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RELATIONS BETWEEN CROATIAN AND SERBIAN ELITES IN DUBROVNIK UNDER AUSTRIAN RULE*

Abstract

The article examines the issue of complex relations between the Croatian and Serbian communities in Dubrovnik under Austrian rule (since 1815), with particular emphasis on the period following the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867). During this time, the Croatian-Serbian dispute over the city's national identity and tradition intensified, amid the significant influence of Austrian policy on the dynamics in Dalmatia and Dubrovnik. The study will analyse selected aspects of Croatian-Serbian relations – political, cultural and literary – against the backdrop of the Austrian authorities' attitude towards the city's elites. The text will examine the activities and views of key figures from Dubrovnik's circles (Luj Vojnović, Pero Čingrija, Frano Supilo) regarding the situation in Dalmatia and Dubrovnik, as well as selected polemics that appeared in the local press (e.g. the exchanges between the Croatian weekly *Crvena Hrvatska* and the Serbian newspaper *Dubrovnik*). As an important complement to the questions under discussion, the paper will attempt to situate the issue of Dubrovnik elites within a broader context of mutual Croat-Serb political and cultural relations in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Dubrovnik in the second half of the nineteenth century, Austrian occupation of Dubrovnik, Dubrovnik's political elites, Croats and Serbs in Dubrovnik

INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century, Dubrovnik and its community experienced one of the most tumultuous periods in their long history. The beginning of the century commenced with the siege of the city by French and Russian-Montenegrin troops, the collapse of the Republic, followed

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by occupations, first by the French and later by the Austrians.¹ All these events left a lasting mark on Dubrovnik's socio-political and cultural fabric. In these adverse circumstances, significant changes occurred within the city's social structure, and the modern elites of Dubrovnik, which formed during this period, would go on to play a pivotal role in both the political and cultural spheres. In the latter half of the century, the Croatian-Serbian dispute over the city's national identity and tradition intensified, amid the significant influence of Austrian policy on the dynamics in Dalmatia and Dubrovnik.

This paper will examine the issue of complex relations between the Croatian and Serbian communities² in Dubrovnik under Austrian rule (since 1815), with particular emphasis on the period following the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867) and the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement [*Hrvatsko-ugarska nagodba*] (1868), up until the victory of the Croatian factions over its Serbian counterparts in the municipal elections (1899) – a key moment in the city's history. It will specifically focus on the polemics among the leading figures of Dubrovnik's elite in the press of that day, which played a pivotal role in the city's public life. References to the most important cultural

¹ There is a rich body of scholarly writings on the history of Dubrovnik in the nineteenth century. The most important studies of general scope include: Lujko Vojnović, *Pad Dubrovnika: prva knjiga (1797–1806)* (Zagreb, 1908); id., *Pad Dubrovnika: druga knjiga (1807–1815)* (Zagreb, 1908); Miljenko Foretić, *Dubrovnik u povijesnim i kulturnim mijenama: Zbornik odabranih radova* (Dubrovnik, 2007); Robin Harris, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, transl. Mirjana Valent (Zagreb, 2022).

² In both the title and the body of this article, the terms 'elite'/'elites' are used in reference to nineteenth-century Dubrovnik political activists (most often also cultural ones). This usage is employed with full awareness of the specific nature of this category. In its basic, most frequently used meaning, 'elite' is defined as a distinct, though not necessarily formalised, leadership group that guides societal life and shapes or influences its developmental trajectory. Elites may occupy positions in various segments of the social structure and are not necessarily part of the official establishment (Wojciech Sokół and Marek Żmigrodzki, 'Elity polityczne', in Bogumił Szmulik and Marek Żmigrodzki (eds), *Wprowadzenie do nauki o państwie i polityce* [Lublin, 2010], 455). It is also important to highlight the internal diversity of such groups – their members may differ in terms of origin, education, customs, lifestyle and mentality. Nevertheless, they enjoy a degree of social prestige and are accorded special respect, see Monika Senkowska-Gluck, 'Pojęcie elity i jego przydatność do badań historycznych', in Janina Leskiewiczowa (ed.), *Spółczesność polskie XVIII i XIX wieku. Studia o grupach elitarnych* (Warszawa, 1982), 11–16.

events and selected literary works central to ongoing discussions in Dubrovnik will be integral to the analysis.

DUBROVNIK IN NEW SOCIO-POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

For the city of Dubrovnik and its inhabitants, the prolonged period of Austrian rule (lasting almost one hundred years) proved to be the time of even greater tyranny than the previous French occupation, leading to the city's degradation, both in tangible and symbolic terms, and to its eventual marginalisation. Local elites' cold stance towards Austria was symbolically reflected in the reaction of its representatives to Emperor Franz I, who visited Dubrovnik after it had come under Austrian rule. Niko Pucić, who greeted the distinguished guest on behalf of Dubrovnik's aristocracy, was reported to have said that their presence was not motivated by "fear or hope, but by devotion and proper manners".³ The authorities could also gain insights into the prevailing mood in the city through the reports of the Austrian agent, Friar Inocent Čulić, who observed that while lower social classes did not pose a threat to the new administration of Dubrovnik, they "had no sympathy for Austria"; in contrast, members of the aristocracy – as he noted – "lacked intellect and land".⁴ The ironic poem *Korist tamnice* [The Advantage of the Dungeon] by Đuro Hidža, one of the most prominent Dubrovnik poets at the turn of the nineteenth century, can also be interpreted as a symbolic reflection of the city's situation under Austrian rule. The poetic imagery of this literary work centres on a comparison of Dubrovnik, in its new political circumstances, to a prison where control and supervision over the prisoners are not only exerted by the guards but also by some city inhabitants who align with the occupiers. In contrast to many other literary works that attempted to depict the cityscape, this symbolic vision stressed the conformism and opportunism within certain local intellectual circles, whose members used the 'benefits of imprisonment'⁵ to their own advantage.

