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”Of Heroes and Villains“
Competing Identity-Constructions in Post-War Croatia

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Abstract:

The Croatian policy towards the ICTY was marked by ambivalence. Reluctance to hand over indicted war criminals in prominent cases, but at the same time willing to fulfil the demands of the international community in order to adhere to the EU. This paper argues that the struggle over extradition cases not only triggered fierce domestic turmoil but also made visible diverse and competing narrations of Croatia's war involvement between 1992-95. Through the narrative analysis of statements and declarations made by leading Croatian politicians this study identifies different appropriations of history with different implications for political action. The study shows that in contrast to common knowledge, purely nationalistic and heroic interpretations of Croatia's war involvement have been prominently contested by more self-reflected forms of historical interpretations. The heroic picture shows fissures and these competing narrations opened up possibilities for cooperation with the ICTY.

Key Words: Croatia, ICTY, Collective Memory, Narrative Identity

"A hero is, and remains outside the law and has no moral restraints"

(Ivan Čovolić 2004: 267)

"The Croatian people must not and will not be hostage to those who bloodied their hands and brought shame on Croatia's name, no matter how deserving they might be in other respects."

(Stipe Mesić, President of Croatia, 2001)

1 Introduction

When Croatia became an independent nation in 1992, its closest future should still be darkened by two violent wars raging from 1991 to 1995. Once the battles were over, the young nation faced the task to consolidate its existence, which meant a whole bundle of new challenges, possibilities and obligations. It had to establish itself as a functioning, autonomous state for an interior and exterior audience, while at the same time integrating itself into a web of international relations, out of which the relations to the EU were of particular importance. For this project the confrontation of Croatia's most recent past was a major requirement. Since the end of the Balkan Wars in 1995, the events and experiences of the war have played a major role in the

rhetoric of Croatian politicians as well as in the rhetoric of the EU towards Croatia. Even though the latest developments, most notably the prospect of Croatian EU membership in 2009, bear witness of a successful rapprochement between the two parties, things have not always been easy. In opposite, since the Dayton Agreement in 1995, Croatia's relations with the EU have resembled a never-ending story of ups and downs.

This paper takes the above observation as an incentive to examine the different identity constructions which are present in the discourse of post-war Croatia. Building upon constructivist approaches, we think that these images of the Croatian self are relevant for Croatia's zigzag course towards the EU. From a constructivist point of view, identity can be understood as the social construction of a self, which results when an actor is placed in the flow of time and space. Identity constructions are seen as the basis of agency, as it is only by knowing who one is that an actor can know what acting opportunities one has. The paper holds that identity and identity struggle play a crucial role for post-war Croatia because the country has just gone through a number of transitions, which require the re-construction and adjustment of Croatian identity. Croatia has just moved beyond its autocratic past and embraced a democratic government, it has just stepped from times of war into a period of peace. Moreover, analysts often describe Croatia as having an 'in-between' position through its geographic location in between Europe and the Balkans.[1] The paper argues that these characteristics lead to the construction of particularly numerous and fluent identity versions of Croatia. These, in turn, open up various and possibly contradictory acting opportunities and might be able to account for the inconsistent behaviour of the country. The strong presence of the war narrative in foreign policy talk suggests furthermore that the memory and the interpretation of the war are of high importance for Croatia. The paper therefore focuses on the different versions of Croatian identity, which are established through the interpretations of the war narrative, which are constructed in the inner Croatian as well as in the international discourse.

1 The importance of identity and identity struggle for Croatian politics is emphasised by different analysts. See for example Bartlett 2003; Bjkljacic 2003; Tamminen 2004; Bet El 2002f; Todorova 1997.

2 Croatia's Zigzag Course Towards the EU

Integration into the EU was Croatia's most pressing strategic goal since the foundation of the young nation. In 1998 the HDZ created a Ministry for European Integration. In 1999 an Action Plan was launched which was supposed to promote and propel the move towards the EU (Bartlett 2003: 74; see also Tamminen 2004: 400). Reaching this goal, however, was inextricably linked with requests and conditions brought forward by the EU, among them most importantly the establishment of minority rights and refugee return[2] and a cooperative stance towards the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY).[3] The EU tried to enforce its requests through a policy of stick and carrot, pursued first in the context of its Regional Approach towards four former Yugoslavian states, and later through the Stabilisation and Association Process offered to Croatia.[4] However, Croatia's reactions were marked more by hesitations and ambiguity than by smooth compliance. In the words of Peskin and Boduszynski (2003: 4) Croatia's behaviour rather resembled an "inconsistent, ad-hoc policy" than a rational reaction to pressures and incentives put forward by EU (see also Cruvellier/Valinas 2006: 5).

The ups and downs in Croatia's policy can best be illustrated by the alternation of cooperation and non-cooperation with the ICTY: During the years of the Tudjman regime, the Croatian government while paying lip service to the country's integration in western institutions, continued to consolidate their authoritarian regime[5] and refused repeatedly to accept the ICTY's jurisdiction over the operations *Flash* and

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2 This request addressed predominantly the right of Serbian refugees from the Krajina region to return to and resettle in their houses and the resettlement of displaced persons within Croatia. Between 1995 and 998, almost 20,000 houses belonging to Croatian Serbs were taken from their owners and given mainly to Bosnian Croat refugees (Bartlett 2003: 73-76; Cruvellier/Valinas 2006: 27-30).

3 Cooperation included in particular the willingness of the Croatian government to support the prosecution of indicted war criminals and to hand over important documents to the tribunal.

4 The Regional Approach as well as the more wide-ranging Stabilisation and Association Process were EU policy strategies directed towards the so-called 'Western Balkan' countries, i.e. Croatia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Assistance towards the five countries in this context were dependent on the fulfilment of a set of political and economic conditions (mainly democracy and economic activity). Compliance with these requests would be rewarded with the prospect to benefit from assistance through the PHARE programme and to negotiate a Cooperation Agreement with the EU in the case of the Regional Approach. The Stabilisation and Association Process even bribed with the prospect of eventual EU membership (Bartlett 2003: 73-75; for a Croatian point of view see Sanader 1999).

