

Twentieth-century wars in history teaching and public memory of present-day Croatia*

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On July 1, 2013, when Croatia celebrated its accession to the European Union, it was hard to imagine that only a few months later some leading Croatian politicians would once again question the right to freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Let me illustrate this claim with a statement made by Tomislav Karamarko, the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union, one of the two biggest and most influential political parties in Croatia:

Everybody can think what he or she wants, but only in his or her own room, courtyard or house – certainly not in the public arena. Everyone will have to respect values that are [embedded] in the very foundations of the Croatian state – these are the Homeland War [the 1991–1995 war in Croatia, author's comment]¹, our defenders², our dead, the political doctrine of Dr. Franjo Tuđman and the great deeds of Gojko Šušak³.

Ironically, this statement was made on May 3, 2014, World Press Freedom Day (!). A day later, faced with criticism over his statement as an attack on freedom of speech, Karamarko (who graduated with a university degree in history in the 1980s) explained what he actually meant:

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¹ The term "Homeland War" appeared during the 1990s, first in politics and journalism. Today it is widely accepted in Croatia, not only in political documents, public discourse or education, but also in academics.

² "Croatian defenders" – a term which is officially used in Croatia to designate soldiers in the Croatian Army during the 1991–1995 war.

³ See: S. n., "Ne može se pomiriti s tim da Hrvatska bude 'pokvareni zub EU' [He cannot accept that Croatia is a 'bad tooth of the EU']," *Dnevnik Nove Tv*, 3. 5. 2014, <http://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/karamarko-hdz-je-najsaznija-infrastruktura-za-promjene-u-hrvatskoj--334314.html> (accessed February 22, 2015). Franjo Tuđman was the first president of the independent Republic of Croatia, from 1990 to 1999. Gojko Šušak was defense minister from 1991 to 1998; he is considered one of the key figures in the successful war effort in Croatia, but also as one of the advocates of rigid nationalism and one of the architects of Croatia's policies toward Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially during the Muslim (Bosniak)–Croat war (1993–1994).

I always emphasize that the modern Croatian state was created on the foundations of the Homeland War and the political doctrine of Dr. Tuđman [...] Enough with insulting the Homeland War, enough with underestimating, relativization and ideological fog [...] If you do not agree with the Croatian state, if you think that we should forget all crimes committed against Croats, attempts to destroy the Croatian state and seize its territory – okay [...] think what you want, but not in public [...] All of you who want to forget – who want to equate the victim with the aggressor – you can do that in your own home, but in the public arena, *in textbooks* [highlighted by S.K.], in newspapers, please do not poison us with that⁴.

So, according to some high-ranking Croatian politicians, no one should publicly express interpretations other than the official interpretations of certain key events from Croatian contemporary history. Moreover, these diverse opinions *especially* should not be expressed in the media or in school (history) textbooks. But these ideas should not come as a surprise to anyone in Croatia. Such an oppressive culture of thinking about the purpose of school history, a model which allows only “proper” interpretations of past events, has been more the rule than the exception in the last hundred years. But let us put aside for a moment the fact that such official interpretations are prone to change together with political changes, and that this has already happened more than once over the past decades. One would expect, however, that in a country devastated by an economic crisis, whose economy in 2014 contracted for the sixth year in a row and is one of the worst in the EU, economy – not history – would be in the focus of the current political debate. Yet this is not the case: history continues to be (mis-)used as a means of fighting political battles, and as one of the key focuses of political arguments.

Let me briefly describe the contemporary Croatian political landscape. Croatia was part of Yugoslavia until its violent breakup in the early 1990s. Following the collapse of the ruling League of Yugoslav Communists, the first multi-party elections were held in the spring of 1990. After the war broke out in 1991, Croatia declared its independence and gained diplomatic recognition from the European Economic Community and the United States in 1992. The impact of the war on the further development of the country was serious. It is estimated that the war claimed some 22,000 lives.⁵ It caused a huge number

⁴ Quoted in: Dražen Ciglenečki, “Karamarko: Ja sam to iskarikirao zato što je to bio skup branitelja i svi su bili emotivni, [Karamarko: I was exaggerating because it was a gathering of veterans and everyone was emotional]” *Novi list*, 5. 5. 2014., <http://www.novilist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Karamarko-Ja-sam-to-iskarikirao-zato-sto-je-to-bio-skup-branitelja-i-svi-su-bili-emotivni> (accessed February 22, 2015).

⁵ There is no individualized list of victims of the 1991–1995 war in Croatia, but only various estimates. According to the most detailed account, among the 22,000 casualties of the war, 36.7% were Croatian soldiers, 29% were Croatian civilians, 5.5% were missing Croatian soldiers and civilians, and 28% were killed and missing Serbian soldiers and civilians. Dražen Živić, “Demografski gubitci Hrvatske vojske tijekom Domovinskog rata [Demographic losses of the Croatian Army during the Homeland War],” *Diacovensia*, Vol.12 No.1 (June 2005): 119–140. According to another report, which takes into account only Croatian casualties,

of refugees to flee from areas that during the war were under the control of local Serbs and the Yugoslav Army (about one-third of Croatia's territory), not to mention extensive material damage. The state of war also served as a pretext for numerous violations of human rights and media freedoms, as well as increasing authoritarian rule. The war drew public attention away from the country's problematic economic transition (privatization), whose effects on the Croatian economy were in many aspects devastating. The war ended in the summer of 1995, after the Croatian Army, in a military operation code-named *Storm*, restored control over most of Croatian territory. These events also resulted in a mass exodus of the Serb population from the territories affected by Operation Storm. Podunavlje (Danube basin region), the only part of the country that remained under Serbian control after 1995, was peacefully reintegrated in 1998. After the war, the share of ethnic Serbs in the total population of Croatia was reduced from the prewar figure of 12.2 percent to 4.4 percent (according to the 2011 census).

Under its 1990 constitution, Croatia operated under a semi-presidential system. When constitutional changes were made in 2000, the country switched to a parliamentary system. There are two major political parties – the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) – as well as a number of smaller national and regional parties. HDZ was founded in 1989 by Franjo Tuđman, the Croatian president from 1990 to 1999. It has been in power for most of the period since 1990 (1990–2000 and 2003–2011). HDZ is a conservative right-wing party; its political attitudes vary from center-right to radical-right and are strongly colored by the ideology of ethnic nationalism. At the moment, HDZ is the strongest opposition party in Croatia. It lost power in the 2011 elections after several major corruption and political scandals, causing the party to win its smallest number of votes since its foundation. The other major political party, SDP, evolved from the former League of Communists of Croatia. It is the largest party of the Croatian centre-left, and its political ideas are in many aspects closer to those of (left) liberal parties than of social democratic parties. SDP led a coalition government from 2000–2003, after HDZ lost power for the first time after 1990. It is currently in power (since the end of 2011) as the senior partner in the governing coalition.

