



## INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS

JULY 2020

### Hybrid threats and digital media in time of elections

Modern hybrid attackers, very often, use the numerous advantages of digital media and social networks in order to amplify the data and information with which they want to spread their influence and impose their own positions by posting (dis)information. These processes are using methods of extracting information from the actual context of events and placing it in a new fictional and forged space-time context to make the disinformation available to a wider audience, who does not doubt the truthfulness of the content. Disinformation that are shared in the time immediately before the election are particularly dangerous (elections at the national level are much more important than at the local level). One such disinformation, deliberately inserted into the international and Croatian public space at the end of June 2020 (written on June 29, 2020 just a few days before the elections in Croatia), was published by unknown authors from IFIMES on their websites (version on Croatian language: <https://www.ifimes.org/ba/9844>; version on English language: <https://www.ifimes.org/en/9846>) with title: *2020 Parliamentary Elections in Croatia: Croatia in-between the past and the future* (furthermore: Analysis). We will analyse this text, citing numerous inaccuracies, with aim to determine the goals that the authors tried to achieve.

### Untruths (disinformation) in Analysis

Unsigned authors from Zagreb and Ljubljana state that the published document represents only the "most important parts" from the written "extensive analysis". The published document is full of half-truths and untruths that is trying to present the Republic of Croatia, very tendentiously, as an underdeveloped democratic state inclined to totalitarian tendencies without any will to democratize its own society and state. We are going to list those disinformation in the order in which they appear in the published text.

#### 1. „So far, little has been done on promotion of preferential voting.“

This is an untruth. Namely, since the possibility of giving preferential votes was introduced, a large number of politicians who were in the so-called "imperishable" or "unsafe places for being elected as Parliament member" (MP) on the electoral lists have just run a personalized campaign to encourage voters to be elected as MP on the basis of preferential votes. In these elections, as in the previous ones, a significant part of the deputies were elected in this way. Therefore, this claim does not stand and is in serious conflict with the truth. In addition, the sentence is very general, it does not say who, when and what else should have been done to promote the preferred voice, which indicates the method of influence by general suggestion.

#### 2. „A total of 192 candidate lists, including 95 independent party lists (90 at the last elections), 92 coalition of parties lists (84 at the 2016 elections) and 5 independent candidates (3 at the last elections), will participate at the elections.“



The entire segment was tendentiously written in order to try to prove, especially to foreign audiences, that the Croatian political scene is completely stratified and that there is political and political chaos on it. Namely, accepting the above mentioned (dis)information, the reader, if he does not know that there are 192 lists that are not in all constituencies at the same time, but that it is the sum of all lists in all 12 constituencies, may think that in each of the 12 constituencies are separate 192 candidate lists. Such (dis)information indicates chaos in the political life of a society and a state. The truth, however, is somewhat different. The authors should, if they wanted to be objective, put the real information and the link on the website of the State Election Commission (<https://www.izbori.hr/site/site/en/homepage/18>) where this data could be easily checked and put it in an accurate and true context.

- 3. „The Most Party, headed by Božo Petrov, played a key role in the establishment of the new government. However, in April 2017, it withdrew from the coalition and was replaced by the party of Zagreb Mayor Milan Bandić, *Bandić Milan 365 – Party of Work and Solidarity* and the Croatian People’s Party (HNS).“**

It is wrong that MOST withdrew from the ruling coalition. It is true that the Government ministers, who were then members of MOST, voted against the proposal of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, who immediately issued an order for their removal, after which there was a change in the parliamentary majority in Parliament. In democratic societies, it is completely legal and legitimate for individual members of the Government to vote against the proposal of the Prime Minister. It is also legitimate for such a move to be sanctioned by the Prime Minister and then to reposition political relations in Parliament.

- 4. „Plenković is not an autonomous politician as he had not come to the helm of the HDZ on his own.**

Whether Andrej Plenković is an autonomous politician or not, we do not want to talk about it, not because we do not have an opinion on it, but because it is misplaced when we look at the decisions he makes, both independently and in the community, either with the party leadership or the Government. What we consider problematic here is the fact that the results of the HDZ party elections held on March 15, 2020 are not respected in this Analysis. Their results were published on the official website of the Croatian Democratic Union – HDZ (<https://hdz.hr/category/111/unutarstranacki-izbori-2020> ). It is obvious that Andrej Plenković received by far the largest number of votes of HDZ members in the election for party president. Thus, this statement should be interpreted as a tendentious untruth which, in the context of the Analysis that seeks to portray the Prime Minister as an incompetent apparatchik controlled by someone else. And that the processes inside HDZ are happening spontaneously and impulsively. This disinformation is a clear example of disinformation that, on a personal level is trying to deny the abilities of the attacker.