5 They circumcised the freedom of the independent media and manipulated an used the intelligence services of the country for the stabilisation of their power. Moreover, observers blame them to have manipulated elections and electoral laws for their benefit (Bartlett 2003: 49-55)

Storm.[6] The continued non-compliance with EU requests ended in a near isolation of the young nation at the end of the 1990s, and lead ICTY officials to file two reports of non-compliance with the UN Security Council in 1996 and 1999 (Bartlett 2003: 49-55; Peskin/Boduszynski 2003: 15-16). After the change of government in the 2000 elections, things first seemed to get better. Right after the elections, the new government under Prime Minister Ivica Racan passed a Declaration on Cooperation with the ICTY, and promised to work together with the tribunal. Yet despite the cooperative rhetoric, ICTY requests towards the Croatian government to hand over indicted Croatian Generals were answered with hesitation and refusal (Peskin/Boduszynski 2003: 17 ff; Cruvellier/Valinas 2006: 8). In 2001, for example, the ICTY requested the handing over of the two Croatian generals Rahim Ademi and Ante Gotovina. First, Racan seemed to fulfil his promise of cooperation. He announced that the government would immediately initiate the handing over of the generals and called in a ministerial session to discuss the further procedure. However, it soon became evident that his rhetoric would remain without immediate consequences, since the government delayed the issue of the indicted generals in favour of domestic politics. Observers even speculate "whether the government deliberately delayed arresting Gotovina in order to give him a chance to elude capture" (Peskin/Boduszynski 2003: 30; see also Cruvellier/Valinas 2006: 5ff). After the year 2001, Croatia's cooperation even seemed to decrease: in 2003, the ICTY requested the handing over of the Croatian general and war hero Janko Bobetko. In this case, the government not only delayed, but openly opposed the transfer of the suspected general. Opposition against the transfer was suprisingly lead by Prime Minister Racan himself, who had so far been the leading voice of ICTY supporters inside Croatia (Peskin/Boduszynski 2003: 32). In 2004, the Croatian stance became more cooperative again; when the ICTY requested the surrender of the Generals Ivan Cermak and Mladen Markac, the government provided documentary evidence and persuaded the indictees "to surrender to the Tribunal whilst assisting with their defense" (Cruvellier/Valinas 2006: 9). This support was appreciated by ICTY chief

6 Operation Flash stands for the Croatian army's May 1995 attack on the breakaway Serb republic in the Krajina in western Slavonia. Many Serbian residents from the region had to flee to Bosnia. Operation Storm was the major Croatian offensive in August 1995, in which they regained the whole of the Krajina in only a few days. In Croatia, he two operations stand for the victory of Croatia, and therefore for the heroic liberation of the country from Serbian dominance (Bartlett 2003: 47,69; Crnobrnja 1994: 160ff; Goldstein 1999:239ff).

prosecutor Carla del Ponte in 2005, when she confirmed that Croatia was now "cooperating fully" with the tribunal (Ibid.).

2.1 Stick and Carrot? Or Identity? Possible explanations of Croatia's foreign policy

The outline given above reveals the rather inconsistent character of Croatian policy towards the ICTY. While a tendency towards a "pragmatic" behaviour (Cruvellier/Valinas 2006: 5), i.e. towards compliance with the EU's pressures and incentives, seems to have existed most of the time, as the cooperative rhetoric and some initiatives of prosecution indicate, something worked as a brake which made cooperation either hard to reach or not fully desirable or even possible for Croatia. Despite the EU's reliance on clear pressures and incentives Croatia's reactions to a large extend remained limited to mere rhetoric of cooperation; in the end, the promised acts failed to be carried out. A linear "rational" response to the EU's sticks and carrots cannot be confirmed. Rational approaches therefore do not seem to be the appropriate tool for analysis.

How can this foreign policy behaviour be approached? The existing body of literature on post-war Croatia is rather moderate with most authors being more interested in the 1991-5 war itself instead of post-war Croatian foreign policy (see e.g. Goldstein 1999; Crnobrnja 1994). Many books and articles dealing with aspects of the country after the war are descriptive in character and do not explore the reasons why Croatia showed such an inconsistent behaviour (Cruvellier/Valinas 2006; Bartlett 2003). Yet, they provide a fruitful pool of material out of which to draw. One study by Peskin and Boduszynski (2003a; 2003b) deals analytically with Croatia's ad-hoc policy towards the ICTY and points at the rising domestic pressures, mainly by nationalist groups, which have made cooperation increasingly costly. The study is definitely compelling, yet no particular emphasise is put on the inconsistencies and changing directions of Croatia's foreign policy.

It is striking that many studies on Croatia assign an important role to the country's history and identity (see e.g. Bartlett 2003; Tamminen 2004; Brkljacic 2003; Jansen 2002; Tanner 1997). Bartlett, for example, notes that throughout her history, Croatia has been pulled in several conflicting directions in her international relations, due to

an unresolved tension between her identity as both a central European and a Mediterranean country, as well as from her proximity to, and close historical connections with, the Balkan region (Bartlett 2003: 63). Tamminen analyses cross-border cooperation in the Southern Balkans in terms of identity politics and hints at two different identity constructions, which are considered as the two options Southern Balkan countries can choose from: "Balkanisation" on the one hand and "Europeanization" on the other hand, (Tamminen 2004: 400; 404ff). While these authors primarily stress Croatia's geopolitical location as a reason for competing identity constructions, a constructivist interpretation allows for some more factors which make it seem plausible that identity and identity struggle might play an important role for Croatia. Constructivism assumes that changes in meaning structures to occur through moments of crisis and dilemma. "Change arises as situated agents respond to novel ideas or problems" (Bevir/Rhodes 2005: 173; see also Wendt 1992). This applies to Croatia, as the country has passed through various transitions on different levels in the last 20 years. The first transition occurred when Croatia became independent. Croatia has long been part of the Yugoslavian multi-ethnic state. It was established as an independent nation only 15 years ago, in 1992. Since this transition, creating an explicitly *national* identity has been an important goal of Croatian history writing, according to Maja Brkljacic (2003). Secondly, in the 2000 elections Croatia has moved from an autocratic government under Franjo Tudjman and his HDZ to a democratic administration. Defining its new democratic self might be another challenge to be faced by the country. In public discourse, Croatia's democratic development is often brought into a connection with the country's aim to move towards the EU. Last but not least, Croatia has recently stepped from a long period of war into a period of peace. Shaping a clearcut identity in the context of the newly ordered and predominantly peaceful Balkan or East European region could represent another challenge Croatia has to confront.