The present Croatian government has so far been rather unsuccessful in managing the deep economic and social problems of the country, caused by the prolonged economic crisis, widespread unemployment, and the unwillingness of governments to conduct necessary but often painful reforms. For many months, polls have shown that HDZ is steadily gaining in popularity, while the Social Democrats are losing support. After its weak performance in the 2011

48.7% were military deaths and 51.3% civilian deaths. Andrija Hebrang, *Zločini nad civilima u srpsko-crnogorskoj agresiji na Republiku Hrvatsku* [Crimes against civilians in the Serbian-Montenegrin aggression against Croatia] (Zagreb: Udruga hrvatskih liječnika dragovoljaca 1990–1991, 2013).

parliamentary elections, the HDZ leadership was replaced. The new leadership, with Karamarko as the party's new president, began a process of party consolidation. Their strategy also includes a return to the nationalist rhetoric of the 1990s; some political analysts see this strategy as a tailwind for a trend of nationalism that began to reappear after the completion of the EU accession process⁶. This was evident in the last presidential elections (end of 2014 / beginning of 2015), in which the candidate of the opposition (HDZ) narrowly won over the candidate supported by SDP and some other left-wing parties, as well as in the recently held parliamentary elections (November 8, 2015)⁷. The history of the twentieth century regularly serves as fuel to feed and inflame these sentiments.

History teaching and history textbooks have already been under the special scrutiny of leading HDZ politicians for several months now. There are quite a few examples. On August 23, 2014 (Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes), Karamarko delivered a speech in which he outlined the new politics of history if HDZ wins the next general elections:

When HDZ comes to power, and this is going to happen after the next parliamentary elections, we will first implement lustration⁸ – as far as this is possible today, but we will do it. Then, we will banish that criminal [Josip Broz Tito, author's comment] from all the streets and squares in Croatia. And most importantly, we will finally fix Croatian schools. Not like today, when some quasi-historians write history the way it suits them. We need to unify school standards. Ultimately, we have to write realistically about the past. We shouldn't continue to learn quasi-communist history in which one of the ten greatest world criminals, Broz Tito, is portrayed as a some sort of bon vivant, a hedonist, and therefore, quite a normal person⁹.

⁶ See: Dejan Jović, "First 'return to Europe', then to the 1990s," *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*, Centre for Southeast European Studies, <http://www.suedosteropa.uni-graz.at/biepag/node/144> (accessed February 22, 2015).

⁷ The first Croatian parliamentary elections after joining the EU were held on 8 November 2015. The coalition led by the HDZ won 59 seats, including all three seats allocated to Croatian citizens living abroad. The ruling alliance, led by the Social Democrats, won 56 seats, but it is expected that representatives from some minor parties, as well as minority representatives, will side with the Social Democrats. Both coalitions, however, are well short of the 76 seats needed for a parliamentary majority. A new, third group – an alliance of independent candidates known as Most (Bridge) – won 19 seats, thus becoming the third most influential political force in the country. Croatia faces difficult coalition negotiations to form a stable government, and repeating the elections in January 2016 is not the least likely option.

⁸ Lustration of the former members of the Communist Party is often emphasized in the speeches of HDZ officials, although today, former Communist Party members can be found in both major political parties. It is even likely that they are more numerous in HDZ than in SDP. However, because there are no clear criteria for lustration (especially since it is now a quarter of a century after the collapse of communism), there are reasonable fears that lustration could serve the political purpose of eliminating political opponents and imposing control over the media, the judicial system, secret services, universities, etc. See: Jović, "First 'return to Europe', then to the 1990s."

⁹ See: S. n., "Karamarko, Čičak, Banac: Provest čemo lustraciju, a zločinca Broza maknuti s

Following this speech, some other members of the HDZ Committee on Education announced that the topic of communist crimes should be given special attention in future history curricula and textbooks (disregarding the fact that it has been part of history teaching for the past 25 years). They mentioned the 1991–1995 war in the same context – according to them, *the Homeland War* is not dealt with objectively and not taught thoroughly enough¹⁰. Then, at the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Franjo Tuđman (December 10, 2014), Karamarko announced the unification of history textbook narratives about Tuđman, as well as the introduction of the concept of *tuđmanizam* ('Tuđmanism', described as the political doctrine of Franjo Tuđman) into the Croatian Constitution:

They are trying to take our children away from us. What kind of school textbooks do we have? When we come to power, we will certainly change that. Textbooks must be unified, and in these textbooks we will verify the role and the work of Dr. Tuđman in the right manner. And not only in the textbooks. We will introduce the concept of *tuđmanizam* into the Constitution [...]¹¹.

On February 24, 2015, in his speech at the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the first general assembly of HDZ, Karamarko emphasized several points: he paid a special tribute to Franjo Tuđman and his legacy. He announced the construction of a monument in Tuđman's honor "at a distinguished place" in the capital, the reintroduction of sponsorship by the Croatian Parliament over the commemoration in Bleiburg field (see the explanation later on in the text), as well as the adoption of a declaration which would "conclude the tragic balance of the Second World War"¹². In that speech, he raised the issue of history teaching once again:

ulica i trgova, [Karamarko, Čičak, Banac: We will conduct lustration and remove the name of that criminal Broz from streets and squares]" *Maxportal*, 24. 8. 2014., <http://www.maxportal.hr/karamarko-cicak-banac-provest-cemo-lustraciju-a-zlocinca-broza-maknuti-s-ulica-i-trgova/> (accessed February 22, 2015).

¹⁰ Maja Šurina, „HDZ bi mijenjao knjige: Tito je out, a Domovinski rat je in [HDZ would change textbooks: Tito is *out*, and the Homeland War is *in*]”, *Tportal*, 29. 8. 2014., <http://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/348337/HDZ-bi-mijenjao-knjige-Tito-je-out-a-Domovinski-rat-je-in.html> (accessed February 22, 2015).

¹¹ See: Dražen Ciglenečki, “Karamarko: Pojam tuđmanizam uvest čemo u Ustav RH [Karamarko: We will introduce the concept of Tuđmanism into the Croatian Constitution],” *Novi list*, 11. 12. 2014., <http://www.novilist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Karamarko-Pojam-tudmanizam-vest-cemo-u-Ustav-RH> (accessed February 22, 2015). Also: Speech by Tomislav Karamarko at the Academy on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the death of Dr. Franjo Tuđman (10. 12. 2014.), <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCc9lr9dLTC3jE1yzK1CSvLA> (accessed February 22, 2015).

¹² Speech of Tomislav Karamarko at the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the first general assembly of HDZ, February 24, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9ly9RPXXSw> (accessed February 28, 2015).

It is unacceptable that national content, such as the Homeland War, are taught superficially, incorrectly, or at the end of the school year, when fatigue and the workload take their toll. We are aware that the public school system is a sensitive area and we do not want to conduct any experiments, but we need to examine some curricula and textbook standards that are now, unfortunately, more tailored to various particular interests, rather than to the interests of students and patriotic education¹³.

In one of his recent interviews, however, Karamarko stressed that “no one should be afraid of lustration” because there is no point in blacklisting from public offices those persons who were once affiliated with the Communist regime, but who are now already too old. He called for a “fundamental change in the social climate” instead – in this process, education, culture, and history should have a prominent role. If he becomes prime minister, he said, he would “pay special attention to school programs” – they should include “the whole truth, whether some would like it or not”¹⁴.

So, ultimately, it is all about the teaching of two twentieth-century wars, as well as the results and consequences of these wars. World War II has been in focus of debates about history and history teaching in the past quarter-century; debates about the 1991–1995 war intensified after 2000. Why are these two wars so fiercely debated in Croatia, and what are the consequences of these debates for the history teaching?