³ Josip Bersa, *Dubrovačke slike i prilike (1800.–1880.)* (Zagreb, 1941), 75–6. All quotations cited in English are translated by the author of the article.

⁴ Harris Robin, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, transl. Mirjana Valent (Zagreb, 2022), 455.

⁵ For a more detailed analysis of this poem in the context of the socio-political circumstances in the city at that time, see Slavica Stojan, 'Jedna nepoznata politička pjesma Đura Hidže', *Anali Dubrovnik*, 37 (1999), 237–50.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the memory of the Republic remained vivid, as manifested in local patriotism – a sentiment which, due to Dubrovnik’s relatively provincial location, contributed to the growing resentment towards the Habsburg Monarchy, and, conversely, to a sense of sympathy among specific segments of its population towards neighbouring Serbia (which, let it be noted, gained international recognition in 1878 and proclaimed itself a kingdom in 1882).⁶

The political situation in Dubrovnik (and indeed throughout Dalmatia) during that time was strongly influenced by the Austrian authorities’ political strategy, which supported factions opposing Croatian national aspirations and their calls for the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia. During this period, Austria maintained positive relations with Italy and Serbia, both of which had competing interests in Dalmatia that were at odds with Croatian interests. Against this backdrop, the secret agreement concluded by Vienna in 1881 with Prince Milan Obrenović of Serbia, in which he pledged not to support any movements against the dualism of the monarchy, became significant.

As a result, the Catholic Serb movement gained prominence in Dubrovnik, alongside the Croatian faction, i.e. “the national” party and the Autonomists. This situation was shaped by the unique circumstances in Dubrovnik and by demographic changes driven by migration, which led to an influx of new capital into the city and strengthened the position of Serbs who began cooperating with the Autonomists,⁷ and gradually emerged as a significant force in its political landscape.

⁶ Sanja Curić and Nikša Selmani, ‘Gradnja Domobranske vojarne u kontekstu nacionalnih i modernizacijskih procesa u Dubrovniku potkraj 19. stoljeća’, *Vjesnik dalmatinskih arhiva. Izvori i prilozi za povijest Dalmacije*, 3 (2022), 488.

⁷ The autonomist movement in Dubrovnik, also referred to as *talijanaši*, was split into two groups. The first faction included people of Slavic origin who spoke limited Italian (while Italians across Dalmatia spoke the Venetian dialect, regionalists in the city learned a literary standard based on the Tuscan dialect). The second faction comprised representatives of approximately 10 families who came to Dubrovnik from the impoverished Italian South (*Mezzogiorno*); they were led by Giovanni Avoscani and Abele Seragli. In the final decade of the nineteenth century, Dubrovnik’s Autonomists – following the example set by Italians in Zadar – formalised their political representation in the city (they established various political institutions, e.g. *Cabinetto*) (Josip Vrandečić, *Dalmatinski autonomistički pokret u XIX. stoljeću* [Zagreb, 2002], 244–5; see also: ‘Autonomaši’, *Crvena Hrvatska*, 8. Aug. 1891, 1). Nenad

In the nineteenth century, Dubrovnik underwent a dramatic change. The loss of its independence precipitated a profound economic crisis. Because of large-scale emigration, coupled with adverse conditions for trade and craftsmanship and the sentiment of resignation among the aristocracy, the city lost its opportunity to develop freely. Only after the end of the Russo-Turkish War (1829) and the Crimean War (1853–1856) did the economic situation in this part of the Mediterranean improve, and Dubrovnik merchant ships could resume transporting goods.

The city itself witnessed some major changes. Following the arrival of the French troops, many landmark buildings lost their original function and were repurposed for military use. This character of Dubrovnik persisted even after it came under Austrian administration. The status of a fortress city was underscored by the presence of barracks in the St Clare's Convent and the Nunnery of St Catherine of Siena, the military hospital housed in the former Dubrovnik College, and the ongoing extension with new buildings and additional fortifications. Lujo Vojnović drew attention to the city's decline in his essay 'Smrt dubrovačkih stijena' [The Death of Dubrovnik's Rocks], which directly referred to his two-volume study *Pad Dubrovnika* [The Fall of Dubrovnik]. In this work, he observed that the Rector's Palace – described by him as “the most beautiful building in the Slavic South” – had been repurposed as the seat of local authorities, and that “in the courtyards where Dubrovnik's lords once strolled and received rulers and members of parliament, all kinds of officials, secretaries, soldiers and pawnbrokers have now made themselves at home among the armchairs, tables and carpets”.⁸ However, as he further noted, “on the benches – where the Rector and the Small Council once welcomed deputies of the Republic or attended exhibition of works by Ivan Gundulić, today Dubrovnik's porters leap about, while beggars sit and observe how announcements of goods being pledged are posted or watch the military inspection”.⁹

Vekarić notes that once the movement lost its purpose, the majority of its former supporters came to identify as Croats; id., *The Nobility of Dubrovnik. Roots, Structure and Development* (Zagreb–Dubrovnik, 2019), 400.

⁸ Lujo Vojnović, 'Smrt dubrovačkih stijena', in Lujo Vojnović, Ante Dukić et al., *Izabrana djela*, ed. by Branimir Donat (Zagreb, 1981), 112.

⁹ Ibid.