Building upon this interpretation of Croatia's current situation, this paper claims that history and identity play an important role for post-war Croatia's foreign policy. It argues that the inconsistencies in Croatia's foreign policy should be understood as the result of competing identity constructions, which are derived from different interpretations of the country's most recent history. Whereas cooperative behaviour becomes possible through a more critical and differentiated picture of the Croatian

'self', a purely heroic identity construction, in contrast, would further opposition against cooperation with the ICTY. In the following we will outline this argument in more depth. The next paragraphs give an introduction into identity theory as applied in the discipline of International Relations, and outline the basic assumptions underlying this study. Thereafter we present our concept of identity, identity formation and identity change which derives from IR literature as well as from sociological approaches, which we consider to be particularly fruitful in the field of identity study. After sketching our methodology, we will present the four broad patterns of Croatian identity, which we found in our analysis. They are dovetailing and partially overlapping, and open different and sometimes contradictive acting opportunities: First, we identified the very prominent narration of a heroic Croatian nation that stood up against the aggression emanating from Serbia. This identity version suggests a rather confident and un-self-critical actor Croatia. Second, we found the narration of an innocent nation Croatia, which contained the one or the other 'black sheep' that committed war crimes (individualisation of guilt). Such an identity construction allows for at least limited cooperation with the ICTY. Third and fourth we found the two antagonistic identity versions of Croatia, a 'Western'[7] one and a 'Balkan' one. They are intertwined and represent two options Croatia can choose of. While choosing the 'Western' identity would imply establishing the rule of law and following democratic values, the 'Balkan' identity is rather connected with unlawfulness, a criminal habitus and brutality. These four identity versions do not replace each other, but they exist parallel and compete with each other, and the one or the other might gain dominance at certain points in time. As each identity construction opens specific spaces and opportunities of action for Croatia, cooperation and non-cooperation come into question or not, depending on the version that is dominant at a time.

2.2 ID theory and situated agency in IR

Identity based approaches of action became popular in the discipline of International Relations in the 1980s and 1990s. They build primarily upon constructivist

[7] We do not understand 'Western' here in any evaluative way. As in the Croatian foreign policy texts, which we analysed, this identity version is generally connected with integration into the European Union and seen in opposite to the Balkan (Eastern) identity, the term seems appropriate and not ideological.

assumptions and hold that action should be understood as being based on socially constructed meaning instead of fixed interest. Identity is conceived of as one such meaning (Campbell 1992; Wendt 1994; Ringmar 1996; Williams/Neumann 2000; Neumann 1999;).[8] The concept of identity stands for the images actors hold about themselves and about others. On the most general level, identity is the answer to the question "who are you" (Tilly 2002: 11). It is the establishment of a 'self', the production and specification of a subject. Identity based approaches assume that identity is crucial for agency, as only if an actor knows who he is, he can know what can do. Identity based approaches were developed as a criticism of rational choice theories and their major assumption that agents act on the base of fixed interests and preferences. Identity based approaches in contrast hold, that identity, not fixed interests, should be considered as the decisive foundation of agency. Depending on their theoretical heritage the connection between identity and action is drawn in two different ways: Moderate constructivists argue that agents do not act on the base of fixed interests and preferences, but that interests themselves can only develop from the image an actor holds of himself and of others. Identities are seen as the source of interests and therefore as the base of action (Wendt 1994; Ringmar 1996). Interests are still considered as the link between identity and action; or as Erik Ringmar puts it, "it only is as *some-one* that we can have an interest in *some-thing.* Without this 'someone' there would simply not be anyone around for whom something could, or could not, be an interest" (Ringmar 1996: 3, 13).

This paper however will focus more on post-positivist approaches. They assume that identity and action are not primarily linked via interests, but that identity constructions *enable* an actor to act in the first place. The argument is less 'only if I know who I am can I know what I *want'*, but rather 'only if I know who I am can I know what I *can/should/must/want to do'*.[9] This idea is closely linked with the concept of situated agency (see e.g. Bevir/Rhodes 2005: 172ff; Emirbayer/Mische 1998). In accordance with the so-called 'cultural turn' in social sciences, situated agency

[8] This contradicts the traditional point of view of social science approaches on identity which conceived of identity as a fixed and essentialist category which could be specified in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, or other seemingly 'objective' attributes (see e.g. Calhoun 1994; Somers 1994).
[9] Writing about the importance of the narrative construction of identity as a prerequisite of action, Margaret Somers remarks "Ontological narratives [of identity] are used to define who we *are*; this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to *do*" (Somers 1994: 618)

assumes that social action must be analysed in terms of the specific spatial and temporal patterns in which an actor is embedded, and through which his options and limits of action are defined. Agency is understood as "a temporally embedded process of social engagement informed by the past, but also oriented toward the future and toward the present". Therefore, "social action can only be captured in its full complexity (…) if it is analytically situated within the flow of time" (Emirbayer/Mische 1998: 963-964).[10] In this concept, identity can be understood as the linking piece between time and space on the one hand and agency on the other hand. The past does not matter just by itself. Only by relating the past to oneself, if one places oneself somewhere in this past, it starts to matter because it becomes *one's own* past, which makes *one's own* present and *one's own* future possible.[11] An actor needs to know his identity in order to know what he can/should/must do. This is why Wendt considers identity as the key link in the mutual constitution of agent of structure (Wendt 1994: 385; Wendt 1987).