The “National Liberation Struggle” in the politics of history of socialist Yugoslavia and post-1990 Croatia

The 1941–1945 war in Yugoslavia was not only a war of liberation against the Axis occupying forces (German, Italian, Bulgarian, Hungarian) and their locally established puppet regimes. It was also a terrible civil war between the Partisan resistance movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and various political and military groups which collaborated with the Axis, most notably the Chetniks and the Ustashe.¹⁵ During the war, Croats split their

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Moj antikomunistički manifest [My anti-Communist manifesto],” an interview with Tomislav Karamarko in *Globus*, no. 1276, 22. 5. 2015. See also: Ivanka Toma, “Karamarkov antikomunistički manifest u praksi [Karamarko’s anti-Communist manifesto in practice],” *Jutarnji list*, 30. 5. 2015, <http://www.jutarnji.hr/karamarkov-antikomunisticki-manifest-u-praksi/1357754/> (accessed June 2, 2015).

¹⁵ The main goals of the Partisans and their communist leadership were to fight the occupying forces and collaborators and to restore Yugoslavia as a federal state with a Soviet-style government. The Chetniks of Draža Mihailović were originally established as a resistance movement with a monarchist and nationalist agenda. They wanted the restoration of a monarchist Yugoslavia under Serbian domination. The Chetniks soon came into conflict with the Partisans and adopted a policy of collaboration with regard to the Axis. The Ustashe were established at the beginning of the 1930s as a revolutionary and terrorist organization, emphasizing as their goal the creation of an independent Croatia. The ideology

allegiance between the Partisan Movement, which wanted to restore Yugoslavia as a federal state, and the Independent State of Croatia, a fascist puppet state established by the Axis and ruled by the Ustashe. Partisans carried out the main fighting against the Axis and its collaborators and, at the Tehran conference (November 1943), they got support from the major Allied powers. They won the war, and Yugoslavia was restored as a federal and multiethnic republic and, eventually, as a communist state.

The human cost of the war was enormous, and it is estimated to have been around one million (out of approximately 16 million inhabitants in Yugoslavia before the war); civilian victims made up more than half of that number. Axis occupying forces and collaborators carried out mass executions of civilians in retaliation for resistance activity and pursued ethnic cleansing in some territories. The majority of Yugoslavia's Jewish population perished as a consequence of the persecutions of the German occupying forces and puppet regimes in Croatia and Serbia. The Ustashe regime also committed genocide against Serbs and Roma on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and murdered numerous antifascists. The Chetniks committed numerous crimes against the Muslim and Croat populations on the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Allied bombings, especially in the last two years of the war, took their toll of civilian victims as well. During and after the final stages of the war, Partisan troops and the Yugoslav authorities carried out reprisals, including forced marches and mass executions of captured collaborators, deportations of ethnic Germans, atrocities against Italians, etc.¹⁶.

In post-war Yugoslavia, the “National Liberation Struggle” (this is how the 1941–45 war used to be called in Yugoslavia; hereafter: NOB) was a topic of particular significance. With its emphasis on the “common struggle of all Yugoslav nations led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia against the occupying forces and the collaborators” (as the phrase goes), the NOB was meant to provide the basis of legitimacy for the Yugoslav Communist regime. Consequently, it was a topic of special importance for history teaching: a significant number of class hours were assigned to this topic in curricula, students regularly visited sites associated with the Partisan struggle, student competitions in knowledge of the NOB were held, etc. In textbooks, the topic was elaborated in detail: it was a story of military offensives, Partisan victories, and the heroic deeds of Partisan fighters. It was also a rather monolithic narrative, in which each of the Yugoslav nations had their own heroes and villains: the

of this movement was a blend of fascism and Croatian nationalism. In April 1941, they were appointed to rule the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), a fascist puppet state established by the Axis. See: Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). (Croatian translation: Jozo Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941 – 1945: okupacija i kolaboracija*, Zagreb: EPH Liber, 2010).

¹⁶ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945*, p. 718–750.

former were Partisan fighters recruited from all Yugoslav nations, and the latter were the occupying forces and collaborators (the Ustaše, the Chetniks, the Slovenian White Guard, etc.). The shared experience of fighting against fascism – which was expressed in the famous slogan “brotherhood and unity” – was also meant to provide a common supranational and unifying narrative for all Yugoslav nations. However, different interpretations of war events among the political and intellectual elites of the six Yugoslav republics – about the role of each of the Yugoslav nations during the war and their merits in the creation of the second Yugoslavia – served in certain periods as an indicator of deeper inter-ethnic strife, especially in Croatian-Serbian relations. Occasionally, these conflicting narratives found their reflection in the history textbooks of the Yugoslav republics (each republic produced its own textbooks).¹⁷ But these were not the kinds of discussions that would allow the inclusion of memories of those who had fought on the other side in the civil war: neither the mass killings of war prisoners committed by Partisan forces in May 1945 nor the retaliation and atrocities against the German and Italian populations were ever mentioned in history lessons.

In the period of political changes that occurred during and after the collapse of Yugoslavia, it was precisely the narrative on World War II that underwent extensive and often disputed modifications in all of the former Yugoslav republics. In Croatia, these changes were very much determined by the political needs of the HDZ leadership. Tuđman had fought during the war as a member of the Yugoslav Partisans. He had been a general in the Yugoslav Army and a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. After his military career, he worked as a historian and actively participated in shaping the narrative about the NOB as an author and a director of the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement of Croatia in Zagreb (1961–67). Later, he came into conflict with the regime, which ended his career and made him a dissident.

When Tuđman became the Croatian president, he promoted the idea of “national reconciliation” among the former war adversaries (the Partisans and the Ustaše) and their descendants, based on the synthesis of state-building elements from the different political and ideological options originating from World War II. Reconciliation was seen as the basic precondition for the creation of an independent Croatian state in the 1990s. But it was also very much determined by the need of the HDZ leadership to reconcile conflicting narratives *within* the party. Some of Tuđman's closest associates and “founding fathers” of HDZ were also former communists, former members of the Yugoslav army, police, and secret services. On the other hand, Tuđman received strong support from émigré circles, very much influenced by those who

¹⁷ Snježana Koren, *Politika povijesti u Jugoslaviji (1945–1960): Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, nastava povijesti, historiografija* [Politics of history in Yugoslavia (1945–1960): the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, history teaching, historiography], (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2012), 309–375.

fled Croatia at the very end of World War II either because they were strongly affiliated with the NDH or because they were opponents of the Yugoslav Communist regime. The idea of reconciliation promoted the ethnic concept of a nation: only Croats in Croatia and abroad were invited to participate in it, while other Croatian citizens, especially Serbs, were excluded. In this concept, democracy was of secondary importance and the homogenization of the Croatian nation was given priority.

The politics of history promoted by the HDZ leadership strongly influenced the public use of history in the 1990s. Thousands of monuments erected in the period of socialist Yugoslavia to honor the Partisan struggle were destroyed or damaged. In many towns and places, names that previously recalled Partisan fighters and brigades, or the achievements of socialism, were removed from public spaces. However, these practices have strongly varied from one region of Croatia to another; they remain the source of constant conflict between those who want these names or monuments (including those of Tito) to be removed and those who would not support that decision. In history textbooks of the 1990s, the number of pages dedicated to Partisan warfare and victories in World War II was heavily reduced. These changes, however, were only partly motivated by the rigid manner in which this topic used to be taught in the previous period. In the new interpretative paradigm, the Partisan Movement in Croatia was not interpreted altogether negatively, but it was separated from the rest of the Yugoslav context and primarily placed in the context of creating the Croatian state within the Yugoslav federation. This shift was also reflected in terminology: the term “National Liberation Struggle” (NOB) was replaced by the term “Croatian Antifascist Movement.”

