatian foreign policy will be the foreign policy of the European Union. This will generally be the implementation of EU foreign policy. What is now external, individual, it will be in the group compared to China, America or Australia. This is a Eurocentric policy. It is the policy of Brussels according to which each country defines its foreign policy to their own interests. For example, the priority will be the foreign policy towards the countries of the remains of the Western Balkans. Afterwards, there could be a possible defined policy towards Russia and Eastern policies. Croatia currently has no defined policy nor with China, nor Russia or India. She behaves extremely eurocentrically, in fact, she behaves reserved. Croatia does not promote the concept of openness to the world that would build a special relationship with the big ones. In short, we have two options: Croatia is to, a) implement the European Union's foreign policy and, b) with respect to its geopolitical position, create specific foreign policy according to her own interests.

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