2.3 An identity based approach for the analysis of Croatian foreign policy.

The constructivist point of view leads to a crucial aspect of identity: if identity is understood as being socially constructed, it is contingent. Different versions of one single identity can be constructed and coexist at the same time. The exact shapes of the various identity constructions depend on the aspects of the historical narrative which are included or left out on the one hand, and on the other hand they depend on the way these aspects are put together and interpreted to frame the actor. Stef Jansen, for example, in his study on the historical narratives told among Serbs and Croats in five Croatian villages in the Krajina region, finds two dominant versions of 'one single' history. He points out that the difference between the two largely nationally homogenous narratives was mainly based on "vagueness, amnesia and

[10] This third perspective somehow reconciles the everlasting antagonism between voluntarism and determinism, since actors act towards culturally determined social institutions, but simultaneously have the power to reshape through practices and habits the patterns determining their actions

[11] In Eric Ringmar's words: "[N]either the temporal nor the spatial present is a natural hospitable location which simply is 'there' for us to inhabit. What we must do is instead to create a present for our selves; we must make room for our selves in time and in space. (…) We can *be* someone today since we *were* someone yesterday and since *we will* be someone tomorrow" (Ringmar 1996: 76-77; his emphasis).

selective remembering" (Jansen 2002: 78). Just as the historical narrative itself, the identity constructions, which are framed by it, might vary.[12] The different interpretations of the historical narrative come to bear when different actors tell different stories about one single self, or when one single actor tells different stories about himself to different audiences (Ringmar 1996: 79ff). Identities need recognition to be valid and effective. "Only as recognised can we conclusively come to establish a certain identity" (Ringmar 1996: 81). Different audiences accept different versions of one single actor's identity. Thus, an actor might have to adjust his identity construction according to the audience's requests.

In summary, although identity is usually meant to refer to the construction of a specific 'self', it is neither unified nor static: it consists of various interpretations, which compete and try to gain dominance. In respect to collective identities, the aspect of multiplicity seems to be of particular importance as collective identities are constructed, reconstructed and challenged from outside the 'self' and by sub-groupings within the collective self (Calhoun 1994: 12; see also Wendt 1994: 385). Furthermore, the variability of identity might be fostered by the social context of an actor: identity adjustment becomes a necessary process as soon as the 'old' identity cannot face the challenges put up by the situation anymore. If a given identity does not 'fit' into a new situation, it might have to be adjusted to find a place in the new present and to remain capable of agency.[13] The multiplicity and variability of identity is fostered, moreover, by an identity's need of recognition. Different audiences accept different versions of one single actor's identity. Moreover, audiences themselves can become constructors and confront the actor with new or different versions of his self which – in their eyes – are more appropriate than the variant told by the actor himself. The different identity versions which coexist might be in a relative harmony, but they might also contradict each other, and – depending on which identity

[12] This selectiveness and variability of memory and identity construction corresponds with what Jeffrey Olick (2003:6) points out, namely that we should rather talk about contesting "mnemonic practices" than "the collective memory" as a social fact. "Memory is never unitary, no matter how hard various powers strive to make it so. There are always sub-narratives, transitional periods, and contests over dominance (Ibid: 8; see also Olick 2001; Olick/Robbins 1998; Gillis 1994).

[13] Such a situation represents what Ringmar calls a 'formative moment' (Ringmar 1996: 83-84). It corresponds to more general constructivist approaches, which expect changes in meaning structures to occur through moments of crisis and dilemma. "Change arises as situated agents respond to novel ideas or problems" (Bevir/Rhodes 2005: 173).

construction is dominant at any given moment – lead to an observable behaviour which seems to be inconsistent and ad-hoc. This is exactly what this paper claims about Croatia's seemingly non-understandable and inconsistent foreign policy behaviour towards the ICTY.

2.4 Outline of Methodology

In our analysis, we will treat identities as being constructed through 'constitutive stories' (Ringmar 1996: 76), i.e. through narrative processes (see also Somers 1994; Neumann 2000: 362).[14] An identity is created by narrating the past, the present, and maybe also the future of a subject.[15] Narrating a subject's story means to organise time and space around him in the shape of a plot. The plot structures the narrative. In contrast to a mere chronological order of events, a plot does not simply add single events upon one another. Instead, events are brought into a causal structure and organised around a central subject, which is the social centre of the story (Ringmar 1996: 72; White 1980: 15; Somers 1994: 616). Through the plot and the social centre, the story gets coherence. Each event functions as a cause or an effect, and thus carries an essential meaning for the course of the story. The plot makes a story a closed entity with a beginning and an end. In our analysis, depending on the role Croatia plays in the plot of the constitutive narratives, Croatia's identity features might vary. In the methodology of our discourse analysis, we focus on narrative analysis and add predicate analyses, as this helps to grasp the evaluative dimension of the words. What events of the plot are established as causes, where are the effects and what driving or passive role does Croatia play in this plot. Predicate analysis will help to classify the events delineated in the plot, e.g. to find out whether a war is 'aggressive' or 'defensive'. Both words contribute to the plot, as they signify the *pro*active character of an aggression and the *re*active character of defense, thereby saying whether an act caused a war (aggression) or was the effect of some act (defense). The following analysis will reconstruct the plot, in which the metaphors are

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[14] For the importance of narration in social life, see also Erwick/Silbey 1996.

[15] Another widespread concept considers identity to be constructed through the parallel creation of an ‚other' from which the central ‚self' can be distinguished (see e.g. Neumann 1999; Campbell 1992; Shapiro 1992). We do not exclude this essential part, but want to integrate it in the more encompassing constitutive narrative.

integrated and specify it with the help of predicate analysis. Each identity version which is derived from the narratives will interpreted as for the possible spaces of action it might open for Croatia in its interactions with the EU.