At the other end of the spectrum, members of the Ustaše movement were, in a way, rehabilitated as fighters for an independent Croatia and against Serbian domination. In textbooks, the establishment of the NDH was presented as a positive historical fact. Ustaše atrocities against Serbs, Jews and Roma were marginalized and glossed over (especially those committed at the concentration camp Jasenovac¹⁸), and the story of the mass killings of war prisoners committed by Partisans at the end of the war was given a central place. Annual commemorations near the town of Bleiburg on the Austrian-Slovenian border, where the armed forces of the NDH surrendered in May 1945, were sponsored by the Croatian Parliament until three years ago. These commemorations, established in the 1950s by Croatian émigré circles, memorialize events at the very end of the war when Partisan forces committed

¹⁸ Jasenovac concentration camp was the largest extermination camp established by the authorities of NDH and operated by the Ustaše. The majority of victims were ethnic Serbs, Jews, and Roma, as well as anti-fascist or dissident Croats. Since World War II, there has been much debate and controversy regarding the number of victims killed at the Jasenovac. Institutions such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the Jasenovac Memorial Site, and the Museum of Genocide in Belgrade presently estimate that the Ustaše regime murdered between 80,000 and 100,000 people in Jasenovac.

mass liquidations of captured war adversaries, mostly soldiers of the NDH. The Bleiburg commemorations had always been controversial, however, because they regularly served not only to pay homage to the victims, but also as a memorial celebration of the NDH.

Debating the teaching of the “Homeland War”

Simultaneously with the debates about the teaching of the Second World War, the new history curricula and textbooks in the first half of the 1990s began to include the topic of the 1991–1995 war, which in Croatia is called the “Homeland War.” In fact, a 1992 history textbook already included descriptions of events in this conflict, which was still in progress. These narratives were very much attuned with the official memory, but they were also highly problematic because they used politicized and loaded language whose primary function was not to inform, but to sway the emotions of readers. But in the 1990s these narratives were not yet problematized nor subjected to public debate.

In the years since, these views of Croatia’s recent past have frequently been criticized both inside and outside of Croatia, especially in the period after 2000 when HDZ lost power for the first time. Because of its negative aspects – such as Croatia’s involvement in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, dubious privatization practices, authoritarian leadership in the second half of the 1990s, the treatment of minorities, etc. – Tuđman’s legacy has been called into question in the years after his death, through a process usually called *de-Tuđmanisation*. Part of this process was also the appointment of the Commission for the Evaluation of History Textbooks inherited from the 1990s (2000–2001)¹⁹. Although its results were meager, its activities prompted a public debate about history teaching. As a result, history curricula and most textbooks that have been published since 2000 have abandoned the most controversial parts of the 1990s narrative, especially its positive evaluation of the NDH. The paradigm of history teaching has also gradually started to change: in history curricula, textbooks, and everyday teaching practice, history has increasingly been presented not only as a body of carefully selected facts and value judgments, but also as a critical engagement with the past. But the framework that was set in the 1990s, especially the ethno-national ideology, still strongly permeates the curricula and textbook narratives. Furthermore, in some of the textbooks published after 2000, there are still underlying assumptions that to a certain extent reflect other contested paradigms from the 1990s about World War II²⁰.

¹⁹ For the activities of this commission, see: Snježana Koren, Branislava Baranović, “What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia? Transition, Intervention, and History Education Politics (1990–2008)”, in ‘Transition’ and the Politics of History Education in Southeast Europe, ed. Augusta Dimou (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009): 105–112.

²⁰ See: Snježana Koren, “Nastava povijesti između historije i pamćenja: Hrvatski udžbenici

After 2003, the intensity of debates about World War II was temporarily diminished, and the 1991–1995 war came into the focus of discussions about the content of primary and secondary history education. There were two major debates over interpretations of the “Homeland War” in school history textbooks, one in 2005 and the another in 2007. These debates were also determined by the contemporary political context. In the years following the end of the conflict, the 1991–1995 war has acquired an important place in the official memory. It has been increasingly portrayed as one of the key events in Croatian history, the victory of the Croatian defenders over the Serbian aggressors, which ensured the very existence of today’s Croatia. For many, no longer was it the synthesis of different ideological state-building elements originating from World War II that provided the foundation for today’s Croatia, but the “values and virtues of the Homeland War.”

Secondly, in years after 2000, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) issued indictments against a number of senior Croatian Army commanders for war crimes, bringing to the surface some questions that have continuously burdened the memories of the war. Among them, the issue of war crimes committed by Serbs and Croats, as well as different evaluations of wartime events, have had the most influence on the textbook debates. Attempts to raise these questions have met strong resistance among those politicians and veterans of war associations who regard it as their duty to protect what they refer to as the “dignity of the Homeland War.” These divisions and conflicts in the society prompted the Croatian Parliament to issue several declarations attempting to provide an official interpretation of the war, the most important of which were the Declaration on the Homeland War (2000) and the Declaration on Operation Storm (2006)²¹. These developments also found their reflection in history teaching. There were two parallel processes after 2000. Some textbooks began to offer narratives that went beyond the simplified descriptions of wartime events characteristic of the

povijesti o 1945. godini [History teaching between history and memory: Croatian history textbooks on 1945],” in *Kultura sjećanja: 1945. Povijesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti* [Culture of remembrance: 1945. Historical turning points and mastering the past], eds. Sulejman Bosto and Tihomir Cipek (Zagreb: Disput, 2009): 239–263.

²¹ In the Declaration on the Homeland War it is emphasized that Croatia “led a just and legitimate, defensive and liberating war, and not a war of conquest and aggression against anyone.” In the Declaration on Operation Storm, this military operation is described as a “legitimate,” “victorious,” “allied,” “antiterrorist,” “decisive” and “unforgettable” battle. State officials and authorities are “obliged” (although without any sanctions), while scientific and educational institutions, the media, trade unions, etc. are “called on” to protect the “basic values and the dignity of the Homeland War.” However, both declarations avoid mentioning the issue of Croatia’s role in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. See: Snježana Koren, “Korisna prošlost? Ratovi devedesetih u deklaracijama Hrvatskog sabora [‘Useful past?’ The 1990s wars in the declarations of the Croatian Parliament],” in *Kultura sjećanja: 1991. Povijesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti* [Culture of remembrance: 1991. Historical turning points and mastering the past], ed. Tihomir Cipek (Zagreb: Disput, 2011): 123–155.

1990s. Simultaneously, there were increasing demands by some members of war veteran associations and some politicians to expand the number of school lessons allocated to this topic (which, they maintained, should be taught in a “proper” manner).

Finally, in 2003–2004 the Ministry of Education had to deal with the end of the moratorium on teaching recent history in Podunavlje (the Danube basin region). Podunavlje is the easternmost part of Croatia, one of the most ethnically heterogeneous areas (among several ethnic groups, Croats are the largest and Serbs the second largest). The area was heavily affected by the war, mainly during the 1991 military campaign led by the Yugoslav Army and local Serbian militias, which caused numerous deaths and extensive destruction. The most important battle was the battle of Vukovar, the biggest town in the area. Vukovar became a symbol of the war’s destruction and the suffering of Croats in Podunavlje. When Croatia regained control over most of its territory in the west of the country in the summer of 1995, Podunavlje remained under the control of the local Serbs. The region was placed under the UN Transitional Administration, and it was peacefully reintegrated with Croatia in 1998. The peace agreement ensured the educational rights of the Serbian minority in the region, but it also resulted in segregated education for Croatian and Serbian children. Part of the agreement was the decision to implement a five-year embargo (“the moratorium”) on the teaching contemporary Croatian history in classes of Serbian pupils, starting with the school-year 1997–98 and ending in the school-year 2002–2003²².