Conversely, the growing importance of Serbs in Dubrovnik's socio-political hierarchy was exemplified by the construction of the Church of the Holy Annunciation [*Blagoveštanska pravoslavna crkva*] (1877) in the very city centre. Built in the period of easing restrictions and the gradual restoration of constitutional principles after Bach's absolutism,¹⁰ the church symbolised the full affirmation of the Serbian community in Dubrovnik and marked the realisation of its civil rights and religious freedoms.¹¹ It is also important to note that in 1886, Dubrovnik was declared an 'open city', which significantly accelerated its growth and spurred the emergence of a new economic sector – tourism – which soon became an important source of Dubrovnik's revenue.¹²

The transformation that Dubrovnik experienced during that period was also confirmed by external observers of its social and cultural life. In his mid-century account of a journey through Dalmatia, Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, a Croatian historian, writer and politician, acknowledged that although Dubrovnik "is not the city it used to be 50 or 100 years earlier", it still retained "memories of a great spiritual tradition" and "clear traces of once famous social and literary life". He attributed this condition, marked by "material modesty and lack of spiritual activity", to the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars in the region (due to censorship, he likely refrained from mentioning on this occasion the detrimental policies implemented by Austrian authorities). In a way against all odds, he expressed hope that the memory of the old Dubrovnik would, with some fortune, facilitate the city's spiritual revival.¹³

¹⁰ Later on, members of local political elites capitalised on the restoration of constitutionalism in the Habsburg Monarchy. For example, Medo Pucić (1861) and Kosta Vojnović (1878–84) served in the Croatian Parliament, where they advocated for the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia.

¹¹ Interestingly, the Dalmatian Serb community – including Serbs from Dubrovnik – was marked by internal divides not only along religious lines, but also in terms of understanding of Serbness and other political issues. This was best evidenced by the differences between Catholic Serbs (Dubrovnik) and Orthodox Serbs (*Srpski glas*), as well as the conflict between *Dubrovnik* newspaper and the Orthodox faction of Nikodim Milaš within the Serbian Party.

¹² Sanja Žaja Vrbica and Peter Zimmermann, *Dunavska monarhija i Dubrovnik* (Dubrovnik, 2023), 142.

¹³ Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, *Izvjestvje o putovanju kroz Dalmaciju u Napulj i Rim s osobitim obzirom na slavensku književnost, umjetnost i starine* (Zagreb, 1857), 19.

THE RISING PROMINENCE OF SERBS IN DUBROVNIK

Dubrovnik's significance increased visibly in the 1860s, when, due to the efforts of local elites, the city even experienced what Lujo Vojnović described as a form of revival.¹⁴ Within the National Party [*Narodna stranka*], Croatian and Serbian activists joined forces against the Autonomists, which culminated in their victory in the 1870 Sabor elections. By 1875, members of the National Party held as many as 59 of 80 districts.

The origins of the open Serbo-Croatian clash in Dubrovnik can be traced back to the late 1870s. The political prominence of Catholic Serbs in Dubrovnik, whose presence dated back to the activities of writers, Medo Pucić and Matija Ban, in the 1840s,¹⁵ increased three decades later, coinciding with a split within the National Party. It was during this period that Stjepan Mitrov Ljubiša, a Serbian politician and writer, decided to leave the ranks of the group, while Dubrovnik's Catholic Serbs joined the Serbian Party [*Srpska stranka*] in Dalmatia (1879), which was in coalition with the Autonomists (also referred to as 'talijanaši').¹⁶

Shortly after this event, Serbs in Dubrovnik abandoned the vague concept of *slovinstvo* [Slavianism in its broadest form],¹⁷ as promoted

¹⁴ Lujo Vojnović, 'Prva smrt Dubrovnika (6 aprila 1667)' (I. dio), *Letopis Matice srpske*, 3 (1912), 40.

¹⁵ There exists a considerable body of scholarly work on the phenomenon of Catholic Serbs in Dubrovnik, e.g. Irena Arsić, *Dubrovačko srpstvo kroz vekove* (Beograd, 2021); ead., *Srbi u Dubrovniku* (Beograd, 2019); Ivo Banac, 'The Confessional "Rule" and the Dubrovnik Exception: The Origins of the "Serb-Catholic" Circle in Nineteenth-Century Dalmatia', *Slavic Review*, 3 (1983), 448–74; Vlaho Benković, 'Dubrovački Srbi-katolici i "novi kurs" u hrvatskoj politici 1903.–1905.', *Dubrovnik. Časopis za književnost i znanost*, 1–2 (1990), 211–31; Trpimir Macan, 'O pristupu srpskokatoličkom fenomenu (u povodu nekih interpretacija)', *Dubrovnik. Časopis za književnost i znanost*, 1–2 (1990), 232–46; Antun Stražičić, *Dubrovački koluri. Uspori i pad srbokatolika*, ed. by Stjepan Ćosić (Dubrovnik, 2018); Nikola Tolja, *Dubrovački Srbi katolici* (Dubrovnik, 2011).

¹⁶ In an effort to counteract their political weakness, the Serbian Party and the Autonomists, both opposing the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia, cooperated at regional (*Dalmatinski Sabor*) and local levels, particularly during the 1880s and 1890s. For a discussion of the essence, nature, and forms of this cooperation, see Josip Vrandečić, *Dalmatinski autonomistički pokret u XIX. stoljeću* (Zagreb, 2002), 240–9.

