

The Need to Have Something ‘Of Their Own’: Croat Parallel Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: *The asymmetrical, federal construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been contested by all groups, but it has particularly influenced a significant element of Croat politics in BiH – their need to create ‘their own’ entity. Not being able to form a separate territorial unit, Croats created parallel institutions following the Herzeg-Bosna pattern: firstly in 2000, and again in 2011. This paper aims at analyzing the Croats’ autonomist and secessionist politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina with special emphasis on the formation of parallel structures as a replacement strategy derived from the Croat inability to bring about a constitutional unit of their own. Using the model suggested in the introduction to this special issue, the problem is analyzed from the perspective of center-periphery dynamics in Bosnia and answers the question as to why territorial autonomy has been an impossible goal for Croats.*

KEYWORDS: Croats, Bosnia and Herzegovina, autonomy, parallel institutions

Assuming that Bosnia and Herzegovina¹ is a federation, it should be underlined that it is an ‘internationally administrated’ state with an asymmetrical structure – a federal system *sui generis* (Keil 2013) based on two principles: territorial and ethnic (non-territorial). While the first one introduces two entities (one Serbian, the other shared by Bosniaks and Croats), the second principle recognizes three groups. Yet, even though the territorial composition of the country has been contested by all three groups, this structural mixture significantly differs from Croat expectations and has particularly influenced the most visible element of Croat politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the need to create ‘their own’ entity, on equal footing with the two that already exist.

The demand to create a separate Croat constitutional unit has replaced the pre-war goal, when Croats had wanted to secede from BiH, but given the current political climate in the country and region, it is still at a declaratory and imprecise stage. Nevertheless, Croats have demonstrated a lack of willingness to accept the loyalty position and to abide by the constitutional structures designed in the Dayton Peace agreement (DPA). What is more, following the pattern known from the times of the Herceg-Bosna structures, they have attempted to create parallel institutions based on the ethnic principle on two separate occasions: in 2000/01, through a form of self-government, and in 2011, when they reaffirmed this attempt, albeit in a significantly weaker form.

This article aims at analyzing the Croats’ autonomist and secessionist politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina with special emphasis on the formation of parallel structures as a *replacement strategy* derived from the Croat inability to bring about a constitutional unit of their own. Moreover, the article also tries to look at Croat politics in BiH through the

¹ The terms Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia and BiH will be used interchangeably.

lenses of regionalism and locally differentiated strategies, represented by Croats from Posavina, central Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet still accepting the fact that the latter option has prevailed. Using the model suggested by Siroky et al. (2016), the problem is analyzed from the perspective of center-periphery dynamics in Bosnia and answers the question of why territorial autonomy has been an impossible goal for Croats. Subsequently, the paper tries to establish on what basis Croats in BiH, instead of choosing “exit” or “loyalty”, have decided to abuse the federal structure of the state by creating these parallel structures – a strategy which can neither be classified as exit, nor as loyalty.

The article will be based, among others, on the following primary sources: materials published by Bosnian newspapers, documents issued by international organizations (mostly OHR and OSCE), as well as interviews with local politicians from the main political parties, conducted during field research in 2014 and 2015 in Mostar and the Brčko District. The following section gives an overview of the assumptions and merits of the theoretical framework. It is then followed by a short description of Croats as one of the constituent peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina and their politics in the country. The subsequent part contains a presentation of Croat parallel structures mentioned above and discusses them in light of the theoretical framework. The paper offers some conclusions at its very end.

Theoretical Framework

The questions asked in the introductory article – why some national groups within democratic states demand outright independence, while other groups mobilize for regional autonomy, and still others settle for even less, and how we can explain change in both demands and replies – can also be applied to the case of Croats in BiH, who over time have shifted their dominant strategy from secession to the creation of ‘their’ constituent unit and parallel institutions. The paper opens a dialogue with the model constructed by Siroky et al. (2016), but as in the Croat case the exit strategy was replaced by the construction of parallel institutions, it tries to establish why this has become a viable choice.

The point of departure of the model are center-periphery bargaining dynamics which still hold in the Bosnian Croat case – first, despite the consociational nature of the Bosnian state which includes them in its central structures, they clearly put themselves in opposition to the center. This shows that even the implementation of power-sharing mechanisms does not necessarily nullify existing center-periphery dynamics. Second, even though Croats are a dispersed group that inhabits various regions in BiH, given the non-territorial character of many power-sharing provisions and the domination of the Herzegovinian ‘option’, one can clearly treat Croats as a group which forms a periphery. The model then introduces three parameters influencing the center’s willingness to accommodate the periphery and to extract concessions: a periphery’s cultural and economic distinctiveness; its exit credibility; and the center’s dependence on that periphery. It is based on the assumption that the center will grant concessions to a distinctive region only under two conditions: the periphery must have a credible exit threat and the center must be dependent on the periphery. Moreover, in the case of Croats in BiH, it is interesting to think about one possible outcome of center-periphery bargaining, tagged by the authors as the fourth option: if the periphery chooses to use voice, then the center must determine whether, and how, to respond. If the center ignores the periphery’s voice, then the periphery must decide whether to remain loyal or leave. If the periphery remains

loyal, then the center keeps the concessions and the periphery gets nothing, plus it pays the cost of having used its voice to no avail (Siroky et al. 2016).

Consequently, in the postwar case of Bosnian Croats, the periphery has no exit credibility, while the second variable holds here only to some extent as Croats in BiH are a rather dispersed group (Herzegovina being the most significant region with a territorially concentrated Croat population) and the center depends on them only to some extent. So, in accordance with the model, the bargaining attempt has resulted in no concessions from the center. Croats have used their voice and threatened the center with an exit strategy (first, to leave the state, then, when that failed, to create their own entity) which, however, has not triggered concessions. The last Croat “move” was neither to be loyal (which would mean to play in accordance with the rules of the game) nor to exit, which could be treated as an extension of the model. With time, the strategy has been changed into a forced, simultaneously semi-loyal and semi-exit position: they still want to proceed with the third entity strategy, but as it is unachievable in the current political context, they have tried to find a way to get around this situation with *parallel institutions* – purely Croat governmental structures, alternative to the formal state ones.