The 2005 debate was prompted when the Ministry of Education decided, after the expiration of the moratorium, to create a supplement to the existing textbooks that covered contemporary history (entitled *Supplement to Textbooks on Current Croatian History*) that would be in temporary use until new textbooks were developed.²³ The text was commissioned from a group of au-

²² More about this topic (in English): Eric Stover, Harvey Weinstein eds., *My neighbor, my enemy: Justice and community in the aftermath of mass atrocity* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004); Branislava Baranović, Boris Jokić, Karin Doolan, “Teaching history in a post-war social context: The Case of Croatian Danube region”, *Intercultural Education* 18 (2007): 455–471; Dinka Čorkalo Biruški, “Lesson learned from the Former Yugoslavia: The case of Croatia”, in *Handbook of ethnic conflict: International perspectives*, eds. Dan Landis, Rosita D. Albert (New York: Springer, 2012): 327–248; Dinka Čorkalo Biruški, Dean Ajduković, “Parallel worlds of divided community: Time does not make much difference”, *Peace psychology in the Balkans: Dealing with a violent past while building peace*, eds. Olivera Simić, Zala Volčič, Catherine R. Philpot (New York : Springer, 2012): 177–198; Dario Spini, Guy Elcheroth, Dinka Čorkalo Biruški eds., *War, community and social change: Collective experiences in the Former Yugoslavia* (New York: Springer, 2014).

²³ The debate on the supplement is well-documented. It resulted in two books. The first one – *Jedna povijest, više historija: dodatak udžbenicima s kronikom objavljanja* [One past, many histories: the *Supplement to Textbooks* with a chronicle of publication] (Zagreb: Documenta, 2007) – offers the perspective of the authors of the supplement. This book contains the supplement, newspaper clips, various documents, and several essays written by the authors and some other participants in the debate. The other – *Multiperspektivnost*

thors who envisaged a handbook that would provide different perspectives on wartime events. The 2007 debate coincided with the publication of new history textbooks, some of which also tried to offer a more multiperspective approach to the teaching of the recent war. Both the supplement and some of the 2007 history textbooks came under attack from various war veterans' associations, right-wing politicians, and journalists from the right-wing media, as well as some historians. The attempts to introduce different perspectives to the teaching of recent conflicts and to address crimes committed by both Serbs and Croats were condemned as education "without any value guidelines," a "distortion of the historical truth about the Serbian aggression," a "relativization of the Serbian responsibility for the war," and an attempt "to equate the Croatian victims with the Serbian aggressor." The Supplement was also criticized because of its "neutral terminology" and its avoidance of the term "the Homeland War." Another issue in both of these debates was how textbook authors should deal with the parliamentary declarations on the 1990s war – whether these declarations are obligatory interpretative guides for history textbook authors or not.

However, these two attempts to produce a different narrative about the war did not have the same ending. In the case of the supplement, the negative publicity, together with the charged atmosphere of war crime trials, and the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Operation Storm, resulted in the Ministry's decision to give up on the project, leaving the authors of the book on their own in the debates that took place months after the text was made public. This attempt proved to be premature, but it opened up questions on *how* to teach about the 1991–1995 war. Two years later, in a more favorable political context, the Ministry of Education eventually accepted all textbooks after some minor changes. But there were other consequences as well. The supplement debate prompted the Ministry of Education to make extensive changes to the unit on the 1991–1995 war in the new history curriculum for compulsory education, which was under construction at the time (2005–2006). These modifications made that topic the most elaborated one in the curriculum, but at the same time it was cleansed of any events that could interfere with the official memory of the war.²⁴ The debate over the 2007 his-

ili realitiviziranje: dodatak udžbenicima za najnoviju povijest i istina o Domovinskom ratu [Multiperspectivity or relativisation: the *Supplement to Textbooks* and the truth about the Homeland War] (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2008) – offers the perspective of the critics. It contains several essays by historians who wrote negative reviews of the supplement, as well as their reviews. See also: Iavor Rangelov, *Nationalism and the Rule of Law. Lessons from the Balkans and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 158–159. Edith Marko-Stöckl, *My Truth, Your Truth – Our Truth? The Role of Truth Commissions and History Teaching for Reconciliation. Specific report on the role of history for reconciliation in the frame of the FP& project "Human and Minority Rights in the Life Cycle of Ethnic Conflicts* (MIRICO, 2008), 14–17.

²⁴ For example, students are expected to describe in detail the course of the war, to describe the

tory textbooks encouraged the ministry to start organizing (from 2008) annual Seminars on the Homeland War for history teachers: in-service training of history teachers has proven to be another important strategy the ministry has at its disposal to promote an official version of history.

Recent debates

Among the strategies of the current government led by Social Democrats, dealing (or “dealing”) with the past does not play such a prominent role. Although state officials have regularly attended commemorations and anniversaries of events from World War II and the 1991–1995 war, they have not generally instigated debates about them. However, in April 2012 the Croatian Parliament decided by a majority of votes to abolish its sponsorship of the commemoration at Bleiburg field because of, as it was explained by the president of the Parliament, the persistent display of Ustashe iconography and other manipulations regarding the NDH²⁵. Since then, this decision has been strongly criticized by HDZ and other right-wing parties; the new president of the Republic, who was elected as a candidate of right wing parties, soon after her inauguration accepted the sponsorship of this year’s Bleiburg commemoration. In past two years, there were some half-hearted attempts to establish an alternative place of commemoration for the victims of Partisan crimes (the largest mass grave site in Tezno, Slovenia), but the governing coalition eventually gave up on that idea. However, the mythology and symbolism around Bleiburg is so strong that it is questionable whether it would be at all possible to establish another *lieu de mémoire*.

In the last three years, the Ministry of Education has not intervened too much in history curricula and textbooks. This does not mean, however, that

most important military operations of the Croatian army, to “name distinguished Croatian defenders,” and to “precisely define who was the aggressor and who was the victim.” Only those crimes in which Croats and Bosnian Muslims were victims are explicitly mentioned (Dubrovnik, Vukovar, Srebrenica). On the other hand, the sentence from the original curriculum proposal that mentioned the exodus of the Serbian population after Operation Storm was removed in the final version. See: *Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu* [The National Curriculum for Primary School], Zagreb: Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa, 2006, p. 291. These events are nevertheless thematized in most current history textbooks, although the manner in which they are presented significantly differs from one textbook to another.