- 5. „HDZ tends not to understand antifascism, because if it did it would demonstrate support to preservation of antifascism and antifascist tradition and would not cause excesses, which sometimes can be characterized as neo-fascist and anti-Semitic. Rehabilitation of *ustashism*, Holocaust denial and the opposition to the Istanbul Convention is attributed to the HDZ. “**



It is the HDZ that is often the target of numerous attacks from the far-right political scene that HDZ outflanks various far-left political ideas in Croatia. At the same time, the far-left persons on political scene, attacks HDZ and Plenković for not protecting anti-fascism (thinking primarily of Titoism and communism) and for leading the country to the far-right political spectrum. Given that the HDZ is attacking from these extreme positions, it is logical to conclude that the HDZ is essentially positioned at the political center. The accusation that the HDZ is a Neo-fascist and anti-Semitic party is completely inaccurate and incorrect and is aimed at an international audience that has little knowledge of the political and social processes in Croatia. This especially refers to the second sentence, which everyone, even a flighty follower of political processes in Croatia, knows that it is not true because there is no, in Croatia, attitude among almost all political parties that could be called an attempt to rehabilitate the Ustasha movement, neither Holocaust denial. And the so-called “The Istanbul Declaration” was just adopted by the last convocation of the Croatian Parliament with the HDZ majority and upon the initiative by HDZ and prime minister Plenković personally. The authors of this Analysis on the other hand do not make a difference, and they should do it because these are historical facts, between the anti-fascist and the communist movement. At the same time, they do not understand the reality of the totalitarian and undemocratic policy of Titoism in communist Yugoslavia.

#### 6. „Disputable voting of Croatian diaspora?“

This chapter is contradictory in its content. On the one hand, Croatia is accused of giving, by its Constitution, special rights to Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) to vote in the elections for Croatian Parliament, and on the other hand of "preventing them the democratic right" to vote due to the reduced number of polling stations in BiH. This short passage is inconsistent and tendentious because it cites half-information as facts.

#### 7. “Frequent references to the establishment of the so-called *Third entity* in Bosnia and Herzegovina once again put the focus on the role of the HDZ Croatia and the then President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman. Resolution of the so-called *Serb issue* in Croatia in the way in which it was done resulted in abolition of the so-called *Croat Republic of Herzeg Bosnia (HRHB)*. Hence, a wider agreement, which was accepted by Tuđman, had also resolved the Croat issue in BiH- with respect to a third entity- at the cost of BiH Croats.”

It would be desirable that authors of this Analysis state how many times BiH has been mentioned in this election campaign, from whom, and the possibility/call to establish a “Third Entity”. Without entering into the analysis of the (in)justification of such a request, its emphasis opens space for a more precise identification of the real intentions of the author of this, apparently, document whose only intention is to dis-inform. The rest of the paragraphs are again phrases, sentences without meaningful content, which are used in this way to manipulate information and create and impose false events. Indeterminate suggestive forms reappear, which is a feature of a simple manipulation, and not serious analysis. It is customary to try to reconcile such simple manipulation with direct questions. Therefore, authors should be asked with simple questions to which, we hope, they should offer meaningful answers: What is the “Serbian question in Croatia”? How was it performed? What is the cause-and-



effect relationship suggested in connection with the abolition of the HRHB and the “Serbian question in Croatia”? Why is HRHB called “so-called”? What and what kind of “broader agreement” did Tudjman accepted? How exactly was “the Croat issue in BiH resolved - with respect to a third entity - at the expense of BiH Croats”?

8. **„In 2016, shortly after it come to power, the government stopped using<sup>1</sup> the term “region” and introduced the term “neighborhood” as a new term in the context of cooperation.“**

How can something, that does not exist, be abolished? What does "region" mean? It is true that some individuals used the euphemism "region" for the area encompassing states, either individually or in groups, created by the violent disintegration of the SFRY. It should be said that the term "six countries of the Western Balkans", ie "WB6", has been openly introduced into the public knowledge of the international community in order to define that geopolitical area more precisely and precisely. Croatia does not belong to it. Croatia is a Central European and Mediterranean country bordering the area of the WB6 countries, colloquially called the "region".