The key questions then are why and how Croats in Bosnia reacted to the bargaining attempt with the center by creating structures parallel to the constitutional system of Bosnia. In particular, it was the autonomy principle – i.e. the federal construction which is part of the power-sharing model implemented in the country – which was questioned. The answer could be linked to the differentiation between the ideal and the real position of institutions in a post-war political system or, as Elinor Ostrom says (2005: 138), between rules-in-form (dead letters) and rules-in-use (those which are actually followed). Yet, there is no space for such a distinction in the power-sharing model. On the contrary, it is assumed that “institutions and practices create an incentive structure for ethnic groups to mediate their differences through the legitimate institutions” (Sisk 2002: 33), so formal institutions should fill the gap created by low social capital and trust, being even more productive than in homogenous societies (Easterly 2001: 690).

Nevertheless, to quote Przeworski (1991: 26), a consolidated democracy is one where the rules of the game have become ‘self-reinforcing’, that is where all the relevant political forces find it best to continue to submit their interests and values to the uncertain interplay of the institutions (the loyal strategy). Yet, actors may agree to these rules during a transition but, because of a lack of understanding of the consequences, or because of a conscious decision to place likely short-term (party-political) advantages above long-term political stability, they then change their mind (Reynolds 1999: 63). This means that formal institutions do not immediately or permanently constitute a decisive determinant of political actors’ behavior, as we shall observe in the Bosnian Croat case (Manning 2008: 18).

To Be the Smallest Constituent People in BiH

There are three main groups in BiH: Bosniaks (which are predominantly Muslim), Serbs (predominantly Orthodox) and Croats (predominantly Catholic). According to the 1948 figures, Bosnia consisted of 44,7% Serbs, 30,9% Muslims (Bosniak) and 23,9% Croats. However, according to the census taken in 1991, there were 43,7% Muslims, 31,3% Serbs and 17,3% Croats (Ramet 1992: 177, 259), while according to the newest, 2013

census there are 50,11% Bosniaks, 30,78% Serbs, and 15,43% Croats (Al Jazeera 2016). At the same time, there have never been homogenous and cross-cutting cleavages since class, education and geographic location significantly influenced ethnic relations, yet never dominated them (Siroky & Hechter 2016). Successive generations have interpreted their identities according to their own geographic, political, social and cultural circumstances as the country experienced a long-term process of social and religious polarization (Hoare 2007: 28; Malcolm 2011: 185). Thus, ethnic categories built on sectarian communities appeared on this territory only in the nineteenth century (Donia and Fine 2011: 20).

These historical processes created three distinct communities in Bosnia. Yet the national and political development of Bosnian Croats was slower than that of Serbs – it started in the 1850s with the Franciscans and accelerated during the Austro-Hungarian occupation (Imamović 2006: 117). Only then were they able to maintain contact with Croats from the Empire and became acquainted with a strong tradition of statehood and independence, as well as national and pan-Slavic ideologies (Nešković 2013: 24-5). As in the other cases, Croat identity was rooted to a great extent in religion (Bataković 2001: 73), which became especially visible when the SFRJ was about to collapse – religiosity then replaced Communist symbols and rhetoric (Grandits 2007: 104). The Catholic Church has been tightly connected here to Occidentalism, the Latin tradition and myths oriented around Katarina Kosača – the Catholic queen who fought for the Catholic cultural profile of BiH (Rekšć 2011: 397). In fact, Croats share the faith of the pre-Ottoman rulers of Bosnia as the Northern and Central parts of the country were catholic also during the medieval period (Donia and Fine 2011: 27). That faith has been kept in folk memory, while identity was preserved by the Franciscans over the course of time (Hoare 2007: 56-9; Donia and Fine 2011: 62; Cvitković 2006; Lovrenović 2002).

As there was no simple relationship between ethnicity and settlement type in Bosnia, there has been no encompassing, contiguous Croat area in BiH but rather distinctive concentrations of Bosnian Croats in some regions: western Herzegovina, the Posavina region (northeast Bosnia), central Bosnia and Sarajevo (Toal and Dahlman 2011: 72-74). This division has been reproduced in the group's politics and bargaining attempts and in a longer perspective has created distinct strategies oriented towards the center and other groups. The most radical Western Herzegovinians have been most prone to support incorporation into their kin state, Croatia – in the present context a demand impossible to fulfill and replaced by the third entity option. Croats from Central Bosnia are closer to the strong central state idea, but for the biggest fraction here the same postulate is still the most common one (Nešković 2013: 27). The most distanced from the third entity postulate seems to be the Posavina region, where they have concentrated on local-level politics and defined the third entity issue as irrelevant, although still supportive of the need for territorial reform (Vrhovac 2015). Consequently, the most specific element that characterizes Croats in BiH is regionalism – of which the most visible example is the distinctiveness of Herzegovina in the Southwest.² Yet despite these differences, due to its status as the major Croat territory in BiH, Herzegovina managed to dominate the Croat question in Bosnia.

² That territory is named after Stjepan Vukčić Kosača (Herzog Svetog Save), who ruled there in the fifteenth century, and which also preserved its status during the Ottoman period and later on.

On the other hand, the position of Croats in Bosnia has always been defined by the fact that they were the smallest constituent people (now both at the central and at entity level) so their behavior has been very contextual and for a long their only option was to cooperate with Muslims when the latter group wanted to have majority (Imamović 2006: 125)³. The SDA-HDZ (Stranka demokratske akcije – Party of Democratic Action and Hrvatska demokratska zajednica – Croatian Democratic Union) alliance, a frequently strained feature of almost every governing coalition since Dayton, collapsed entirely in early 2010, almost directly after the breakup of the Prud process⁴ due to the deterioration of personal and political relations between the leaders of both parties, the imprecise plan to reform Bosnia into a state with four territorial units (which implied the dissolution of the FBiH, highly criticized by Bosniaks), Bosniak-Croat tensions in Mostar (ICG 2010: 11-2) and a crisis in the Federation BiH connected to the problems with the Trans-European corridor 5 highway and HDZ's declarations that they were being outvoted by SDA and other Bosniak parties. This switch ushered in closer Croat cooperation with Serbs.