3 Analysis: the narrative identity constructions of Croatia

The following paragraphs will delineate some narratives which contain competing identity versions of Croatia. These narratives appeared in the inner-Croatian discourse. Knowing that we can capture only one small extract of the discourse, we will focus on texts by foreign policy decision makers. These texts were told by different speakers at different points in time and they were addressed to different audiences. According to our concept of identity outlined above, it can be expected that all narratives contain different versions of Croatian identity. These versions open different spaces of action for Croatia. In the following analysis we will first reconstruct the identity versions included in the narratives; thereafter we will suggest some acting opportunities which might arise out of these identity constructions.

The first Croatian identity version is drawn from two texts: The 1999 pamphlet "Croatia's Course of Action to Achieve EU Membership" by the then Deputy Foreign Minister of Croatia, Ivo Sanader, on the one hand; and on the other hand the 2000 *Declaration on the Homeland War* of the Croatian Parliament Sabor. The second identity version emerges from the 2002 writing "Croatia: What heritage?"[16] by Mate Granic, who was Croatian Foreign Minister under President Tudjman, and from some speeches by and media interviews with President Mesic from 2001 to 2007. For each identity version we identify, we will delineate possible spaces of action which might open up, thereby enabling Croatia to pursue a specific portfolio of foreign policy options.

[16] Granic, Mate 2003: Kroatien: Welches Erbe?, in: Timmermann, Heiner; Jakir, Aleksandar (Eds) 2003: *Europas Tragik. Ex-Jugoslawien zwischen Hoffnung und Resignation.* Dokumente und Schriften der Europäischen Akademie Otzenhausen, Band 106, pp. 129-135. The excerpts we offer on the following pages are our own translation. The same can be said about some Croatian newspaper articles which were only available in a French translation, and the Declaration on the Homeland War which we had to translate into English from Croatian.

3.1 Croatia as a Heroic Nation and as a Western Country

The first identity version we identified is that of a heroic nation Croatia which was attacked by Serbia, stepped into the war in self-defense, and in the end emerged as the victorious hero. This construction arises out of former Deputy Foreign Minister Sanader's 1999 Discussion Paper as well as out of the Sabor's Declaration on the Homeland War, passed in the year 2000. Sanader writes:

> "While firmly pursuing its Euro-Atlantic priorities vis-á-vis the EU and NATO in the 1990's, Croatia was forced, for a number of complex reasons, to concentrate primarily on resolving domestic issues, i.e., defending itself from aggression, liberating the occupied territories, achieving territorial integrity and re-establishing authority over its entire territory" (Sanader 1999: 3).

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), of which Serbia is the successor state, is presented as:

> "the very country that started the aggression that resulted in such grave consequences for Croatia and its people" (Ibid. 5).

From this, the following plot can be reconstructed: Serbia started the war by a bold aggression; it *caused* the war. Croatia, which suffered severely under Serbia's attacks, was forced to defend itself as an *effect* of the Serbian aggression. Predicate analysis helps to specify the moral evaluation of the actions: Whereas Serbia was 'aggressive', i.e. hostile and violent (Oxford Dictionary 2005: 31), Croatia's actions served to 'liberate' its territory, i.e. to set it free from oppression (Oxford Dictionary 2005: 1009), and to achieve territorial integrity. The narrative which is contained in the Sabor's Declaration on the Homeland War tells a very similar story when it says in its preamble:[17]

> "the Republic of Croatia led a just and legitimate, defensive and liberating, and not aggressive and occupational war against anyone, in which she defended its territory from the great Serb aggressor (velikosrpske agresije) within its internationally recognised borders."

[17] The Croatian version of the declaration is available at: http://vijesti.hrt.hr/arhiv/2000/10/14/HRT0006.html; [20 June 2007]

The narrative told in both texts establishes Croatia as an actor who is forced to react to a Serbian aggression. Serbian aggression is presented as the cause of the war, the Croatian acts as the necessary reaction enforced by the Serbian behaviour. In the course of both texts, the plot of the story is further developed, as the effects of the Croatian war involvement are presented. Paragraph three of the Sabor's declaration says that

> "the successful defence through the decisive military and police operations Bljesak (Flush) and Oluja (Storm) and respectively the later reintegration of Croatian territories has laid the ground for a steady development of the Croatian Republic as a country, which shares the democratic values of the present Western World […] in the domains of politics, security, society and culture."

Similarly, Ivo Sanader writes:

> "By liberating its occupied territories, Croatia solved its major problem and with it the crisis that had dragged on for several years in the hands of the international community. Moreover, together with the Bosnian Army and the Croatian Defence Council of B-H, Croatian police and military actions succeeded in liberating the entire Southwest Bosnia, thus helping to break the siege of the so-called Bihać pocket, which was close to suffering the same tragic fate as the UN safe havens Zepa & Srebrenica. The above-mentioned moves by the Croatian political leadership undoubtedly created the necessary conditions that enabled the international community led by the United States, to bring about the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords" (Sanader 1999: 17).

These two passages continue the plot by narrating the effects of the Croatian war involvement. Different from the Serbian 'aggression' which caused 'grave consequences', the Croatian war involvement lead to the liberation of the occupied areas and made it possible to build a democratic state Croatia, which is oriented towards Western values. What is even more, according to this narrative Croatian war involvement contributed to the solution of an international crisis and achieved what the UN itself was not capable of: namely to create a save haven in the Bihać pocket, whereas the UN's own project, the protection of the city of Srebrenica, ended in one of the worst massacres of the whole Yugoslavian war. The whole narrative constructs an identity version, in which the Croatian state is an innocent victim of a Serbian aggression first, but in the end emerges as the victorious hero that liberated its territories and contributed to the peace and security of the whole region.