9. **„The Croatian national leadership is trying to strengthen its relations with Montenegro and the regime of Milo Đukanović (DPS) (...), all Croatian leaders have had close relations with Đukanović, as well as with Kosovo leaders, believing that to be a matter of a “natural coalition” with respect to Serbia.“**

Completely incorrect. Croatia is trying to develop good and positive relations with all of its neighbours, and with other countries that want it too. Montenegro is a member of NATO. Montenegro is facing numerous hybrid attacks on its sovereignty and democratic system by inciting non-institutional activities and street violence by pro-Serbian and pro-Russian circles. Therefore, cooperation with Montenegro is not in the function of the fight against Serbia, but for the preservation of democracy in Montenegro. Croatia is also trying to have constructive relations with Serbia. However, in order to have successful, effective and fruitful cooperation all parties need to be sincerely interested in implementing it.

10. **„Currently, pilot project of *Unionization of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church* in Montenegro is underway. The project envisages that orthodox believers of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church in Montenegro would maintain their “*Eastern religious rituals*” and the Roman Pope would become their chief pastor.“**

This is also an untruth that comes from radical Serbian and Russian circles and is part of the hybrid threats to which Montenegro is exposed. Namely, the return to reality of the extinct Montenegrin Orthodox Church is the wish of many Montenegrins who do not want to be part of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which is at the forefront of denying the existence of the Montenegrin nation. The fight against the re-institution of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (religious element is always one of the important identity features of a nation and community, especially if it belongs to the vast majority of the population) is being tried by violent and

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<sup>1</sup> In a document written in Croatian language, authors are using word “ukinuti”. Correct translation of that word can be done by using words such as abolish, revoke, cancel. Authors decided to translate it in English by using the phrase “stop using” what gives different meaning to the sentence.



undemocratic methods to overthrow the democratically elected government in Montenegro. While it is hard to believe that the autocephaly of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church will return, and that it will not be subject to the Vatican, as the authors incorrectly state, the threats to democracy coming from the authorities of the Serbian Orthodox Church are real and dangerous.

**11. „If this model would succeed in Montenegro, Croatia would then try to apply it also on the remaining, generally decimated Orthodox population in Croatia.“**

The accusation that Croatian official policy wants to establish a Croatian Orthodox Church modeled on the regime of Ante Pavelic from World War II, is completely fabricated, inaccurate and tendentious, and follows other accusations that, again, insinuate that modern Croatia is just a continuation of the Second world war Independent state of Croatia (NDH).

**12. „The Croatian national helm had publicly expressed its disagreement with the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia) judgment against in the Case of Jadranko Prlić (HDZBiH) et al., which established the aggression of the Republic of Croatia on Bosnia and Herzegovina and the criminal joint enterprise headed by Franjo Tudman, Gojko Šušak, and others.“**

Another falsehood. The verdict against "Jadranko Prlić and others" did not establish either the aggression of Croatia against BiH or the "criminal joint enterprise". Such judgments are not mentioned in other ICTY court rulings either. Moreover, the ICTY had no mandate to judge states or prosecute anyone's aggression. This is also a hoax that fully corresponds to numerous hoaxes and incorrect interpretations of certain ICTY decisions in accordance with the Greater Bosniak (Muslim) policy of majoritarianism and religious radicalization of BiH. The authors of the text obviously deny the right to free thinking and expression to individuals, groups, communities, people, and the state. Such an attitude of the author does not surprise us because nostalgia for the communist Tito's Yugoslavia, which was against the right and freedoms of thought and expression, that used repression against all those who were thinking differently than the communists, runs through many other parts of this disinformation document.