Croats and Their Politics in the Federal BiH

When the process of the dissolution of Yugoslavia started, Croats were represented by HDZ, the strongest Croat party supporting the sovereignty of BiH with Bosniaks. Yet, their politics quickly changed: while on the one hand they were cooperating with Bosniaks, on the other hand an exit strategy became gradually more visible as the armed conflict proceeded (Hoare 2007: 348). Eventually, a secessionist course similar to that of Bosnian Serbs prevailed and Western Herzegovina became the center of the movement. Already in November 1991, like their counterparts in SDS (Srpska demokratska stranka – Serb Democratic Party), HDZ bodies had used the existing local Territorial Defense and police structures to establish military units. In the same month, they created two Bosnian Croat political bodies, namely the *Croat Community of Bosanska Posavina* and the *Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna*, which unified already existing regional associations (Hoare 2007: 370-1). This resulted in the creation of a state within the state, the so-called Herceg-Bosna, supported by authorities in Zagreb and proclaimed as the Croat Republic of Herceg-Bosna in August 1993, henceforth pursuing an openly secessionist line (Ilić 2009: 98). The policies oriented towards a clear exit strategy were supposed to end with the signing of the Washington Agreement in April 1994; one year later, during the Dayton negotiations, Franjo Tuđman conceded on Croat territorial ambitions in Bosnia (Toal and Dahlman 2011: 155): having in mind mostly Eastern Slavonia (today's Croatia), he sacrificed Bosnian Croats (Holbrooke 1999: 236).

³ This explains their ideological efforts to attract Muslims: according to the theory designed by Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik, BiH was a primordially Croatian land and all of its inhabitants were Croat while the Bosnian Muslims were „the flower of the Croatian nation.” These views were inherited by Čista stranka prava and Ustasha (Nešković 2013: 26).

⁴ The negotiations between SDA, HDZ BiH and SNSD (Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata), initiated by Sulejman Tihić, started in November 2008 and continued throughout 2009. They were meant to show that Bosnia's politicians could negotiate domestic reforms by themselves. The process dealt with two sets of issues: solutions to requirements set out by the PIC in 2008 that needed to be met by the BiH authorities prior to the closure of the OHR, and constitutional reforms aimed at making the state more efficient and capable of joining the EU (ICG 2009: 4).

Resulting from these two peace agreements, post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina was reconstructed as a complex state of two Entities: 1) the Federation of BiH (FBiH), shared by Croats and Bosniaks (the dominant group), represents the crucial territory for Croats in BiH⁵ due to Bosnian history and the demographic map; and 2) the predominantly Serb Republika Srpska (RS). There is also a third unit, the District of Brčko. Despite the fact that the Bosnian Constitution does not mention the word “federation”, Bieber (2006: 61) defined it as a “loose multinational federation” with a weak central authority, while the federal nature of the state should be seen rather as an aspect of its consociational structure. However, as the country focuses on ethnic and territorial power-sharing with a strong focus on territorial elements, it might also be described as an ethnic federation (Keil 2013: 95-96; see also Anderson & Costa 2016). In fact, the FBiH after the war was seen as a federation of two nations, not of cantons or municipalities, since both sides seemed to stick to their respective ‘national’ authorities not foreseen in the Dayton agreement (OSCE 1996b), while all multiethnic units – the central level, the FBiH and the mixed cantons – have been marked by instability and low effectiveness.

Consequently, the distribution of power by levels of governance in BiH contains the following: a weak position of the municipalities (too many responsibilities with no adequate powers or sources of funding); a dominant position of the cantons in FBiH (too many powers but too few responsibilities and limited resources)⁶; a high level of responsibility and wide powers for the Republika Srpska; and a weak position of the state of BiH (both limited responsibilities and powers) (Miovčić 376; Marković 2013)⁷. It is also important to highlight that in many joint tasks the cantons have taken lead. This is the result of the cantons interpreting their own decision-making competences more widely, the Croat (but also some Bosniak) cantons’ desire for more autonomy, but also due to the slow and complex decision-making procedures in the FBiH (Bose 2002: 80-81).

Yet, in addition to being a highly decentralized state, Bosnia is also an asymmetric federation: the subunits are constituted very differently, since one is a loose federation consisting of ten cantons and two predominant nations, while the other is a centralized republic of a single nation. Also, the existence of a third unit, the District Brčko, provides for an additional element of asymmetry. This has meant that members of the three constituent nations enjoy different degrees of political representation and rights: while

⁵ Established by the Washington agreement in 1994, which ended the year-long Croat-Bosniak conflict, the FBiH was the umbrella structure for all Bosnian government-controlled territories and the areas under the administration of the Croat Republic of Herceg-Bosnia. The new Bosniak-Croat Federation was, however, supposed to be able to enter into a confederation with Croatia (Burg and Shoup 1999: 292-298), which never happened.

⁶ In 1996, cantons were described as the weakest link in the structure of BiH: artificially created and with no tradition among the population. There was also disagreement in the FBiH about their role: Bosniaks wanted a strongly centralized government while Croats wanted their cantons to be as independent as possible (OSCE 1996c).

⁷ Both entities have had, now significantly weakened or abolished, state-like features of control over most of the revenues, their own military, and control over border police but in the FBiH competences were further devolved to cantons in accordance with Part III Articles 1-4, which introduces the Federation’s and the cantons’ exclusive as well as joint tasks (Keil 2013: 107, 111, Omerović 2011: 487). The enhanced competences of the state and the clear direction towards greater empowerment of state level institutions suggest a movement from a confederation to a federation, since originally the highest degree of governance took place in the territorial unit that was most homogenous – in the RS it was the entity itself, in FBiH that meant the cantons (Bieber 2006: 60-62).

Serbs enjoy territorial autonomy in one of the two entities, territorial autonomy for Croats and Bosniaks is limited to cantons, which are bestowed with fewer powers (Bieber 2006: 60-62)⁸.

For Croats in particular, this means that because of the overall demographic structure they have a relative autonomy only in three cantons with Croat majority: Posavina, Western Herzegovina, and Canton 10, while on all the other levels they have the status of the smallest constituent people, which is interpreted as a serious breach of the autonomy principle and defines all their politics. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that they have been granted the same power-sharing provision as the other constituent peoples: inclusion in grand coalitions (including one of three members of the Presidency), a minority veto (in both the Presidency and House of Peoples) and proportional as well as equal representation in central institutions (Guss & Siroky 2012: 310). What is more, in 2002, on the basis of a Constitutional Court decision from 2000, similar mechanisms were transplanted to the cantonal and entity levels guarantying them a powerful and influential position in Bosnian politics⁹.

As mentioned above, the post-war structure of the country triggered Croats' visible disinclination to support federal and entity structures; in particular, they appeared determined to pursue *their own* state-building project and thus, first, to preserve their wartime quasi-state Herceg-Bosna and then, when this turned out to be impossible, to create a new one not encumbered with the experience of war. In other words, due to the signed accords, the position of the international community and the politics of Croatia since 2000, full secession became impossible and was replaced by blurred conceptions of territorial and non-territorial self-government, in turn presented as a key point of HDZ BiH's¹⁰ political program. Their two prevailing goals which are frequently treated as the central symbols of Croat politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been to create their own

⁸ Special provisions for the two mixed cantons were introduced with the first amendment to the Constitution of FBiH (1994). It stated that those cantons could transfer their competences in education, tourism, culture, local business, charitable activities, and radio and television to a municipality or city in its territory; what is more cantons are obliged to do so if a municipality demands it (Marković 2012: 283).