²⁵ See for example: Maja Šurina, “Sabor ukinuo pokroviteljstvo komemoracije u Bleiburgu! [Croatian Parliament abolished its sponsorship of the Bleiburg commemoration],” Tportal.hr, 17. 4. 2012., <http://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/188464/Sabor-ukinuo-pokroviteljstvo-komemoracije-u-Bleiburgu.html>; S. n., “Milanović ide u Tezno umjesto na Bleiburg [Milanovic is going to Tezno instead of Bleiburg],” Novi list/tportal.hr, 16. 4. 2012., http://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/188145/Milanovic-ide-u-Tezno-umjesto-na-Bleiburg.html?utm_source=clanci&utm_medium=manual2&utm_campaign=clanci_manual (accessed April 19, 2015).

there were no other ideological confrontations over the content of education, rather it was mostly about the curricula of civic and health education. These confrontations have been part of a broader culture war between conservative forces strongly supported by the Catholic Church and liberal forces, battling over issues like same-sex marriage, reproductive rights, or the introduction of gender ideology in school curricula. The only major intervention in the field of history teaching happened in 2013, when the Ministry of Education requested that publishers bring the content of history textbooks adopted in 2007 up to date, i.e., that they supplement them with new information about post-2007 events. Although it was symptomatic that the Ministry had called for this “updating” immediately after the ICTY acquitted Croatian generals Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač of charges of war crimes in Operation Storm, the whole procedure turned out to be rather uneventful. Similarly, the subsequent process of new history textbooks approval in 2014 passed without any major debates or demands from the ministry for politically or ideologically motivated modifications.

But, with the general elections fast approaching (for the election results, see footnote 7), history has once again become a central part of the political debate, as well as part of the campaign strategy of HDZ and some other right-wing parties. The governing left-liberal coalition, too, increasingly accepts the heated rhetoric about the topics from the recent past – it has proven as a convenient way to draw public attention away from other pressing problems of the country. Discussions are focused on topics such as antifascism, Partisan crimes in World War II, the activities of the Yugoslav secret services and their role in the assassinations of Croatian emigrants, the legacy of the “Homeland War,” or the evaluation of historical figures such as Tuđman or Tito. These ongoing debates were additionally inflamed by several decisions made by the newly elected president of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. In March 2015, she decided to remove a relief of Tito from the presidential office. It had been exhibited there among the busts of several other important personalities from Croatian history during the presidencies of Franjo Tuđman and of his first two successors in the office. The decision to remove the relief provoked discussions about Tito’s role in Croatian history – some condemning him as a criminal responsible for the murders of tens of thousands of people and a communist dictator of Yugoslavia, others emphasizing his role as one of great leaders of the allied struggle against fascism during World War II and of the Non-Aligned Movement, praising his resistance to Stalin and for providing the peoples of Yugoslavia with a prolonged period of peace, stability, and economic growth.

In April 2015, President Grabarić-Kitarović decided not to take part in this year’s commemoration at Jasenovac; at the same time, she announced her decision to personally attend the Bleiburg commemoration in May, which provoked additional controversy. The president visited the Jasenovac memorial site alone, four days before the official commemoration (the information of her visit was released on the web site of the Office of the President only

afterwards) and wrote her impressions in the visitor's book. The text provoked criticism because she avoided naming the victims of the concentration camp Jasenovac, as well as the regime that was responsible for the atrocities that took place there (see footnote 15)²⁶. Faced with criticism about Jasenovac, the president gave up on the decision to take part in the Bleiburg commemoration; she eventually visited Bleiburg one day before the official commemoration, in the same manner in which she visited Jasenovac. In June 2015, however, she personally attended the annual celebration of the Anti-Fascist Struggle Day; in her speech, the president underlined that antifascism should be preserved as a "historical value", but the "negative heritage of the totalitarian communist ideology" should be rejected²⁷.

But most of all, the new HDZ leadership calls for *re-Tuđmanisation* – a return to the values of the 1990s that stem from the political legacy of Franjo Tuđman. During the presidential campaign, the future President of the Republic repeatedly invoked the memory of Franjo Tuđman and his political heritage. One of her first official photographs taken in the President's Office shows the new president working at former president Tuđman's desk, thus establishing a symbolic connection with the 1990s. In the eve of the general elections, however, some leading SDP politicians have also repeatedly praised Tuđman's political merits, including prime minister who said that both Tito and Tuđman were the best that Croats had in a given period of history²⁸. However, proponents of *Tuđmanizam* take from that legacy only those components which they find usable in the present – the creation of the independent Croatian state and the victorious "Homeland War" – and omit its negative aspects. The new HDZ leadership has even gone one step further: they deliberately leave out of Tuđman's political legacy one of its key ingredients – the

²⁶ President Grabar-Kitarović wrote in the Book of Impressions: "At this very moment, on this day 70 years ago, began the break-out from the Jasenovac camp. I bow to the victims and express my deep respect to the people who were tortured and killed in this place. These are people who have first and last names, who had their own families and homes, their own identity, their own desires and hopes, their own dreams, everything that makes a person unique. As President of the Republic of Croatia and as a human being, I unconditionally condemn the crimes of torture and killing that happened here. The ideology which caused those crimes has been morally and legally condemned. That policy was the will of a regime which linked itself with the Nazi-fascist Axis and dishonourably used the Croatian people's legitimate wish for their own state." The web site of the Office of the President of Croatia, http://predsjednik.hr/22_4_ (accessed April 29, 2015).

²⁷ See: "Grabar Kitarović: Antifašizam je povijesna vrijednost, komunizam nije" [Grabar Kitarović: Antifascism is a historical value, communism is not], Index.hr, 22. 6. 2015., <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/grabar-kitarovic-antifasizam-je-povijesna-vrijednost-komunizam-nije-/826824.aspx> (accessed July 4, 2015).

²⁸ See: Ana Erdelja, „Zoran Milanović: Tito i Tuđman najbolje su što je Hrvatska u tim razdobljima povijesti imala“ [Tito and Tuđman were the best that Croatia had in a given period of history], *Večernji list*, 18. 3. 2015., <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/zoran-milanovic-tito-i-tudman-najbolje-su-sto-je-hrvatska-u-tim-razdobljima-povijesti-imala-995688> (accessed March 27, 2015).

politics of national reconciliation. In his speech at the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of Tuđman's death, Karamarko declared Tuđman's politics of reconciliation "a failure," because it was allegedly misused by "those who deny Croatia," those who "never got over the breakup of Yugoslavia"²⁹. In the rhetoric of Croatian nationalists, both Yugoslav states are presented as essentially anti-Croat, as entities that were created only to secure Serbian domination. Because the whole Yugoslav experience – especially its communist part – is perceived as altogether negative, none of it is accepted as part of Croatia's positive historical heritage, including the Partisan struggle during World War II. This interpretation tends to delete any positive memory of the Partisan Movement by placing it primarily in the context of the creation of Yugoslavia, or by emphasizing only its communist aspects, as well as Partisan atrocities committed during the war. It tends to downplay its character as a resistance movement and especially its antifascist character. Moreover, the events of World War II are now increasingly viewed and judged through the prism of the 1991–1995 war: for example, the Yugoslav Army, which was responsible for the destruction of Vukovar and the bombing of Dubrovnik in 1991, is retroactively linked with the Partisans because they both "wore the symbol of the red five-pointed star." Although this interpretation declaratively rejects "all totalitarianisms," it tends to underplay the fascist character of the NDH and often eludes clear value judgments of its crimes³⁰.