Besides the heroic frame of the story, another associative figure is significant in this context: the war is presented as the key not only to independence, but also to the Western World. Croatia is presented as the Western ally in the Balkans, as it contributed to the peace and stability in the region and prevented a massacre, something even the UN did not succeed in.[18] Another quotation from the Homeland Declaration is characteristic here and exemplifies the different functions of these two antagonising images. In contrast to the "westernising" role of the Homeland War presented in the Declaration, a Croatian involvement to a possible "Balkan" Confederation is irreversibly renounced. The Declaration reads in paragraph three: "After the Croatian Republic has become an independent and sovereign state, it is not willing to engage in any Yugoslavian and Balkan confederative structures". Thus the Homeland War appears as a turning point for the affiliation of one of the two contrasting political geographical conceptions inherent in the Declaration. Through the Homeland War Croatia moved on to the West.[19] The next examples will indicate that the conflict between these two geopolitical conceptions lies at the bottom of the Croatian identity formation and will be relevant in the subsequent discourses upon the extradition cases. The heroic construction of Croatian identity suggests a space of action which does not include any kind of apology, restitutive justice or punishment of some actors. It rather prohibits them. There is no guilty, but only a victorious nation. Cooperation with the ICTY and the handing over of indicted Generals does not correspond with seeing oneself as a hero. Instead, the heroic version suggests that Croatia has proved to be a strong, autonomous country, which did the right thing. Being confronted with the ICTY's requests for extraditions, Croatia's challenge would rather be to protest against the seemingly 'wrong' depiction and to fight for a correction of the EU's and the tribunal's war narrative. A heroic identity construction would call for resistance and protest against the accusations, not for compliance and cooperation.

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[18] The notion of Croatia as a "generator of peace" and a "factor of stability" is mentioned explicitly in Ivo Sanader's text (Sanader 1999: 5). Moreover, he writes that Croatia was "geographically a part of Central Europe, not Western Balkan region" (Ibid.: 11) In the Declaration, in addition to the westernising role of the Homeland War, a Croatian involvement to a Yugoslavian or Balkan Confederation is irreversibly renounced, Croatia thereby decoupled from the Balkan region: "After the Croatian Republic has become an independent and sovereign state, it is not willing to engage in any Yugoslavian and Balkan confederative structures".

[19] These two notions of West and Balkan is also ambivalently captured by a compilation of country studies made by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) with the title: *The Western Balkans: moving on*.

3.2 Black Sheep in the heroic landscape

The second identity construction we found is an adjusted version of the first one. Whereas the metastory of the Homeland War remains the same, the frames in which the story of the war is narrated are modified. These changes affect specific events within the metastory of the domovinski rat. As some declarations by the Croatian President Stipe Mesic and a text by former Foreign Minister Mate Granic show, the adjusted version allows for some 'black sheep' in the Croatian herd. Granic, for example, maintains the popular metastory, when he writes:

> "Croatia was without doubts a victim of Slobodan Milosovic's aggressive procedure. It was severely damaged and had to mourn the loss of numbers of lives. The Croats and the vast majority of the Croatian population wanted their own independent state, which should be built upon the foundation of European values" (Granic 2003: 133).

Yet, he allows for some adjustments:

> "In 1987 already, Slobodan M. began to prepare his plan for the creation of a Greater Serbia, and until 1989 his intention got more and more obvious (…) Slobodan Milosevic is the main culprit for the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and for the aggression against this country, whereas Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic must be held responsible for the mass crimes, the genocide, the detention centres, rapes, refugees and all the other war victims there. War crimes were also committed by Croats and Bosniaks, however, and the unfortunate war between the Croats and the Bosnian Muslims as well as the role played by the radical wing of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, very much called into question the credibility of the Republic of Croatia" (Ibid.: 129 &131).

Granic's narrative corresponds roughly to the story told by President Mesic in an interview on 8th of July 2001. The Croatian President states:

> "It is well-known that the Croatian side, too, committed crimes during the war. It is well- known that the crimes were committed during operations Lightning and Storm and afterwards, and, most probably, in the Medak Pocket operation. [And] this is probably not all" (RFE/RL 9 July 2001).[20]

[20] If not otherwise indicated the subsequent news dispatches are available at: http://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0110&L=twatch-&D=1&O=D&F=P&P=77345; [29.05.07]

With this public statement the President Mesić scratched the overall heroic and morally impeccable story of the Homeland War and tells an adjusted story of the Homeland War. Even though he admitted the occurrences of crimes, he remained imprecise on the concrete actor committing the crimes, talking vaguely about "the Croatian side". "Crimes" simply occurred ("were committed") during the operations and afterwards. Mesic's declaration was made within the context of fierce discussions on the possible extradition of Rahim Ademi and General Ante Gotovina to the ICTY in summer 2001. Mesić repeatedly declared that the charged crimes "had no nationality" and that individual suspects – not countries – were on trial in The Hague. Mesic furthered: "The Croatian people must not and will not be hostage to those who bloodied their hands and brought shame on Croatia's name, no matter how deserving they might be in other respects" (RFE 9.July 2001). These statements make clear the distinction made between the "Croatian people" and "those who bloodied their hands" and who are meticulously separated in the declarations of the Croatian President in the subsequent debates on the war.

On the 11th anniversary of the start of operation Storm, on August 4 in 2006, President Mesić declared on the very symbolic site of Knin, the former Serb stronghold of the Krajina region:

> "For the sake of the purity of the Homeland War and our just fight, we must individualize the guilt for crimes committed after the operation and punish those responsible for them. History teaches us that we must do it for the sake of generations to come" (BBC 5.August 2006).

As in the aforementioned quotations the distinction between the collective enterprise of "our just fight" and "those responsible" for crimes is present in the deliberations of the president. It is interesting to note that the individualising of guilt for the war crimes committed after the operation comes along as a duty to secure a higher end: "the purity of the Homeland War".