¹⁷ Antoni Cetnarowicz provides a detailed analysis of the concept of *slovinstvo*, and examines its relations to *dalmatinstvo* and the Croatian and Serbian national idea:

by the periodical *Slovinac* (1878–1884).¹⁸ The periodical, which adopted a transnational term for both its title and slogan, advocated cooperation between Serbs and Croats, as reflected in its use of both Cyrillic and Latin scripts. In political terms, however, *Slovinac* considered the aspiration to unite Croatia and Dalmatia as unrealistic, given the principle of dualism in force in the monarchy. The concept of *slovinstvo* itself came under criticism, most notably from Mihovil Pavlinović, a Croatian politician and writer who was invited to contribute to the periodical, who argued that it isolated Dalmatia from both Serbian and Croatian national ideas.

The Serbs abandoned *slovinstvo* and openly embraced Serbian ideology (the conviction that it was impossible to deviate from the chosen path is perhaps most clearly evidenced by a 1902 editorial of the *Srđ* periodical, in which Luko Zore stated that the new publication would no longer follow the line of *Slovinac*¹⁹). Press outlets of the Serbian Party in Dubrovnik – *Gušterica*, *Glas dubrovački* and *Radnik* – played a key role in socio-political discussions among Dubrovnik’s elites of the day.

It is important to stress that the split in the ranks of the National Party and the departure of Catholic Serbs occurred in Dubrovnik 10 years later than in the rest of Dalmatia (1889), thanks to its leaders, Miho Klaić and Pero Čingrija, who, wishing to counter Serbo-Italian cooperation, led to the party’s reunification. At the same time, however, the Serbisation of Dubrovnik societies, e.g. National Reading Room [*Narodna štionica*], Dubrovnik Civic Music [*Dubrovačka građanska muzika*], Dubrovnik Workers’ Association [*Dubrovačko radničko društvo*], further advanced, marginalising the role and importance of Croatian communities in the city’s public life. Croats did not stay passive, though, and also acted at the organisational level, by establishing exclusively Croatian organisations and associations. The catalyst for this was the conflict that arose in 1885 over the transfer of the

Antoni Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Dalmacji. Od „slavenstva“ do nowoczesnej chorwackiej i serbskiej idei narodowej* (Kraków, 2001), 13–20.

¹⁸ For more about this newspaper and its significance in the city’s political and social life see: Nikola Ivanišin, ‘Časopis *Slovinac* i slovinstvo u Dubrovniku’, *Rad Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti*, 324 (1962), 171–245.

¹⁹ “Neutrality no longer serves its purpose ... *Srđ* should become the voice of all Serbs in Dalmatia ...”, Luko Zore, ‘Bilješke’, *Srđ*, 1 (1902), 36.

remains of Stjepan Mitrov Ljubiša from Vienna to Budva, when, without the knowledge of the president of the National Party, Pero Čingrija, representatives of Catholic Serbs, led by Antun Puljezi, laid a wreath at the grave of this Serbian activist and writer who had opposed the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia. Croats regarded the participation of the members of the Dubrovnik Reading Room [*Štionića dubrovačka*] in this ceremony as an overreach of their powers and interpreted it as a political manifestation. Čingrija himself, sceptical of the Serbian members' assurances that it was merely a tribute to the great writer, stated that he found it difficult to separate Ljubiša the writer from Ljubiša the politician. To demonstrate his opposition, the Croatian activist resigned from the society, of which he had been a member since its very beginnings (1863), but this act made no impression on his fellow Serbs. They were of the opinion that Čingrija could not impose his will on the majority, and regarded his protest as "ridiculous" and stemming from "a confusion of the most elementary concepts".²⁰ It was at that time that, as an expression of opposition, Croats began to establish their own societies: Dubrovnik National Reading Room [*Dubrovačka narodna čitaonica*] (1887), Dubrovnik Civic Music [*Dubrovačka građanska glazba*] (1888) and Croatian Workers' Cooperative [*Hrvatska radnička zadruga*] (1894).

Since these events, Serbs experienced a rapid rise in prominence, although their position had been gradually and steadily consolidating for a long time. The causes for this state of affairs should be attributed to the influence exerted by Serbian intelligentsia in the Serbian Party, the economic power held by Orthodox Serbs, the support provided by the officials from the Autonomist circle, the role played by some pro-Austrian descendants of Dubrovnik's upper class, the passivity of the National Party's members, as well as the popularity of Serbian national thought among the young generation educated by Serbian professors in Dubrovnik's schools. It is important to stress that in the 1870s, Dubrovnik Gymnasium emerged as a strong centre for Serbian propaganda targeting the city's youth. This role was shaped by Serbian professors, led by Pero Budmani, who taught about Vuk and Njegoš, as well as by pro-Serbian teachers – Josip Carević, Niko Matijević, Josip Katić – who articulated the view that "reactionary Catholicism and

²⁰ 'Političke vijesti', *Glas dubrovački*, 5 (1885), 36–7.

Croats' exclusivism stand in opposition to Dubrovnik's centuries-old tradition of tolerance".²¹

Vlaho Bogdan, a Croatian from Dubrovnik, diplomat, writer and journalist, wrote about the circumstances surrounding 'the Serbian renaming of Dubrovnik' in the Zadar-based newspaper *Narodni list* [People's Paper] (1885). Tracing the origins of the process to Medo Pucić's activities,²² he emphasised that during the 1850s and 1860s, aside from 'real Serbs' who had immigrated to the city to make a living, there was effectively no other Serb population in Dubrovnik.²³ Similar observations would still be valid in the late 1890s, when *Crvena Hrvatska* [Red Croatia] attributed the growth of the Serbian population to Serbian economic migrants who had come to Dubrovnik, as the publication put it, "to earn their daily bread".²⁴ They were supposed to join the ranks of a previously small number of Catholic Serbs in the city, as one of the editors wrote, a group which came into existence thanks to the efforts of "the Austrian professors at Dubrovnik Gymnasium".²⁵