**13. „It is also known that the Croatian parliament had previously adopted a decision, the so-called *Law on nullity*, which suspended cooperation with Serbia in prosecution of war criminals.“**

Another fake statement. The law mentioned by the authors does not go against cooperating in the prosecution of war crimes indictees, but denies Serbia the right, which Serbia has appropriated, of universal jurisdiction to prosecute any war crimes suspects. With this manoeuvre, Serbia tried to avoid the possibility of the Croatian judiciary prosecuting Serbs accused of numerous war crimes committed on the territory of the Republic of Croatia during the 1990-1996 Homeland War. It is precisely this self-assumed universal jurisdiction of Serbia that the authors support and encourage its application by placing it in a completely incorrect context which emphasizes some of the real intentions in writing and publishing this *Analysis: Furthermore, Croatia and Đukanović are also linked through the element of joint criminal enterprise, as after the issuing of indictment against Hashim Thaci, Kosovo President, Đukanović has remained the only highest ranking official directly involved in war*





*crimes, who had not been prosecuted. The fact that positive legislation of specific countries incorporates the principle of universal jurisdiction for war crimes and crime of genocide creates a window of opportunity for Đukanović's arrest, bearing in mind that some countries abroad have already opened a case on Milo Đukanović.*

- 14. „The HDZ constantly attempts to take exclusive credit for the results of independence of Croatia, ignoring the fact that, in addition to the wish of the Croatian people for independence and separation, it was primarily a result of the historical international situation and favorable international context. Specifically, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR.“**

This is another well-known Greater Bosniak (Muslim) thesis that does not want to accept the fact that they are also co-responsible for the aggression against Croatia because a large number of attacks on Croatia were launched from the territory of BiH. A large number of BiH citizens also took part in the attacks on Croatia. BiH presidency member Alija Izetbegovic, who often misrepresented himself as "BiH's president", has repeatedly refused to sign military co-operation agreements with Croatia in order to jointly resist the same aggressor. If what the authors write is true, there would be no aggression against Slovenia and Croatia, and then the war in BiH. Yugoslavia would disintegrate in an agreed manner, as was the case with the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. However, Alija Izetbegović and Kiro Gligorov (from that time Macedonia) supported the survival of the Yugoslavia and in that way, indirectly, justified the aggression of Yugoslav army against Slovenia and Croatia. Furthermore, it is a historical fact that the citizens of the Republic of Croatia, in the referendum on independence as well as in the democratic elections, chose the HDZ political platform from which Croatia's independence and victory in the imposed Homeland war resulted. Of course, other political actors in Croatia also has significant part in it, but the leading role in Homeland war was played by the HDZ, led by Dr. Franjo Tuđman.

- 15. “The HDZ did not manage to decriminalize itself and break free from idealizing Franjo Tuđman. Although Croatia is an independent and sovereign country, the HDZ is still “looking for” enemies in the Serbs, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavs, migrants/refugees, Jews, Muslims, etc. “**

Malicious insinuation. HDZ has not been criminalized, so there is nothing to decriminalize. Franjo Tuđman is the founder of the HDZ and the first Croatian president that was leading the people in independence process during the Homeland war. It is quite normal that such a man inside, but also outside the HDZ, represents an ideal or act as a role model in achieving high standards. The number of votes that the HDZ regularly receives in the elections shows what the people think about the HDZ. Polls also show what they think about Franjo Tuđman. The rest of this paragraph clearly states that the authors deliberately accuse HDZ and Franjo Tuđman, but also Croatia, because they have problems with Croatian and Tuđman's successes and their own failures. The problem of prejudice and this disinformation shows that the authors either do not understand or do not want to understand the processes in Croatia but blindly adhere to Greater Bosniak (Muslim) and Greater Serbia political idea and disinformation theses about genocide and Ustashism of Croats as a people and Croatia as a state.



**16. „Croatia violates the European Convention on Human Rights because it sends illegal migrants to Bosnia and Herzegovina, knowing that their human rights will be violated.“**

This is a very interesting thesis: Croatia is sending illegal migrants to Bosnia and Herzegovina. It suggests that Croatia allows to illegal migrants' free travel from Slovenia or Hungary to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The problem is completely different. Croatia acts as a responsible EU member and does not allow illegal migration across its territory on their way to other EU countries. Croatia shares its experiences and knowledge and supports joint efforts to combat organized crime, terrorism and related illegal migration with all who sincerely wish to do so.

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**17. „The withdrawal of Croatia from the Arbitration Agreement on the Border with Slovenia (*Piran Gulf*) was an additional impulse to increase the homeland and nationalistic rhetoric not just towards Slovenia, but primarily towards Serbia, and partly towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia must not forget that it joined the EU with great difficulties, that is thanks to France and with the pressure by Germany“**

Croatia was reluctant to withdraw from the Arbitration Agreement. Croatia was coerced, by a unanimous decision of all members of the Croatian Parliament to leave the process, which was irreversibly compromised by illegal and prohibited actions, against the judges of that international tribunal, by official representatives of the Slovenian government. It should be noted that these actions were recorded, proven, publicly announced and that Slovenia did not deny them. Real facts about this issue can be found at this web page: <http://www.mvep.hr/hr/ostalo/termination-of-the-arbitration-process/>. The rest of the allegations are incorrect and serve to accuse Croatia of being an unreliable, disruptive and unreliable partner in the international community.