⁹ In fact, there is a combination of two patterns of representation: ethnic and territorial. For example, the upper chamber of the Bosnian Parliamentary Assembly, the House of Peoples, comprises 15 delegates, five from each constituent people but 10 from the FBiH and 5 from the RS; the same model is used in the Presidency: each constituent people has 1 member, but two shall be from the FBiH and one from the RS. For the House of Representatives and the Council of Ministers, the law introduces only territorial representation but de facto this also means ethnic representation.

¹⁰ The dominant political actor in the Croat camp, strongly connected to the mother party in Croatia; in that sense, the 2000 democratic transition in Croatia (death of Franjo Tuđman and HDZ being defeated in the 2000 elections) visibly influenced the party in BiH: the financing for HVO and Herceg-Bosna was cut off (Bieber 2001: 7; ICG 2001: 2). In the 1990 elections they achieved between 94% and 100% of the vote in the four main Croat municipalities (Grude, Ljubuški, Posušje, Široki Brijeg); after the war, the picture was similar – in 1996, their vote share was almost 90% and they were described as having enormous power over the population (OSCE 1996a; Grandits 2007: 102). This was also visible on the state level in the elections for the lower chamber of the Bosnian parliament: in 1996, HDZ won 8 mandates, in 1998 6 mandates, and in 2000 and 2002 – given the international pressure – only 5. The situation has changed with the creation of the splinter HDZ1990 – since then, they shared previously exclusively HDZs seats: in 2006 it was 3 mandates for HDZ and 2 for HDZ1990, in 2010: 3 to 1 respectively and in 2014: 4 to 1 seat (Zukić 2012). It is important to underline that Croat parties frequently create electoral coalitions: in 2014 it was HDZ, HSS, HSP dr. Ante Starčević and HSP Herceg-Bosne; in 2010 HDZ1990 with HSP BiH, as well as unified HSS-NHI; in 2006 HDZ-Hrvatska koalicija NHZ and Hrvatsko zajedništvo (HDZ1990, HZ-HSS-HKDU-HDU-Demokršćani).

entity, meaning territorial autonomy,¹¹ and ‘equality’, which can be narrowed down to two demands: the preservation of the minority veto with the ‘vital interests’ clause and their ‘own’ representation in the Presidency – a Croat candidate who represents a truly Croat party and is elected by Croats. The latter postulate is a direct consequence of the situation of 2006 and 2010, when the position was taken by the SDP Croat candidate Željko Komšić (ICG 2009: 6; Nešković 2013: 390, Bose 2002: 28). In 2006, this happened because of two factors: the split inside HDZ, which resulted in the creation of HDZ1990 and rivalry between their two candidates – Borisav Jović and Bože Ljubić –, as well as a huge amount of non-Croat votes gained by Komšić. By 2010 there were no doubts that he was the most popular politician in the country – yet again, given the amount of votes received, could not have been chosen exclusively by Croats (Sarajlić 2010: 242-243)¹² which was used as an argument in the HDZ campaign.

During the first HDZ General Convention on August 18, 1990 it was said that “all efforts and goals of the HDZ BiH shall be aimed at realizing [...] welfare of all people – without any differences – whose homeland is BiH.” However, after the elections, in their political charter adopted in Mostar during the Great Convention on November 14, 1992 it was made clear that the party exclusively represented the interests of Croats. Since the fourth Convention held on August 2-3, 1996 in Neum, the party even went further in that direction; at the sixth Convention in Sarajevo on July 15, 2000 the goal was to concentrate on the implementation of all signed agreements and to oppose every attempt of revising them if the goal of revision would be the negation of the constitutiveness, equality and sovereignty of all Croats in BiH (Čović 2010: 64). What is more, in 1999 the negative attitude of Croats towards the FBiH, rooted in their position in the entity and the politics of the Bosniak leadership (OSCE 1999), were expressed in two documents: the so-called *Non Paper* from March 18, 1999 (Deklaracija o položaju hrvatskoga naroda u Bosni i Hercegovini) and the later *Answer of the Croat Political Leadership to the Process of Croats’ Deconstitutionalisation in BiH* (Odgovor hrvatskoga politickog vodstva na proces dekonstituiranja Hrvata u BiH), in which they demanded the strengthening of the constitutional and legal position of the Croat nation, the preservation of their constitutional status, cultural and national identity as well as the right to education, information and return (Lovrenović 1999, 2000)¹³ – a program offered to voters when the party was in a particularly fragile situation.

Nevertheless, it was the eight convention in Mostar on August 26, 2006 where it was said that “with the creation of Croat self-government, we tried to warn about the de-constitution of the Croat people in BiH and to insist on an agreement about the internal structure of BiH, but the international community did not understand us” (Čović 2010: 65). The need for a new constitutional order that would guarantee the equality of all

¹¹ Which should comprise three ‘Croat’ cantons (Posavski, Zapadno-Hercegovački and Livanjski) where their demographic domination means a de facto self-governance and two mixed, multiethnic cantons (Central Bosnian and Hercegovačko-Neretvianski) where the necessity to share power with Bosniaks frequently results in political deadlocks – e.g. as for now the Hercegovačko-Neretvianski canton has still not created a government after the 2014 elections.

¹² A similar situation took place in the RS when Emil Vlajki as a Croat deputy of the President of the RS was elected with mostly Serb votes (Vukoja 2013: 96).

¹³ However, it should be emphasized that the documents represented a significant change in HDZ’s politics in BiH – from now on they were “civilized nationalists” who supported the Dayton Agreement, distanced themselves from Tudjman, saw the future of Bosnian Croats in BiH – not in Croatia and the reward for such policy was supposed to be the status of the third entity (OSCE 1999).

constituent nations was also underlined in HDZ's program for the years 2010-2014, but territorial autonomy was not explicitly mentioned (HDZ 2010 and HDZ 2014; Bevenda 2014), which is coherent with the replacement of the explicit "third entity rhetoric" by enigmatic "federalization" deprived of any concrete meaning (Al Jazeera 2015).