Serbs in Dubrovnik also received support from two external centres, i.e. Belgrade and Cetinje (representatives of the Serbian elite in the city, including Baltazar Bogišić and Lujo Vojnović, and later Stijepo Knežević and Luko Zore, maintained particularly close ties with the royal court in the capital of Montenegro). This aspect of the Dubrovnik Serbs' doings was frequently raised by Croatian circles and employed as an argument to portray them as a hostile and foreign element in the city. In this respect, the dispute between the papers *Crvena Hrvatska* and *Dubrovnik* revolved, for instance, around Croatian accusations that Dubrovnik Serbs and the Autonomists maintained not only close political ties with Austrian authorities but also with Montenegro, emphasising that "both Vienna and Cetinje opposed Croats' interests".²⁶

²¹ Josip Vrandečić, *Dalmatinski autonomistički pokret u XIX. stoljeću* (Zagreb, 2002), 243.

²² For more information about this prominent activist and writer, see Katja Bakija, 'Orsat Pozza (Medo Pucić) u ogledu svoga vremena', *Dubrovnik. Časopis za književnost i znanost*, 4 (2015), 90–106.

²³ Stjepan Čosić, *Dubrovnik nakon pada republike (1808–1848)* (Dubrovnik, 1999), 326.

²⁴ 'Propaganda', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 11 (1899), 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ 'Direktiva s Cetinja?', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 2 (1899), 1.

At that time, Croatian youth played an important role in Dubrovnik, supporting the Party of Right [*Stranka prava*] and expressing dissatisfaction with the passivity of the National Party's representatives. The first public manifestation of the Croatian youth occurred in 1885, on the occasion of the visit of Crown Prince Rudolf.²⁷ Subsequently, due to anti-Austrian manifestations, Fran Supilo was expelled from the school (the entire action of students' removal was led by Serbian professors). The tense situation in Dubrovnik, set against the broader socio-political conditions in the monarchy at the time – as reported by the Serbian *Glas dubrovački* – meant that the authorities could only pursue a consistent and long-term policy aimed at reconciling various nations and promoting the “Austrian idea”; however, as the cited publication noted, this was regarded as “an attempt to square the circle”.²⁸

Lujo Vojnović also discussed the issue of Croatian-Serbian relations in Dalmatia at the time in his well-known work *Srpsko-hrvacko pitanje u Dalmaciji* [The Serbian-Croatian question in Dalmatia] (1888). He believed that the strife between Croats and Serbs in Dalmatia was a struggle between – as he put it – “two fundamentally different elements”.²⁹ He was critical of the Croatian policy, which, based on “rotten historical law”,³⁰ claimed the right to Serbian Dubrovnik, Serbian Boka or Serbian Srijem. At the same time, he criticised the Orthodox clericalism of the newspaper *Srpski list*, which he accused of “seeking to name all of Dalmatia as Serbian”.³¹ In this text, Vojnović also divided Dalmatia into a Serbian south and a Croatian north – a characterisation which was unacceptable to Croats.

²⁷ During his visit to Dubrovnik in 1875, Emperor Franz Joseph I was also met with anti-Habsburg sentiments and welcomed to the city with patriotic slogans and politically charged poetry.

²⁸ *Glas dubrovački*, 11 (1886), 83. It is worth adding, in passing, that in the same newspaper, Nikša Gradi, a Serbian writer and politician, declared: “We, the people of Dubrovnik, are pure Serbs by origin, and we are not going to transform ourselves into Croats, as this is neither necessary nor possible. However, we do not dream of a Greater Serbia, which would be an obvious and senseless anachronism; on the contrary, we love Croats as our own brothers ...”, *Glas dubrovački*, 14 (1886), 106.

²⁹ L.G. Dubrovčanin [Lujo Vojnović], *Srpsko-hrvacko pitanje u Dalmaciji: nekoliko iskrenijeh riječi narodu* (Split, 1888), 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*

It is worth noting that, in the opinion of Croatian elites, Luj Vojnović was one of the greatest opponents of Dubrovnik's Croatian-ness and, over time, he came to be regarded as an "agent". This distinctly negative portrayal is exemplified in an article published in the newspaper *Crvena Hrvatska*, which, referring to his function as the secretary of the Montenegrin prince, suggested that he would travel to Cetinje only to receive instructions and would stay in Dubrovnik year-round, maintaining close contacts with the paper *Dubrovnik* and writing articles inspired by Greater Serbian ideology.³²

SPLIT BETWEEN CROATIAN AND SERBIAN POLITICAL ELITES IN DUBROVNIK

By the late 1880s and early 1890s, a definite split occurred between the Croatian and Serbian communities in the city. In the 1889 elections to the Dalmatian Sabor, the Croatian candidate Pero Čingrija faced off against Francesco Ghetaldi-Gondola, the candidate of the Serb-Autonomous coalition. The same coalition also secured victory in 1890 local elections in Dubrovnik, held in the absence of the National Party, thereby sealing Serbs' dominance in the city, which was to last nearly the entire next decade. It is worth noting that, on this occasion, Serbs sought to recruit Francesco Ghetaldi-Gondola for cooperation, recognising that his old and respected family name could serve a vital propaganda function by legitimising their communal activities.³³ He secured a strong position in Dubrovnik and gained the support of much of the local aristocracy (Gradi, Bona, and Bizzaro families), becoming the most popular figure in the 1890s. The Serbo-Italian coalition portrayed him as a man capable of ushering in a 'new golden era' in the city.³⁴

Luko Zore's comedy *Stramputicama na put* [Off the beaten track] (1904) alluded to these developments and the prevailing social mood in Dubrovnik. The conventional love story centred on a Serb man

³² 'Propaganda', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 11 (1899), 1.