Next to the individualising character of the guilt another exculpatory figure is present in the declaration of President Mesić: the imagination of transitory violence for which the Croatian state is not to be held accountable. Mesić declared:

> "But on this occasion we must not forget that after Operation Storm the rule of law partially failed and that the liberated area was not reintegrated quickly into Croatia's political and legal system. Unfortunately, this led to crimes. But those were incidents committed by irresponsible individuals which must be not only condemned but prosecuted" (AFP 5. August 2006).

The emplotment of the story suggests that *because* the Croatian legal system was missing in these areas, out law actions could be committed by "irresponsible" criminal individuals. There is a deterministic and causal mechanism assumed when Mesić holds the missing of Croatia's legal system to have "led to crimes". The "but" of the following sentence underscores the message that these "incidents" (not actions) were out of reach of today's Croatia. In this storyline the crimes committed by the Croatian military are carefully externalised. In an interview with the Dalmatian Newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacjia* on the eve of the celebrations of the 12th anniversary of Operation Storm in August 2007, Mesic underscored his version of transitory violence. However, he softened the moral burden for the then authorities. Confronted with the disclosure of an international report on the break up of Yugoslavia and the question of why the Croatian authorities failed to prevent looting and murder of the remaining Serbian population in the wake of Operation Storm Mesić replied:

> "I cannot get into it [the explanation of the failing of the then Croatian government]. The inferences that you [the interviewer] were presenting implied that if someone had wanted to, someone could have done something [i.e. could have prevented the atrocities]. In consequence, one could say that the intention to prevent what happened did not exist, and this is why it happened. But this is only one logical construction" (Mesić 2007: 5).

In reference to the transcripts of the presidential meeting mentioned above President Mesić opted for the disclosure of the documents in order to enable an open discussion about the role of the Croatian state during the "liberation" of the Krajina region as well as upon the state involvement in the expulsion of the Serbian population. To the question of deliberate expulsion of the Serbian population Mesić declared in this same interview:

> "Some light is shed on this complex [Croatian state involvement into acts of Serbian expulsion] by the well known transcripts of the high-level talks which the then President Tuđman held, and which I made available to the public, for the very reason that I think the public has the right to know what was done in the name of Croatia, and in the name of Croatian People, even if illegitimate things were done; especially then" (Ibid).

Even though the wording is very carefully chosen, Mesic's interpretation and narration of the independence war subverts the narration of the 2000 Declaration, in which the *Sabor* had unambiguously backed the war activities of the Croatian forces stating that the acts committed during this war had the moral absolution of an imposed war by outside aggression and national defence. The Declaration passed over the highly controversial issue of ethnic cleansing of the regained territories in the Krajina after Operation Storm and is ignorant to the inglorious role the Croatian state played in the disintegration of Bosnia Herzegovina. Mesić does not stand alone in opting for a more open and sincere discussion upon the Croatian role during the war. Vesna Pusić, who was president of the Croatian National Party (HNS) and thus member of the six party coalition during the debate upon the patriotic declaration "explicitly insisted that the Resolution must mention that the Croatian leadership of that time had committed aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina" (Staničić 2005: 39). She subverted the official narration by displaying a counter narrative and was thus accused of betrayal from the conservative faction of the HDZ while the other factions of her coalition muted on this issue. Only the leader of the powerful regional Istrian Party (IDS) Damir Kajin aligned her. The leader of the HDZ Party attacked both representatives saying that the allegation that Croatia had illegitimately aggressed Bosnia-Herzegovina was "totally unacceptable" and that the "Declaration over the homeland war should mute all the lies over the Croatian history and the contemporary History of modern Croatia".[21]

3.3 The Issue of Apologies

President Mesić and Svetozar Marović, the President of Serbia- Montenegro, exchanged apologies during the first visit of a Croatian president after the Yugoslavian war in Beograd in September 2003:

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[21] Available at *Le Courrier des Balkans*: http://balkans.courriers.info/article4341.html; [20 June 2007]

> "In my name, I also apologise to all those who have suffered pain or damage at any time from citizens of Croatia who misused or acted against the law."[22]

The wording and message of the quoted personal apology of Stipe Mesić fits in other declarations of the president in which the Croatian state is omitted from responsibilities for war crimes. The apology is elusive on the concrete substance of the crime as well as the specific object ("to all those who suffered pain or damage") to which the apology is addressed. The perpetrating actors are denominated as "citizens of Croatia who misused or acted against the law". The individualizing figure in Mesić's apologies has an axiomatic character. During a tripartite regional meeting with the presidents of Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia Mesić reiterated his individualising interpretation:

> "The truth about the past implies both, apology, admission and repentance. In a court, be it an international or a national court, both accountability and guilt can and have to be ascertained exclusively on the individual basis. Nations are not guilty. The fact is, however, that crimes were committed in the name of nations and under the cloak of the name of entire nations. It is therefore logical that expressions of apology come in the name of nations or states. Those who express apologies should be received in good faith and not attacked or boycotted" (Mesić 2005).

As in the aforementioned quotations Mesić carefully makes the difference between the individual and collective level for the moral evaluation of war crimes. Nations cannot be guilty. Nevertheless, the reasoning behind the validity of collective expressions of apology lies "in the fact" that "crimes were committed in the name of nations" or "under the cloak of the name of entire nations." This passive formulation "were committed" implies that the crimes were not mandated by the nation "in the name" of which they were committed. The authorship for the crimes is situated outside of the collective actor since "accountability and guilt can and have to be ascertained exclusively on the individual basis". Mesić infers that since the crimes by individuals misused the "name of entire nations" expressions of apologies should "come in the name of nations or states". But if we follow carefully the line of

[22] BBC NEWS: Presidents apologise over Croatian war, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/3095774.stm; [20 June 2007]

argumentation and the meticulous differentiation between the individual and collective level, there is no "logic" or necessity that crimes, which are solely individual in their character should be apologised on the collective level. It may appear noble and intuitive but, following the deliberations of Mesic, it is not obligatory.