Yet, what HDZ underlines is that they are the "victims of peace" and that they had signed the Washington Agreement because it included a clause forecasting a confederation of BiH with Croatia (in Dayton this was then replaced by 'special relations') and a Federation BiH with the RS inside it, as Serbs were supposed to join the entity so that a Federal Republic would have been created – something that has never happened. In effect, in their discourse, Croats in BiH remain deprived of their own entity and are subject to outvoting, so to make the country functional, stable and viable, a constitutional reform coinciding with Croat expectations is needed (Cović 2010: 47-48). Hence, as Hayden (2005: 233) comments, at no point since 1992 have Croat or Serb politicians in Bosnia with any sizeable support of voters ever been willing to accept a central government of Bosnia that would have any real authority over them.

During the first years after the war, the HDZ had been able to transmit the message that it was the only party able to defend common interests and the unity of Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Grandits 2007: 115) – as a result, Croat politics has been identified with the discourse they imposed. Yet, while indeed it has been the dominant voice¹⁴, especially for western Herzegovina and central Bosnia, it is not the only party of, nor does it stand for the only strategy pursued by Croats in BiH. For example, the third entity demand as the most radical option was not explicitly included in the text of the Declaration from Krešewo (*Kreševska deklaracija*), where parties connected with the Croat national corpus (HDZ BiH, HDZ 1990, HSP, HSS BiH, NSRB, HKDU BiH) emphasized only the need for constitutional change, especially at the middle level of authority.

The party that was then capable of taking some votes from them was a splinter fraction: HDZ1990, created after the failure of the April Package (Aprilski paket)¹⁵ when a group of HDZ's senior figures, led by Božo Ljubić and Martin Raguž, broke away. The split was prompted by personal disagreements (ICG 2010: 10-11), but was justified by the alleged withdrawal from the ideas and values on which HDZ had originally been founded. During its first congress, it was underlined that the party wanted to follow the founding idea and goals of HDZ from 1990: democracy, sovereignty, and equality of all constituent peoples in BiH; hence also the name (HDZ1990 2007:4). Being based on the same territory as HDZ BiH, HDZ1990 participated in the 2006 elections with a radical, nationalist program which described the position of the Croats in Bosnia as deprived of sovereignty (Pejanović 2012: 112; Vričko 2010) – the strategy turned out successful as it was the only moment

¹⁴ The domination of HDZ BiH on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina is visible first and foremost in the results of elections. Even if one does not take into consideration the central level where their position has never been seriously contested (with the exception of HDZ1990 in 2006, but even then they became part of the governing coalition), it is also visible in the elections for the cantonal assemblies (looking only at cantons with Croat majority and the two mixed ones) (www.izbori.ba).

¹⁵ The first serious attempt to reach an agreement on the reform of the constitutional system of BiH. The negotiations took place in Washington DC, between May and October 2005, where the international community brought together Bosnian political leaders from the three main ethnic groups representing the eight leading Bosnian parties (SDA, SBiH, SDP, HDZ BiH, HNZ, SDS, SNSD and PDP). The objective of the talks was to improve the functionality of Bosnia's institutions; under a significant international pressure, a rough consensus was reached but the vote in the BiH House of Representatives on 26 April 2006 did not achieve the required two-thirds majority – the 'no' votes were cast by HDZ1990 and SBiH (ICG 2007: 10; Morrison 2009: 10).

when the party represented a serious competition to HDZ. At that point, underlining that BiH is the country and fatherland of Bosnian Croats, they opened the question regarding the equality of Croats, dominated by Bosniaks in the FBiH, while the asymmetrical structure of the country was blamed for being the main obstacle to its further development (HDZ1990 2007:6-7). The third entity claim has not been explored by the party but the need to reshape the Bosnian federal structure has been underlined – it should become a federation of ‘more’ constituent units (but not less than three) based on the ethnic principle (HDZ1990 2007a: 6-7). Finally, after a less successful campaign in 2010, when the radical rhetoric was taken over by HDZ, during the 2014 elections HDZ1990 presented a positive affirmation of the unification of political options – its campaign was assessed by some experts as historical, since for the first time an ethnic party was able to attract voters from another ethnic group. Still focused on the Croat question, these were put it in a more civic-oriented context. On his posters, Martin Raguž was standing on the ground with Bosnian and Croat symbols, while in his speeches he was talking about a need to merge two ideas, national and civic (Petrić 2015; Klix 2014).

Apart from the central level and being a voice of a minority, a different politics has been represented by Croats from Posavina – a rich, developed and geopolitically important region in north-eastern BiH divided between the RS, FBiH and Brčko District which comprises such municipalities as: Derventa, Bosanski Brod, Odžak, Modriča, Bosanski Šamac, Brčko, Orašje and parts of the municipalities of Gradačac, Doboј and Srebrenik (while the Posavina canton covers Odžak, Orašje and Domaljevač-Šamac). Here, Croats never fought with Bosniaks and have felt abandoned by the Croats from the rest of the country and by their kin state, especially by HDZ. In effect, at the end of 1993 they organized the *Assembly of Bosnian Posavina* (Sveopci sabor Bosanske Posavine) in Slavonski Brod, announcing the creation of the province of Bosnian Posavina as a separate region within BiH and with no real political capital but in opposition to both the Serbian aggression and Croat politics focused on Herceg-Bosna (Isaković 1993). As the postulates of Posavina were consequently neglected, Krešimir Zubak even attempted to withdraw his participation in the Dayton negotiations as he was “feeling that Croats were selling out Posavina, his home area” (Holbrooke 1999: 281).

This specific war situation created space for other Croat political parties which successfully contested HDZ’s domination in the region: Zubak’s NHI (*Nova hrvatska inicijativa* – New Croatian Initiative)¹⁶ and the agrarian HSS (Hrvatska seljačka stranka – Croatian Peasant Party),¹⁷ which simply could not support the idea of a third entity focused on Herzegovina. It was especially the first one that asked for a revision of the DPA and postulated a unified region of Bosanska Posavina which would not be divided into three separate units (Posavina 2010). The party also oriented its politics around territorial changes, yet, being focused on Croats, its frame of reference was the whole region with all its inhabitants. Together with HSS, with whom NHI merged in 2007¹⁸, after the electoral coalition of 2004, they promoted the abolition of the entities and

¹⁶ Created by Krešimir Zubak in 1998 when it won 14 mandates at the cantonal level and since then in a slow decline, in opposition to the dominant course of HDZ BiH which neglected the interests of Croats in central Bosnia and Posavina; its main area of interests were territories of Posavina and central Bosnia.

¹⁷ Created in BiH in 1993 and based on the tradition of Stjepan Radić’s HSS as an alternative to the politics of HDZ BiH.