³³ 'Budimo na čistu!', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 44 (1894), 1.

³⁴ Immediately after Francesco Gondola's death, *Dubrovnik* recalled the numerous contributions he made to the city ('Dokle će ovako?', *Dubrovnik*, 28 [1899], 1). Another article emphasised that the construction of the Imperial Hotel in Dubrovnik (opposed by Croats) was made possible by his efforts; 'Malo odgovora i razgovora', *Dubrovnik*, 30 (1899), 1–2.

and a Croatian woman whose fathers oppose their marriage due to the families' ethnic differences, is set against the city's groundbreaking political developments, namely the Croatian-Serbian split: "Since our old National Party in Dubrovnik began to show off, and Serbs and Croats separated, relatives felt upset, friends quarrelled and acquaintances became estranged".³⁵

Pero Čingrija also wrote about the causes of the complex situation in Dubrovnik at that time, blaming the Serbian side for the split and accusing it of "exaggerated" conduct, which led to the formation of the Croatian party. While acknowledging that the future would show whether this move was "necessary and wise", he also accused the younger generation of embracing ideas he termed "difficult to understand". Nor did he spare older people who, for the sake of better career prospects, had joined Serbs, thereby "easily obtaining a status and influence they do not deserve", which, according to him, was "Dubrovnik's worst plague".³⁶ Moreover, he claimed that the public in the city was "led by the nose" and criticised those who made "profit on the Cyrillic alphabet".³⁷ Accusations were also voiced by the Serbian side. In the Serbo-Italian coalition's appeal ahead of the 1890 local elections, leaders of the National Party were attacked for their activities opposing the national distinctiveness of Serbs and the "Croatisation of the city and children".³⁸

An attempt to calm down the mood in Dubrovnik may be seen in a letter sent by Lujo Vojnović to Pero Čingrija (on 15 July 1890), following the victory of the Serbo-Italian coalition (1890), where Vojnović, while reaffirming his loyalty to the Serbian nation and his city, described the ongoing dispute between Croats and Serbs as a "sad fight". Nevertheless, he expressed hope that the discord was only "temporary and fleeting" and that, despite divisions, both sides would strive for "an agreement between the two communities for the glory of God".³⁹

³⁵ Luko Zore, 'Stramputicama na put. Igra u 3 djela', *Srđ*, 16/17 (1904), 727.

³⁶ Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, Arhiv Čingrija: Č-X-7, 'Pismo Pera Čingrije', *Narodni list*, 45 (1890).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 'Dopis Pera Čingrije *Narodnom listu*'.

³⁸ Arhivska zbirka Kulturno-historijskog odjela Dubrovačkog muzeja, 'Proglas srpsko-autonomaškog odbora za općinske izbore' [Proclamation of the Serbian Autonomous Committee for Municipal Elections], Dubrovnik, 19 May 1890.

³⁹ Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, Arhiv Čingrija: Č-X-7, 'Pismo Luja Vojnovića Peru Čingriji', 15 July 1890.

Despite such tense circumstances, some activists still held hope for cooperation between the Croatian and Serbian parties. This is exemplified by the circumstances surrounding the foundation of the newspaper *Crvena Hrvatska* (financially supported by Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer⁴⁰). Its launch was delayed due to Miho Klaić, who hoped for rapprochement between Serbs and members of the National Party in Dubrovnik. At that time, the actions of Frano Supilo⁴¹ were decisive, as he sought to mitigate the conflict between the Croatian representatives of the National Party and the members of the Party of Right in Dubrovnik (he stressed that, despite their differences, they shared a common belief in the need to unite Dalmatia with Croatia). The agenda of this prominent politician and activist was best encapsulated in a slogan of the political struggle, articulated in his letter to Strossmayer,⁴² in which he asserted the need to defend the Croatian national cause, especially in Dalmatia, Dubrovnik, and the Bay of Kotor [*Boka Kotorska*].

FROM APPARENT UNITY TO CROATIAN VICTORY

A significant event for the entire Dubrovnik, which also reflected the unique local political and cultural context, was the unveiling of the monument to Ivan Gundulić in 1893. Serbian victories (including those in coalition with the Autonomists) in the elections to the Dalmatian Sabor (e.g. the election of Francesco Ghetaldi-Gondola in 1890) and in local elections (1891) further exacerbated divisions with

⁴⁰ At this point, it is worth recalling Strossmayer's close relations with the Vojnović family, particularly with Kosta, with whom he maintained frequent and, from the mid-1870s onward, regular contacts; see Tomislav Markus, 'Korespondencija Josipa J. Strossmayera i Koste Vojnovića kao povijesni izvor', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 2 (2004), 582.

⁴¹ Due to space constraints, this article does not provide a detailed analysis of Frano Supilo's contribution to the events at the turn of the twentieth century. However, it is worth referring to two books which offer a comprehensive overview of his life, political thought and activities: Ivo Petrinović, *Politička misao Frana Supila* (Split, 1989); Ivo Perić, *Mladi Supilo* (Zagreb, 1996).

⁴² It is important to note that Supilo's views were shaped by both Ante Starčević and Josip Juraj Strossmayer (though not by his *Yugoslavism*, which Supilo regarded as detrimental to Croats). According to Ivo Petrinović, however, Supilo rejected the radicalism of Starčević and the opportunism of Strossmayer; Ivo Petrinović, *Politička misao Frana Supila* (Split, 1989), 25.