**18. “In the current convocation of the parliament specific representatives of minority communities had abused their position. Namely, they had neglected the constitutional role of minority representatives and acted as if they were HDZ representatives.”**

Since the elected parliament representatives of the minorities (including three representatives of the Serb minority) agreed to be part of the ruling coalition, they acted as part of the Government coalition. The question is what is their "constitutional role" that the authors of this Analysis means if not the one they performed in order to actively, from the position of Government, work on the promotion and protection of the rights of national minorities. The expression of this claim shows that among the authors of the Analysis are Bosniaks (Muslims) who promote Greater Bosniak politics because they are dissatisfied with the fact that none of their candidates entered the Croatian Parliament from the minority list of Bosniaks (Muslims) but an elected representative of the Albanian minority. By the way, it should be emphasized that Croatia is the only EU member state that gives as many as 8 parliamentary seats (out of 151) to minorities living in Croatia.



**19. „As the chair of the EU, at the peak of the *Covid-19* pandemic, Plenković held partisan elections in the HDZ on 15 March 2020, while hundreds of people were dying in Italy on daily basis. Croatia’s presidency of the Council of the EU passed unnoticed.“**

And after several consecutive readings of this sentence, as well as those written before and after it, it is by no means clear what the authors meant by it. Is it perhaps their claim that the internal HDZ party elections should not have been held due to the expansion of COVID 19 in Italy? This sentence only shows the author's intention to try to slander Croatia, and the HDZ, in all possible ways, means or expressions. Even bringing into relation mutually difficult to connect events in the context of the simultaneity of time and space. Croatia's EU presidency in the first half of 2020 should be the subject of scientific papers given the fact that the whole world, not just the EU, has faced a pandemic crisis that has serious negative consequences for all parts of society and the country, both nationally and internationally. The pandemic has posed serious challenges to the functioning of the EU. At the same time, Zagreb was hit by a devastating earthquake on March 22 which made communication significantly more difficult. By the influence of those facts, communication were switched from direct/personal to online communication. Relevant politicians also testify to the Croatian presidency: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska-je-uspjesno-upravljanja-najvecom-krizom-u-povijesti-eu-1412619>

**20. „Croatia has to decide whether it will continue to live in-between the past and the future or will it definitely opt for development of a modern state and a more certain future. (...) Croatia has the potential for political changes at the upcoming elections.“**

A sentence that clearly shows the political views of the authors who are trying to present themselves as objective analysts.

**21. „However, because of the fragmentation of the political scene, the results of parliamentary elections could result in a situation in which it will not be possible to establish a new government, which would lead to new early parliamentary elections.“**

Election results (available at: <https://www.izbori.hr/site/izbori-referendumi/izbori-za-zastupnike-u-hrvatski-sabor/izbori-za-zastupnike-u-hrvatski-sabor-2272/aktualnostii/results-2276/2276> ) are significantly different from the forecast of these analysts. The HDZ was almost able to form a government on its own. Representatives of national minorities, all eight, again gave to HDZ key support in forming the ruling coalition.

## CONCLUSION

The published text contains a whole series of disinformation and logical and factual errors that should be used for questioning the real intentions of its authors and the institution that stands behind it. The text is not objective, it is not realistic, it is not accurate, it is unreliable as a source of data, and at the same time it is very confusing in some places. The obvious goal





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was to try to give additional impetus to the efforts to achieve strong social and political divisions in Croatia, as well as political changes in an attempt to influence Croatian and international public opinion. That is why it was published only a few days before the elections in Croatian and English language. It does not matter whether the government is led by HDZ or SDP, the intention to introduce social and political divisions based on disinformation and false information to the international public is important. Therefore, it can rightly be characterized as part of offensive actions against the corpus of public knowledge about Croatia, which is classified in the spectrum of hybrid threats. The question is whether such organizations deserves to be part of international organizations whose goal is construction and not disintegration, truth and not untruth, accuracy not inaccuracy, and completeness not partialness.

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Zagreb, July 18, 2020

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