¹⁸ With Marko Tadić as its leader but in a difficult ideological situation as NHI was rather a party of the liberal left while HSS is an agrarian, conservative, people’s party; subsequently, as Hrvatski narodni savez the party unified with HDZ1990 (Prgomet 2014).

equality of all three constituent peoples on the whole territory of BiH (Prgomet 2014) based on the decentralization principle (HSS 2010). The 2012 local elections also saw a successful participation of Posavska stranka, which, in accordance with this pattern, styled itself as a regional party of all citizens with no specific ethnic affiliation, representing and promoting the interests of Bosanska Posavina in the FBiH, and defending its identity and regional character against the politics of HDZ, HDZ1990 as well as SDA (Posavska stranka 2014).

Thus, being less distinct than Herzegovina, with absolutely no credibility to create an additional territorial unit and, given the size of the region and its lack of representation on the central level, having no influence on the center, Posavina has been deprived of any kind of voice and chances for concessions. Its regionally-oriented policies have absolutely no chances of implementation and represent, at least for the moment, no threat to the center, but local suspicions directed towards HDZ have also been reflected in the results of elections to the municipal assemblies in the region¹⁹: in 2012, in Derventa HSS-NHI won 3 mandates while HDZ only won 1; in Šamac, HSS got 2 while in Brčko and Brod HDZ and HSS received 2 seats each. While during the 2008 local elections HDZ, HSS-NHI and HDZ1990 created an all-Croat coalition, prior results are also interesting (due to the unfinished return process in many places there were no Croat votes), as in 2004 in Brčko HSS-NHI won 2 mandates and HDZ 3; in Brod Hrvatski savez HSS-NHI got 3; in 2000: in Derventa got HDZ 1 and NHI 3; in Brod, HDZ 2, NHI 3, HSS 2; and in Šamac, HDZ 1, NHI 2.

Bosnian Croats and the Radicalization of Their Politics: Herceg-Bosna

For some time after the war, politicians linked mostly to HDZ BiH appeared determined to pursue their own state-building project and to preserve their wartime quasi-state of Herceg-Bosna as a third, informal entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as to proceed vigorously with its integration into Croatia (Morrison, 1996: 144). This was based on the assumption that if the international community acknowledged the right of the Serbs to maintain the RS, then this was legitimate as well (Woodward, 1995: 102). In fact, it was the only moment when Croat autonomy had a clearly defined *territorial* dimension within BiH and when openly secessionist policies were that strong. This was possible due to political and financial support from Croatia, which made an exit from BiH a credible option while the center was weak and dominated by its parts, i.e. highly dependent on them. Yet, the project never took the shape of a fully constructed autonomous region, so the exit strategy was never fully implemented – instead, these became rather illegal structures, parallel to the formal constitutional order and thus operating beneath the formal political system.

In 1997, an OSCE study noted that Herceg-Bosna was “in every aspect from military and security matters to business ties [...] part of Croatia” (Burg and Shoup 1999: 377). In this regard, HDZ resisted the transfer of authority away from their parallel institutions to new municipal or cantonal structures, impeded the reintegration of Mostar, the symbolic

¹⁹ HDZ and later HDZ1990 have held dominant positions in Odžak and Orašje since the first post-war elections. What is interesting is that, during the 2012 elections in Odžak, despite the strong position of HDZ, the regionally-oriented Posavska stranka obtained 2 mandates; on the other hand, in Orašje votes used to be divided: in 2004, HSS gained 3 mandates, HSP BiH Djapić-Dr. Jurisić 2, NHI 3 and HDZ 1; while in 2000 votes were dispersed only between HDZ (12) and NHI (7).

capital of Herceg-Bosna, and perpetuated a climate of violence and insecurity in order to prevent the establishment of the Federation of BiH (Morrison, 1996: 145). In fact, the party was able to maintain the functioning of the quasi-state of 'Herceg-Bosna' despite it having officially dissolved, not least thanks to the fact that HDZ held key positions in the governments of both the FBiH and of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Koschnik 1995). In the Federation BiH, HDZ found a partner in the Bosniak SDA, such that the coalition government led by Prime Minister Edhem Bićakčić (SDA) was in reality a front hiding two parallel systems of power (ESI 1999; ICG 1999). Their post-war politics was merely an extension of the behavior of the war period. Yet, it was Tudjman's death on December 10, 1999 and his party's defeat in the Croatian presidential elections the following month that implied the cessation of all assistance to Bosnian Croat financial and institutional autonomy (Lovrić 2000).

Since the end of the war, the quest for territorial autonomy has been a fundamental element of Croat politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, after the formal dissolution of the rest of Herceg-Bosna, this has never triggered any serious reaction by the central level. In accordance with the theoretical model (Siroky et al. 2016), despite the fact that Croats in BiH have a separate and well-defined identity, they have had almost no exit credibility; hence, the exit option has not been a realistic demand (anymore). As consequently the center was strengthened and Croats are not a territorially concentrated group, the dependency of the center on the periphery should be treated here with caution – it can be observed to persist only to some extent, namely in the case of the core territory associated with Croats: Herzegovina. The second region, Posavina, has never been treated with the same attention: defined as irrelevant by Croats and divided between various constituent units, it could never become leverage for their case. To gain any credibility, Croats would have to meet at least three conditions: an inter-Croat agreement in the areas that the entity-to-be would include; consent by the other two nations' political leaders; and agreement by the international community to remodel Bosnia's constitutional setup (Zubak 2010).

The lack of credibility is derived first of all from the situation inside the country – for Bosniaks, centralization (e.g. Haris Silajdžić's demand for the dissolution of the entities) is the only direction in which the country can move, while for Serbs, who theoretically supported the Croat claim (at least since the Prud negotiations), territorial changes regarding the RS are unacceptable and could lead to a radicalization of their politics. Croats cannot count on the international community or any other external actors either. Former Croatian President Stjepan Mesić used to emphasize that Bosnian Croats should pursue their interests in Sarajevo rather than Zagreb, which was a radical break from the Tudjman era and based on a clear expression of respect for Bosnia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. All post-Tudjman Croatian governments have followed Mesić's general policy line regarding BiH (Bassuener and Weber 2012: 15).