Croatian circles. In response to these setbacks, Croats rallied around Frano Supilo and, in 1891, founded the newspaper *Crvena Hrvatska*. A year later, Serbs established *Dubrovnik* (which, together with the Zadar-based paper *Srpski glas* [Serbian Voice], joined forces to advocate for Serbian interests in Dalmatia, Dubrovnik, or the Bay of Kotor). Supporters of both factions – the Party of Right and the National Party – cooperated with the Croatian newspaper and sought to downplay ideological differences to advance their Croatian national agenda. What's more, the activities of Croatian circles in Dubrovnik received support from members of the Party of Right from Croatia proper.

Both Serbs and Croats regarded the upcoming event honouring Ivan Gundulić as an opportunity to express their national and patriotic sentiments.⁴³ According to the organisers, who comprised various social and political groups (members of the Party of Right, the National Party and the Serbian Party), the unveiling of the monument to the great Dubrovnik poet was not only to be a major cultural celebration, but also, at a political level, an expression of unity among the city's community and elites, conveyed to the Habsburgs. This unity was to be manifested primarily through a politically neutral atmosphere and a spirit of harmony between Croats and Serbs, while the city's national and ethnic diversity was reflected in the use of slogans written in both Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, or in the display of Croatian and Serbian banners adorning Dubrovnik on this occasion. The city was honoured by the presence of numerous prominent political and cultural figures, representing the Croat and Serb communities. Serbian King Alexander I sent a wreath of flowers gathered in Kosovo Field, and the Austrian Governor of Dalmatia contributed a wreath decorated with yellow and black ribbons.⁴⁴ Of considerable symbolic significance, though not explicitly stated but understandable to all, was the intention to show that the people of Dubrovnik honoured their own poets and their native language, which they could be stripped of. And even

⁴³ For a more detailed analysis of the political and national significance of this event see also: Iva Milovan and Nevio Šetić, 'Dva općehrvatska skupa iz 1890. i 1893. i njihovo nacionalno integracijsko značenje', *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku*, 46 (2008), 227–58, and Ivan Grkeš, 'Spomenik kao prijeporno mjesto. Trodnevna proslava otkrivanja Gundulićeva spomenika u Dubrovniku 1893. godine', *Anali Dubrovnik*, 59 (2021), 205–41.

⁴⁴ The course of these celebrations, so important for Dubrovnik, was reported in detail by the local press: *Crvena Hrvatska*, 6 (1893) and *Dubrovnik*, 1/2 (1893).

more, they worshipped the freedom extolled by Gundulić, a freedom that they felt was being denied to them.

On this occasion, Ivo Vojnović composed a poetic drama (defined by the author himself as a prose poem) *Gundulićev san* [Gundulić's Dream], whose meaning corresponded to contemporary events in the city. In his search for the sources and foundations of Croatian-Serbian unity, Vojnović drew on Dubrovnik's tradition. He named freedom an ideology and a core value of the city's political culture, and expressed it through the figure of Gundulić, underscoring his patriotic dimension with the declaration: "I am free because I am from Dubrovnik!"⁴⁵ In that sense, the drama (shaped by the author's Yugoslavist ideology) represented a kind of hymn to the unity of Dubrovnik's people, both Croats and Serbs.

In the early 1890s, amidst the enthusiasm following their electoral victories, in the first issue of their newspaper, *Dubrovnik*, Dubrovnik Serbs articulated their primary intention to promote religious tolerance. As noted by the editors, "for us, every Serb is equal and dear, regardless of their professed religion".⁴⁶ To confirm their commitment, they cited the famous passage from Petar II Petrović Njegoš's well-known poem, *Pozdrav rodu* [Greeting to My People]. At the same time, they persisted in asserting that the inhabitants of Dubrovnik were Serbs and "hosts in their own home".⁴⁷ They also contended that Croatian historical law – regardless of its validity – could neither suppress the national Serbian sentiment nor justify Croatian aspirations to annex Dalmatia to Croatia, as such annexation would effectively compel Serbs to become "political Croats".⁴⁸

In the 1890s, Croatian circles sought to regain the upper hand in Dubrovnik's public life and intensify efforts to persuade the city's community. The first significant indication of shifting political preferences was the defeat of Francesco Ghetaldi-Gondola in the 1895 elections to the Dalmatian Sabor. Subsequently, recognising that their propaganda was insufficient, Serbs replaced the editor of *Dubrovnik*. The new editor was Antun Fabris, one of the most prominent figures

⁴⁵ Ivo Vojnović, *Gundulićev san. Pjesma u prozi prikazana dne 25 junija 1893 u Dubrovniku prigodom slave otkrića spomenika Gjivu Fr. Gundulića* (Dubrovnik, 1893), 7.

⁴⁶ 'Naš program', *Dubrovnik*, 1 (1892), 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ 'Pitanje o aneksiji', *Dubrovnik*, 2 (1892), 1.

among the city's Serbian elite, and a tireless scholar, committed to uncovering the evidence of Dubrovnik's Serbness in the past.