All of this, however, serves a very distinctive contemporary purpose: it is meant to denounce all those in Croatian society who, allegedly, have never wanted an independent Croatia. Such labels are usually attached to the present SDP-led government, some other left-wing politicians, some intellectuals and non-governmental organizations, or to anyone who interprets the Croatian experience during the period of Yugoslavia with any positive connotations. In public discourse, a number of derogatory terms are used that recall the hate speech of the 1990s: numerous right-wing newspapers and portals, as well as some right-wing politicians, label their political opponents as "Yugonostalgics," "Yugophiles," "Yugoslavs," "reds," or "communists." One right-wing portal describes them as "ideological Yugoslavs"; another one defines them as "children and grandchildren of those who in 1945 created communist Yugo-

²⁹ See: Dražen Ciglenečki, "Karamarko: Pojam tuđmanizam uvest ćemo u Ustav RH [Karamarko: We will introduce the concept of Tuđmanism into the Croatian Constitution]," *Novi list*, 11. 12. 2014., <http://www.novilist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Karamarko-Pojam-tudmanizam-vest-cesto-u-Ustav-RH>. See also: Speech by Tomislav Karamarko at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4TdLsPMKGU> (accessed February 22, 2015).

³⁰ In the last few years, there has been an upsurge in the number of incidents associated with the glorification of the NDH (such as chanting the Ustaše slogan *Za dom – spremni!* 'For Home – Ready!' at sports events and concerts, the celebration of April 10, the date when the NDH was established in 1941, the displaying of Ustaše symbols, etc.). As a rule, these incidents are not welcomed, but they are also never clearly condemned by many right-wing politicians, and increasingly tolerated by some left-wing politicians.

slavia with gun in hand or later carried out repression against Croats”³¹. In the present political context, otherwise absurd accusations of “Yugonostalgia” or communism sound ominous: they could be understood and interpreted as a call to settle scores with alleged enemies.

Blaming the current government for belittling the “values of the Homeland War” is another pre-election strategy of HDZ and some other opposition parties. There are other groups in the society who make the same claim, the most prominent among them being some of the many war veterans’ associations, as well as certain factions within the Catholic Church. These accusations are usually justified by means of vague claims that the current government “equates the victim and the aggressor,” or “presents the Croats as equally guilty for the war as the Serbs.” For example, the government’s efforts to pass a law that would regulate the rights of civilian victims of the war regardless of their ethnicity, or its attempts to normalize relations with neighboring countries in the region, are usually described in this manner. In March 2015, a public debate was stirred up when the President of the Zagreb County Court, a possible candidate for judiciary minister in the prospective HDZ government, suggested that Croatia’s new criminal code should penalize those who deny the defensive and liberating character of the 1991–1995 war or describe it as a civil war³². The judge said that the legal system should “respect and protect the values of the Homeland War.” This idea received public support among some war veterans’ organizations, politicians, and even some historians. But there are those who oppose the idea and see it as an attempt to limit free speech, and even as the continuation of a trend to limit political freedoms. The current judiciary minister rejected the proposal, declaring that during his term in office nothing resembling verbal assault would be introduced into the penal code³³. Others oppose the idea of regulating historical interpretations with legal documents, believing that such provisions would call into question the freedom of scientific research. For them, the 1991–1995 war could be interpreted as both a civil and an international war³⁴. However, in documents such as the

³¹ See for example: Darko Hudelist, “Karamarko: Moj antikomunistički manifest [Karamarko: My anti-Communist manifesto]” (an interview with Tomislav Karamarko), *Globus*, br. 1276, 22. 5. 2015; Velimir Bujanec, “1991. protiv Jugoslavije – 2014. protiv Jugoslavena! [In 1991 against Yugoslavia, in 2014 against Yugoslavs!]”, *Direktno.hr*, 24. 11. 2014., <http://direktno.hr/en/2014/kolumna/3608/1991-Protiv-Jugoslavije---2014-protiv-Jugoslavena!.htm> (accessed February 22, 2015).

³² The existing Penal Code already sanctions denial of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression (Article 325), provided that such denial is aimed at fostering national, ethnic, racial, religious etc. hatred. *Narodne novine: službeni list Republike Hrvatske* (<http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/>), 125/11, 144/12.

³³ S. N., “Miljenic says threats to lawyer to be prosecuted ex officio,” *Dalje.com*, 25. 3. 2015, <http://dalje.com/en-croatia/miljenic-says-threats-to-lawyers-to-be-prosecuted-ex-officio/540236> (accessed 14.4.2015.)

³⁴ Sven Miklenic, “Croatian Law Should Penalise Attacks on War, Judge Says,” *Balkan Transitional Justice*, 20. 3. 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatian-judge-advocates-legal-definition-of-1990s-war> (accessed April 14, 2015)

Croatian Constitution, or parliamentary declarations on the Homeland War and Operation Storm, the 1991–1995 war is already defined as a value and as one of the foundations of the Croatian state. All these documents emphasize the conviction that the war was essentially a defensive war against aggression, without the characteristics of a civil war.

There are several other events that recently caused increased tension in Croatian society. In autumn 2012, the government decided to put up bilingual inscriptions in the town of Vukovar, written in both Latin and Cyrillic scripts. Under the minority rights law, the implementation of this decision became mandatory after the 2011 Croatian census, according to which Serbs in Vukovar make up more than one-third (34.8%) of Vukovar's total population. This decision became subject to the criticism of a group of Croatian war veterans and some other citizens (the so-called Headquarters for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar), who believe that, due to the atrocious events that occurred there during the war, Vukovar should be excluded from the application of the law. Supported by some right-wing parliamentary parties and some individuals, the group organized protest rallies immediately after the installment of the signs. In 2013, they even prevented (and in 2014 attempted to prevent) the State delegation, which included the Croatian president and prime minister, from participating in the annual commemoration of the fall of Vukovar (November 18).

In October 2014, another group of war veterans (among them, many disabled veterans) began a protest in Zagreb. Since then, they have been camped out in a large tent in front of the building of the Ministry of War Veterans. Besides general requests for improved benefits and legislative protection of veterans' rights, the group has had politically motivated demands from the very beginning, such as the resignation of the Minister of Veterans Affairs because he has allegedly failed to protect the rights of veterans. During the presidential elections, the group publicly endorsed the candidate of HDZ. The political motives behind their protest can also be seen in the slogan which for months has been displayed in front of the tent: "In 1991 against Yugoslavia, in 2014 against Yugoslavs!" Over the past months, the group blocked the street in front of the Ministry's building on several occasions, and in May 2015 it clashed violently with police in front of the Parliament building. It seems, however, that this radicalization of the political scene has changed the mood of part of the electorate. Latest surveys have shown that HDZ has retained its support among voters at about 30 percent, but also that SDP and the governing coalition are once again gaining in popularity – apparently, among part of the population the left-liberal government is perceived as a bulwark against the rise of the radical right.

In these circumstances, teaching twentieth-century history in general, and the 1991–1995 war in particular, becomes another potentially explosive issue for the current government. This question has also become relevant because the Ministry of Education has initiated the reform of education and announced plans to start work on new subject curricula in the autumn. It is not

that the current Ministry of Education has deviated from the course which has been hitherto outlined for the teaching of the 1991–1995 war. So far, it has not intervened in the existing history curricula. It continues to support the annual seminars on the Homeland War. Together with the Ministry of War Veterans, the Ministry of Education plans to establish two-day obligatory visits to Vukovar for eighth-grade pupils in elementary school (14 years). During these field trips, pupils will be taught *in situ* about the 1991–1995 war and the Battle of Vukovar.³⁵ Furthermore, in 2014 the ministry approved new history textbooks whose narratives of the 1991–1995 war very much resemble those from 2007 adopted at the time of the HDZ government.