For example, soon after taking office, Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna Pusić articulated a concept for constitutional reform that included reorganizing BiH into five regions. However, recognizing that the contemporary political situation in BiH was not conducive to any reform, she quickly dropped the idea (Bassuener and Weber 2012: 15). The new President of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, distanced herself from the idea during her campaign, but at the same time promoted the federalization of BiH – in her post-electoral speech she mentioned only broad support for Croats in BiH (Vijesti 2015) and the need to reach equality between all constituent peoples, including Croats (N1 BiH 2015). In the 2015 election campaign for the Sabor, BiH did not figure high on the HDZ's

agenda in Croatia but in a joint rally with HDZ BiH in Orašje in October 2015, HDZ leader Tomislav Karamarko announced that if HDZ won the election, he would make Croatia's relations with the diaspora a top priority of the government's policy (Weber and Bassuener 2015: 10).

Therefore, the demand for the creation of a third entity has not triggered any concessions, but Croats, almost all of whom are connected with HDZ and the Herzegovina fraction, ignored by the center did not decide to proceed with secessionist politics or conversely to become loyal – instead, they chose a middle-of-the-road strategy, consisting of non-territorial self-governance based on parallel institutions. This decision was a continuation of the previous politics, as already on March 3, 1994 Franjo Tudjman commented on the Washington Agreement as being “the one that guarantees Croats full national sovereignty in the Croat cantons” which should have formed a Croat Council (Art. IV of the Washington Agreement) – a kind of special representation of the Croat population within BiH (Čović 2010: 49).

Building Parallel Structures: The Short Life of the Croat Self-Government

The moment of democratic changes in Croatia turned out to be the moment of the radicalization of Croats in Bosnia, led by HDZ BiH. The party, under the leadership of the then-Croat member of the Bosnian Presidency, Ante Jelavić, declared a withdrawal from the joint FBiH institutions in March 2001, while both international and domestic observers noted an obvious continuity between Croat self-government and preexisting structures dating back to the wartime Croat Republic of Herceg-Bosna (Dnevni Avaz 2001; ICG 2001).

One month before the 2000 elections, the OSCE introduced new procedures, strongly desired and supported by OSCE Ambassador Robert Barry – thus known as the ‘Barry rule’ (OSCE 2000a). The rule aimed at regulating the method cantonal assemblies used to elect members to the FBiH House of Peoples. Under the previous rule, each national group in the cantonal assemblies selected its own representatives – the new rule decreed that all members voted on all candidates. Quotas in each canton secured thirty seats for Croats, thirty for Bosniaks and twenty for ‘Others’. The Barry rule was intended to foster moderation by making elected members rely on votes other than from their own community, but HDZ objected vigorously. It argued that when all members of the cantonal assembly elected the delegates in one election, there would be an influence of the majority group, the Bosniaks, on the selection of the delegates from the smaller group – the Croats (Bieber 2001). The quarrel terminated only with the High Representative's dismissal of the HDZ party leader, and the eventual decision to delete the rule from the Permanent Election Law – and yet, during its election campaign, HDZ made extensive use of the slogan ‘self-determination or extermination’ (ICG 2001: 6).

In the run-up to the elections, the HDZ leadership then audibly increased its campaign for the creation of a third Croat Entity. In October, it organized a referendum on the position of the Croat people, where they asked whether “Croats should have their own political, educational, scientific, cultural and other institutions on the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. More than 70 per cent of registered Croats voters participated, with 98.96% voting in favor. Despite its lack of legal force, the referendum had the result of legitimizing and therefore mobilizing greater support for the HDZ, which subsequently won the Croat vote overwhelmingly (Dnevnik 2000c; Belloni 2007: 84-85). Despite that, the new governments at the federal and entity level after the November 2000 elections excluded HDZ. So, raising tensions even further, HDZ organized a gathering of all

'patriotic parties and institutions' and, on October 28, 2000, a so-called *Hrvatski narodni sabor* (HNS, Croat National Congress) was convened in Novi Travnik. This initiative was supported by most of the small Croat right-wing parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina, like the Croat Party of Rights (HSP), but also by most of the Christian Democratic parties, such as the Croat Christian Democratic Union (HKDU), the Croat Christian Patriotic Rebirth (HKDP), and the Croat Demo-Christians (Hrvatski demokršćani) – but not by New Croatian Initiative (NHI). Associations of war veterans and other war-related groups, along with most of the Croat cultural societies also joined, as did the leaders of the Catholic Church (Grandits 2007: 118; OSCE 2000b, Dnevnik 2000a; 2000b).

On February 28 and 29, 2001 Jelavić announced that Croats could no longer take part in the joint Croat-Bosniak FBiH as they had been "cut out of the picture" (Bideleus and Jeffries 2007: 378), that the DPA was outdated and that HDZ would 'restructure' the state (OSCE 2000a). On March 3, 2001 the Croat National Congress declared Croat self-government by establishing an *Inter-cantonal and Inter-municipal Council* (Međuzupanijsko-međuopćinsko vijeće). This was supposed to cover all territories where Croats lived; in practice three cantons which were supposed to be excluded from the FBiH and create a separate unit – meaning it also included the territorial component, even though it was a construction rooted in the notion of cultural autonomy. Jelavić announced that the parallel government would have legislative, executive and judicial bodies and would finance itself by collecting taxes "based on the positive regulations on the territory of the Croat self-government." These measures followed the three-months long refusal of HDZ to implement the results of the November 2000 general elections, both on the Federation and state levels (ICG 2001: 1).

The then defense minister Miroslav Prče also emphasized the importance of changing the constitutional structure to better represent Croat interests. While he did not openly call for a third entity, he did suggest that only the creation of 'three smaller, multi-ethnic, citizen federal units' would produce a 'countrywide civil society'. He also called on Croat soldiers not to serve the 'illegitimate' Federation government and to remove Bosnian insignia from their uniforms. On March 28, 2001 Croats set up their own military headquarters and several thousand soldiers were persuaded to participate, yet the rebellion was defeated with the return of soldiers to the barracks and the sacking of Prče from the position of defense minister (Belloni 2007: 56; Bideleus and Jeffries 2007: 378). The self-government was dissolved only a few days later when on March 7th the High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch removed Ante Jelavić from his post as the Croat member of the Presidency²⁰. The subsequent tensions between the international community and HDZ culminated when the takeover of the Hercegovačka Banka²¹ by SFOR, closely tied to both HDZ and the financing of Croat self-government, was met

²⁰ Still, on October 6, 2001, HDZ held its 7th Party Congress in Mostar where Jelavić ran unopposed and was re-elected as President (OHR 2001).