As another election approached, Croats attacked Serbs by comparing their presence in the city to an "exotic plant", unlikely to take root naturally. Due to the lack of broader social support, Catholic Serbs reached for the backing of the Orthodox segment of their community,⁴⁹ and, having no courage to act independently, they entered into political alliances with the Autonomists and engaged in conspiratorial activities. This refers to the revealed actions of Serbian professors who, as noted by *Crvena Hrvatska*, instead of teaching Latin and Greek to young people, "indoctrinated them with Greater Serbia ideology",⁵⁰ and even financially incentivised older students to organise Serbian groups at school.⁵¹ Croatian circles perceived the Serbo-Italian agreement as a significant threat, expanding throughout Dalmatia, particularly in Dubrovnik. These actions were unequivocally condemned by Croats as a "treacherous behaviour", not only "leading a brother to the abyss, but also seeking to throw him into it".⁵² At the same time – amidst this complex situation – Dubrovnik's Croatian elites reaffirmed their loyalty to Austria, assuring that Croats stood by the Habsburgs and that this was the ethos of a nation determined to remain the host at their home.⁵³

An important event for the socio-political life of Dubrovnik, marking the conclusion of the period covered in this article, occurred in 1899, when the death of the incumbent mayor, Francesco Ghetaldi-Gondola, and the elections victorious of Croatian parties (the united forces of the National Party and the Party of Right) brought an end to nearly a decade of political dominance of the Serb-Autonomous coalition. Following the long-awaited triumph of Croats, achieved mainly thanks to the intense efforts of the newspaper *Crvena Hrvatska* and the personal involvement of Frano Supilo, Pero Čingrija became the city's mayor (1899).

⁴⁹ 'Pabirci', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 3 (1899), 1.

⁵⁰ 'Propaganda', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 11 (1899), 1.

⁵¹ However, these activities extended beyond the gymnasium itself and were progressively carried out throughout the city. Professor Castrapelli launched a campaign to promote the reading of Serbian books and to praise Serbia and the young King Alexander, and Mato Hranilović – the editor of *Dubrovnik* – organised meetings on Srđ in the Serbian Reading Room or in the Workers' Society (*Radničko društvo*); 'Srpska propaganda među gimnazijalcima', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 22 (1895), 1.

⁵² 'Propaganda', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 11 (1899), 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

The significance and necessity of this victory for the Croatian community is evidenced in the Croatian press of the day, which framed this event as an act of historical justice. Immediately after the announcement of election results, the Croats' newspaper underscored in the first sentence that the Serb-Autonomous bloc achieved its 1890 electoral success solely thanks to "a fraud that a significant portion of Dubrovnik's inhabitants fell for".⁵⁴ Over the ensuing 10 years, the triumphant victors would pour out "hatred and contempt for all things Croatian" to such an extent that "a Croat in Dubrovnik could not walk peacefully through a city street without being subject to vulgar insults" by manipulated political opponents.⁵⁵

The Croatian victory in Dubrovnik, which – as noted in its article *Crvena Hrvatska* – "resonated with joy and dignity throughout Croatia" and also paved the way for "a new era of Croatianness in southern Dalmatia",⁵⁶ offered Croats a valuable lesson. This agenda, presented publicly and openly and aligned with the overarching Croatian national idea, should serve as an example of an effective political strategy in contexts where Croatianness is at stake. At the same time, Croatian elites in Dubrovnik remained aware that the struggle against Serbian communities in the city was far from over, and that the fight to win over younger generations was still underway. After all, there was a noticeable scarcity of middle-aged people (30–45 years old), particularly within the intelligentsia – a circumstance caused by the Serbian influence in the educational sphere, which in turn led to the emergence of political Serbs.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated throughout this paper, the period under examination is a culminating phase of political and cultural polarisation between the Croatian and Serbian communities in Dubrovnik. The crystallisation of various environments (political parties and factions/groups centred around periodicals and newspapers), which came into close contact, engaged into complex relationships, held lively discussions and heated

⁵⁴ *Crvena Hrvatska*, 28 (1899), 1.

⁵⁵ 'Poslije pobjede', *Crvena Hrvatska*, 29 (1899), 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

polemics, fostered the position of Dubrovnik and its political and cultural elite in Dalmatia, which in turn influenced Serbo-Croatian relations and the broader political landscape in this part of the Balkans during this era.

In light of the city's complex situation, as outlined here, a little-known sketch of Marko Murat, depicting Dubrovnik beneath the embrace of its two patrons – Saint Blaise and Saint Sava – assumes symbolic significance (and carries a prophetic dimension for the ensuing decade). Also in the play *Stramputicama na put* by Luko Zore, one of the characters expresses the belief that Dubrovnik, which “linguistically belongs to both the Serbian and Croatian nations”, must – as he puts it – “join the same herd”,⁵⁸ i.e. other Yugoslavs.

The events of the final decade of the nineteenth century, as well as the prior experiences of Dubrovnik's elites, prompted a reevaluation of the prevailing political strategy adopted by both the Croatian and Serbian communities. These strategies, based on national antagonism and fluctuating political representation in municipal authorities, ultimately failed to yield any tangible benefits for either side.⁵⁹ Political circumstances that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, marked by the growing presence of ‘nijemština’, i.e., German economic and political influence spreading across Dalmatia, encouraged the unification of political forces. At the same time, the increasingly realistic prospect of improving the political and legal status of Croats within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy paved the way for a Croatian-Serbian agreement, which would find its political expression in the ‘New Course’ policy.⁶⁰

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⁵⁸ Luko Zore, ‘Stramputicama na put. Igra u 3 djela’, *Srđ*, 16–17 (1904), 727.

⁵⁹ The opposition of Catholic Serbs to the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia and their rejection of Dubrovnik's Croatian identity led to a slowdown in the city's political integration with Zagreb. However, the consolidation of cooperation between activists of the National Party and the Party of Right, alongside Frano Supilo and *Crvena Hrvatska*, ultimately caused the defeat of the Catholic Serbs' political agenda in Dubrovnik.

⁶⁰ For more detailed information on this topic see: Vlaho Benković, *Uloga dubrovačke politike u stvaranju „Novoga kursa” (1903.–1905.)* (Dubrovnik, 2009); and id., ‘Dubrovački Srbi-katolici i “novi kurs” u hrvatskoj politici 1903.–1905.’, *Dubrovnik. Časopis za književnost i znanost*, 1–2 (1990), 211–31.

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