But this is precisely what has now become a problem. Time and again, critics insist that existing curricula and textbooks do not pay enough attention to the teaching of the 1991–1995 war. (At the moment, this topic is usually taught for between three and five class hours, and textbooks usually dedicate between 20 and 30 pages for the period of Croatian history after the end of 1980s.) On several occasions, the HDZ Committee on Education expressed their dissatisfaction with the manner in which the war is presented in textbooks. In March 2014, the committee requested the introduction of patriotism as a special topic in the curricula, as well as the teaching of the 1991–1995 war as part of that topic³⁶. The president of the committee (who is a historian himself) has repeatedly criticized (in August 2014 and in March 2015) new history textbooks because

Only one among them explicitly mentions the term “Great-Serbian aggression” in the context of the causes of the Homeland War. The other three textbooks do not mention the term “Great-Serbian aggression” at all. If history textbooks are written by historians, how is it possible that historians cannot reach an agreement on well-known facts? How is it possible that the ministry permitted the use of these textbooks in schools³⁷?

³⁵ Marina Jurković, “Ministar Mornar: Djeca nam više znaju o Ramzesu II., nego o Oluji [Minister Mornar: Children know more about Ramses II, than of Operation Storm],” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 30. 3. 2015, <http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/Hrvatska/tapid/66/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/280300/Default.aspx> (accessed April 17, 2015).

³⁶ Ivica Kristović, „Svađa oko povijesti. HDZ odgovara ministru: ‘Jovanović – dostavljač udžbenika’ [Quarrel about history. HDZ responds to the Minister: ‘Jovanović – a deliverer of textbooks],” *Večernji list*, 25. 3. 2014, <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/hdz-odgovara-ministrusu-jovanovic-dostavljac-udzbenika-928987> (accessed February 22, 2015).

³⁷ Maja Šurina, „HDZ bi mijenjao knjige: Tito je out, a Domovinski rat je in [HDZ would change textbooks: Tito is *out*, and the Homeland War is *in*],” *Tportal*, 29. 8. 2014., <http://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/348337/HDZ-bi-mijenjao-knjige-Tito-je-out-a-Domovinski-rat-je-in.html> (accessed February 22, 2015). See also: Mirela Lilek, “HDZ: Učenici moraju naučiti kako je počeo rat u Hrvatskoj. Jakovina: To nema veze s modernom školom [HDZ: Students need to learn how the war in Croatia began. Jakovina: It has nothing to do with the modern school],” *Jutarnji list*, 9. 4. 2015, <http://www.jutarnji.hr/hdz--ucenici-moraju-nauciti-kako-je-poceo-rat-u-hrvatskoj--jakovina--to-nema-veze-s-modernom-skolom/1327677/> (accessed February 22, 2015).

However, it is not that the current history textbooks do not explain the causes of the 1991–1995 war. It is also not the case that they do not mention aggression against Croatia. What is actually said in the above quotation is that some of them do not explain the causes in the “proper” manner – that they do not use mandatory terminology and that, to a certain extent, they deter from the official interpretation of the war (for example, by mentioning mistakes committed by Croats as well). Precisely the attempt to present the war and its causes in a more complex manner was the main point of controversy in 2007; in the present atmosphere, it has become increasingly unpopular to question certain given “truths,” not only in history textbooks, but in public discourse in general.³⁸ Such attempts are increasingly stigmatized as efforts to tarnish or diminish Croatia’s military victory or simply as “equating the victim with the aggressor.” The verdicts of acquittal for some Croatian generals of all charges of war crimes committed in Operation Storm³⁹ have further strengthened the general reluctance to confront the crimes committed by Croats during the war.

The current minister of education has obviously decided to counter these attacks by adopting the arguments and the tactics of the critics. He has joined the chorus of criticism over the way in which the 1991–1995 war is presently taught. He has been asking for an increase in the number of class hours dedicated to the topic in the future history curriculum. In February 2015, in his opening speech at the Eighth Annual Seminar on the Homeland War for history teachers, the minister announced that, in the reformed curriculum, the topic of the Homeland War will get “an honorary place,” as once the Second World War (i.e., the NOB) used to be presented in socialist Yugoslavia. The teaching of this topic should, according to minister, include “fewer facts and more conclusions”⁴⁰.

The minister’s address only confirms what was already noticed in analyses of history textbook narratives on the 1991–1995 war: the teaching of the

³⁸ As the HDZ leader Tomislav Karamarko recently put it: “We are one of the few countries in which the winners have failed to write their own history, but it is written by those who lost the war.” See speech by T. Karamarko on March 25, 2015, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LxnpTveEeA>. See also: Dražen Ciglenečki: “Neprijatelji svi koji misle drugačije. Karamarko teško optužio narod: ‘Za generaciju ili dvije, svi će napokon voljeti Hrvatsku’ [Enemies are all those who think differently. Karamarko accuses the nation: ‘In a generation or two, everyone will finally love Croatia’],” *Novi list*, 27. 3. 2015., <http://www.novilist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Karamarko-tesko-optuzio-narod-Za-generaciju-ili-dvije-svi-ce-napokon-voljeti-Hrvatsku>. (accessed March 27, 2015).

³⁹ United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, “Appeals Chamber Acquits and Orders Release of Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač” (press release), 16. 12. 2012, <http://www.icty.org/sid/11145> (accessed April 17, 2015).

⁴⁰ Marina Jurković, “Ministar Mornar: Djeca nam više znaju o Ramzesu II., nego o Oluji [Minister Mornar: Children know more about Ramses II, than of Operation Storm],” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 30. 3. 2015, <http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/Hrvatska/tabid/66/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/280300/Default.aspx> (accessed April 17, 2015).

“National Liberation Struggle” in socialist Yugoslavia increasingly becomes a model for the teaching of the “Homeland War” in present-day Croatia.⁴¹ Lessons about the war are primarily used as a tool of promoting patriotism through strong and emotional language, detailed descriptions of battles and military victories, and portraits of war heroes that are offered to students as role-models. There is a prescribed terminology and an obligatory interpretative framework, which makes it increasingly difficult to teach and write about the war in a balanced manner. Thus, in the teaching of history, the two wars interconnect on the most problematic level: strategies that were once rightly rejected for the teaching of World War II are now offered as the best model for the teaching of the 1991–1995 war!

Finally, all of this has a familiar undertone: enemies – external or internal, real or imagined – have to be invented and reinvented all the time, either to consolidate party ranks or to mobilize potential voters. These strategies are nothing new and are mostly due to the lack of vision and perspective of political elites in addressing pressing social and economic problems of the country. However, the current radicalization of political discourse is particularly troublesome because it occurs at a time of deep crisis and general pessimism. The manner in which history is used can only re-open another vicious circle of recriminations, bitterness, and hatred; it contributes to the continuous tearing of the social fabric in an already polarized society.

Croatia is, of course, not the only country that has been facing issues from the past which create tensions and divide the society. As unpleasant as they might be, these debates could in principle help us deal with and confront these issues. But persistent attempts to remove causes of tension by eliminating pluralism and prescribing mandatory interpretations are increasingly problematic, especially when the complex and difficult legacy of the twentieth century is constantly being reduced to one-dimensional narratives and simplified explanations.

In this power struggle, the damage for history teaching is constant, even if this radical rhetoric will be toned down after the elections. The modest progress that has been achieved in recent years – especially concerning different views about the purpose of school history – is constantly in danger of being annulled. It is continuously used as a means in the political game and at the same time it is suffering collateral damage. Judging from previous experiences, the future might be bleak: in years to come, we will continue to teach only the “right kind of history”.

⁴¹ See for example: Koren, Baranović, “What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?”, 129.