²¹ Hercegovačka Banka was explicitly founded in order to support Croat 'national interests' and its initial capital was provided by eighteen Herzegovinian public companies and the three cantons of Herzegovina. Several HVO generals, notably Ante Jelavić, played a very active part in the founding of this bank - also the church, and especially the head office of the Franciscan Province in Mostar. The third group in the founding of the Bank was made up of directors of public companies, especially Mijo Brajković, the director of Aluminij, a Mostar-based company which was to become one of the most significant and profitable industrial complexes in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the war. In May 1998, during the party convention in Mostar, the Hercegovačka Banka fraction took over the leadership of HDZ; a move which was then called the 'generals' putsch' (Grandits 2007: 113-4).

with violence and temporary hostage-taking by supporters and members of the HDZ (Bieber 2001: 1-2).

Croats' Parallel Structures: If not Self-Government then What?

In 2010, two Croat parties, HDZ and HDZ1990, both unhappy with the election results that, according to their perception, did not reflect the will of the Croat people in BiH, and in blatant disregard of the Federation Constitution, blocked the formation of four cantonal governments and thus obstructed the constitution of the Federation's House of Peoples. The main problem was that Bosniak voters "hijacked" Croat votes by voting for SDP, who, in Croat majority opinion, is not the true representatives of Croats in BiH, unlike the two HDZs. The situation deteriorated even further when SDP formed a Federation government in coalition with the Croat ultra-nationalist HSP (Hrvatska stranka prava), thus violating the FBiH Constitution and contrary to the ruling of the Central Election Commission, relying on a highly controversial ruling of the High Representative (ICG 2011: 2-3, Krešić 2011).

In turn, HDZ and HDZ1990, with eight other, significantly smaller parties, re-created the Croat National Assembly (HNS), an extra-constitutional representative institution, and turned to the FBiH Constitutional Court – the case was, however, later withdrawn (Kivimäki, Kramer and Pasch 2012: 27). Consequently, this again raised concerns about the risk of parallel governing structures that were supposed to eventually emerge and that, presumably, were also the final goal this time. Yet, during its first congress, it was decided that Croats in Bosnia, instead of radical attempts to block state institutions, would concentrate on a more subtle long-lasting fight for equality of Croats in Bosnia, which also implied future constitutional change. The new institution was described as the executive and coordinative organ that would connect all Croat municipal and cantonal governments, including the decision about recreating the Inter-cantonal and Inter-municipal Council as a "form of temporary self-government" which, with the budget crisis and critical position of the IMF, has worked only as a common advisory body (ICG 2011: 3, Krešić 2011).

The last, sixth session of the HNS took place in February 2015 (they are organized regularly every two years); in the enacted Declaration, all members underlined the need to build a common national strategy and enhance solidarity, which is crucial for Croats as the smallest and most dispersed constituent group in Bosnia. This looks like an attempt to overcome the regional divisions within the Croat camp and clearly shows that the strategy started by HDZ has become dominant. Consequently, the 2015 Declaration criticizes the constitutional structure and legal order created in Dayton as unacceptable and unjust especially for Croats who are deprived of national representation and cultural rights and freedoms. While the document does not mention the third entity²², it can nonetheless implicitly be read into the demanded federalization of BiH in the form of a *symmetrical* federal state of all three constituent nations (Deklaracija 2015).

Conclusions

The main goal of this article has been to analyze Croat politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including its secessionist dimension, with a special emphasis devoted to the

²² In contrast to the 2013 Declaration, which explicitly describes how the new territorial structure of the country should look like (Deklaracija 2013).

parallel structures as a non-territorial replacement strategy derived from the Croat inability to obtain the demanded goals: secession or, short of that, a constitutional unit on parity with the Bosniak-(dominated) and Serb entities. Despite regional differences, visible especially between Herzegovina and Posavina, the former has always dominated Croat politics in BiH. Thus, for the main Croat political actors the understanding of the autonomy principle is straightforward: self-governance has always been the rule, while shared governance has always been an exception. While Posavina-oriented parties have never been as radical, they also demanded regional autonomy but, in this case, their bargaining position was incomparably weaker than in the case of Herzegovina.

Therefore, a quest for autonomy has been a fundamental element of Croat politics in BiH since the beginning of the war. Yet, it has never triggered any serious reaction by the central level as, in accordance with this special issue's theoretical model, Croats have had almost no exit credibility and the exit option has never been a realistic demand. They have used their voice and threatened the center with an exit strategy but the bargaining attempt has resulted in no concessions from the center. In this situation, during the post-war period Bosnian Croats have twice decided to implement their 'backup' strategy – parallel institutions following the pattern established previously in the form of Herceg-Bosna. The need to achieve more autonomy, based on their status as the smallest and most dispersed ethnic group, has remained their main goal, although clearly in contradiction with the post-war federal structure of the country. As this last "move" meant neither to be loyal nor to exit, it could be treated as an extension of the model presented in Siroky et al. (2016).

However, despite the preservation of continuity between the structures from 2000/01 and 2011, there remain visible differences. The post-war period allowed for the creation of strong parallel structures designed to replace the official ones, but the seriousness of the situation triggered an intervention by the international community. The internal and external situation in 2011 was completely different, which is the main reason why this time it took the shape of an advisory body instead of self-government. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that those structures were created when the secessionist/third entity politics became too difficult to pursue and Croats theoretically had no moves left. As Huntington (1968: 11) says, political institutions can only cohere society if they emerge out of existing social forces, if they represent real interests and real clashes of interests which then lead to the establishment of mechanisms and procedures capable of resolving these disagreements (Chandler 2006: 3) – in other words, if institutions are weak and contested, abuse of them, like in the case of Bosnian Croats, is an opportunity all too easy to use.

It is also symptomatic that despite the constitutional, formal possibility to create structures supporting Croat self-governance, they were never implemented. The constitutional law in BiH (Part V Article 3 of the Constitution of the FBiH) allows for the creation of inter-cantonal councils (Councils of Cantons) for the "coordination of the politics and common activities" connected with the shared interests of ethnic groups (ICG 2010: 16) through organs like commissions or working groups etc., which is rather an exceptional clause²³. The only attempt was undertaken in 2008, when the prime ministers of the three cantons with Croat majority announced the creation of the Council of Cantons. Yet this it never passed the declarative stage and was condemned by Bosniaks as

²³ This provision was never put into practice, but today it would be assessed as unconstitutional as it would mean that cantons would be labeled as Bosniak or Croat (Omerović 2011: 474).

a tool that would lead to the creation of a de facto third entity (ICG 2010: 16) and was perceived as equally dangerous as the self-government of the early 2000s.

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