3.4 The paradigm case of Ante Gotovina: "Balkan villain" or "Croatian hero"

No extradition case has lasted longer and has stained the Croatian relations with the EU more than the case of the extradition of general Ante Gotovina to the Hague. Between 2001 and 2005 the case led to severe tensions between Brussels and Zagreb and the evasion of the general caused the delay of concrete accession talks in 2004 with Croatia. The Case of the fugitive general has captured the domestic political scene since its very beginning. Gotovina represented the symbol of a glorious victory over the Serb "aggression" and was thus a crystallizing collective figure.

"The Gotovina Case worked as indicator in the sense of declaring in favour or against Gotovina, one was positioning oneself in the political landscape of Croatian politics" (JutarnjiList 10.12.2005)[23] writes a political analyst in the JutarnjiList at the capture of Gotovina. With the detainment of Gotovina, the same analyst continues, "the last indebted cleavage of the war" comes to its end. Jacques Massé sees the Gotovina cases as an emblematic figure for the self-positioning of the liberal minority. "Gotovina est resté un héros. Pour une minorité seulement, il incarnait au contraire tout ce qui enfermait le pays dans le «trou noir balkanique»: le mépris des valeurs démocratique et de leurs lois"[24] (Massé 2006: 294). Ante Gotovina represents what Ivan Čovolić has described as the characteristic heroic villain: a collective personality that doesn't care for values besides the patriotic values for which the heroic villain stands (Čovolić 2004).

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[23] Access by *Le Courrier des Balkans*, available at: http://balkans.courriers.info/article6141.html; [20 June 2007]

[24] Gotovina remained a hero. For a minority though, he represented everything that locked the country in the "dark Balkan whole": the disdain of democratic laws and values" (our translation).

Viewed through this light, all the misdeed effectuated during the Operation Storm, the Medak Operation and Operation Flush have the Balkan odour in its illiberal sense from which the Croatian Prime Minister Racan and President Mesić wanted to separate Croatia once for all. The remarks of Premier Racan given during a confidence vote session at the Croatian Parliament on the question of cooperation with the ICTY are significantly revealing in this context. In his speech Prime Minister Račan "called on the lawmakers to ensure that Croatia is a respected member of the international community which "respects its international responsibilities no matter how painful it might be. Any other choice," he said, "would lead us back to our *Balkan past* [in which Croatia would become] a *Balkan dwarf* and an international outcast"[25] (RFE: 16.7.2001). As we have already seen in the Declaration of the Homeland War the geopolitical concept of the Balkan appears as a contrasting foil for the Croatian self-ascribed identity. This quote further demonstrates that the Balkan stigma not only helps as a demarking concept from outside threats, i.e. the Serb aggressor, but also helps to alienate political movements within Croatia. Non-cooperation with the ICTY is equated and textually associated with a backlash to Croatia's "Balkan past". In this sense Prime Minister Racan admits through the use of the possessive pronoun "our" that Croatia had a Balkan feature and that this trait was and is existent if those are not handed over who are responsible for the Balkan stain. The statement also tacitly testifies that the Prime minister admits all the associations with the notion to be valid in the cases of the discussed extradition cases. That crimes and unlawfulness made up for a part of the Croatian history, in this context, namely the war. To get rid of this stigma implies the full cooperation with the international community "no matter how painful it might be".

4 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to present an analysis of the various politically significant narrative identities which are constructed around Croatia. The competing identity versions emerged from the war narratives told by different actors. Our study reveals four dovetailing and partially overlapping narrative identity constructions, which have dominated the debate on the *domovinski rat*. First, we identified the very prominent

[25] Available at: http://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0110&L=twatch-&D=1&O=D&F=P&P=77345; [29 May 2007]

narration of a heroic Croatian nation that stood up against the outside aggression emanating from Serbia and finally succeeded to liberate its occupied areas and establish peace and stability in the whole region. This story creates a space of action which excludes apologies or extraditions of Generals to the ICTY. It rather calls for a firm standing against all requests and pushes Croatia to act as a self-confident, autonomous country which fights another battle for historical truth. The second identity version is that of an innocent nation Croatia, who did 'the right thing' in defending its territory. Yet, this nation might contain the one or the other guilt laden 'black sheep'. Thus a first cautious cooperation with the ICTY becomes possible. The third and fourth identity construction are intertwined, as they represent two opposite identity opportunities Croatia can choose. Croatia is at the Crossroads between a 'Western' and a Balkan identity. The Balkan identity seems to be the disliked one; the kinds of action which are typically connected with it include unlawfulness, a criminal habitus and brutality. They are generally presented in contrast to today's Croatian identity; this suggests that actions – including foreign policies – which are connected with this Balkan identity are avoided by Croatia. Instead, Croatia seems to prefer the counterpart, i.e. Western identity. This, in turn, is presented as being connected with actions which are in accord with the rule of law and democratic values. The Western and the Balkan identity cut across the other identity versions and help to specify them and to mark them as past and disliked (Balkan) or as present/future and desired (Europe).

Even though our analysis has to remain suggestive in respect to action and behaviour, it tries to approach the Croatian stance towards the EU and the ICTY from a constructivist point of view. The identity patterns we found are supposed to frame the spaces of action, which open up for Croatia. It seems that the heroic self-image is slowly substituted with the more self-critical and differentiated identity version, which allows for black sheep in the Croatian rows and for a more cooperative stance towards the EU and the ICTY. The prospect of the 2009 EU membership might confirm these findings. Our findings are also significant on another, more regional level. The intense and diverse voices present in Croatia on the question of Croatia's war involvement have important implications for the relationship between Croatia and its former enemies, i.e. Serbia and Bosnian Serbs and Muslims. The increasingly self-critical re-evaluation of the war period might transport the image of a changed

collective actor that is now more open for restorative politics towards its former enemies and victims. Therefore the modified plots currently present on the domestic scale in Croatia might be of significant signalling value that should not be underestimated and might help to stabilise or even to promote reconciliation processes in the region.

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