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ARTICLE



Converging or diverging patterns of Euroscepticism among political parties in Croatia and Serbia

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ABSTRACT

This article is a comparative study on the patterns of Euroscepticism encountered among the political parties of Croatia and Serbia. Primary attention is paid to the employment of Euroscepticism from within the halls of power by the ruling parties of Croatian Democratic Union/HDZ and the Serbian Progressive Party/SNS. Secondary attention is paid to the employment of Euroscepticism by smaller parties with a populist and/or a radical right-wing orientation. This article demonstrates that whereas Euroscepticism among Croatia's political parties appears to be rather multifaceted (with a focus on domestic minority issues, gender-related themes, and economic anxieties), the Euroscepticism of Serbian political parties has become 'single-issue' with a major stress on geopolitics. Nevertheless, the governing apparatuses of Croatia and Serbia converge in their adaptive and pragmatic employment of Euroscepticism. This consists of the occasional employment of soft versions of revisionist Euroscepticism in Croatia and a gradualist Euroscepticism, which is contested by the rejectionist voices of the radical right, in Serbia. This phenomenon demarcates the tactical and situationally adaptive adjustments of HDZ and SNS from the more ideological and pervasive dominance of socially conservative agendas among ruling parties of the conservative right in the Visegrad Four states (e.g. FIDESZ and PiS).

KEYWORDS

Euroscepticism; nationalism; Croatia; Serbia; Western Balkans

Introduction

This is a comparative study on the patterns of Euroscepticism encountered among the political parties of Croatia and Serbia, which both share the political legacies of the former Yugoslavia. Between them, the emergence of Euroscepticism provides another common denominator. Nevertheless, the evolutionary trajectories of Euroscepticism in the two countries seem to diverge with respect to Croatia's political and socioeconomic realities as an EU member-state (2013) and Serbia's opportunity structures as a state which is not a member of the EU and oscillates between the EU and Russia.

Eurosceptic agendas have been promoted by certain governments across Central and Eastern Europe (the nominally center-right Civic Democratic Union/FIDESZ-led government in Hungary and the Law and Justice/PIŚ-led government in Poland) regarding a wide range of issues, such as the migration crisis and the rule of law controversy with the European Commission. In Hungary, the dominant brand of Euroscepticism seems to be anchored into the 'alternative' concept of *illiberal* democracy, as it has been formulated by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and FIDESZ.

Academic experts have dealt extensively with the more ideologically entrenched variants of Euroscepticism among governing parties in Central and Eastern Europe (Brubaker 2017; Kovacs and Scheppele 2018), but not a lot of attention has been paid to the more adaptive and pragmatic employment of Euroscepticism from within the halls of power. Hence, this would be the major theoretical contribution of this article.

The main question is: What are the commonalities and differences between the Croatian and Serbian brands of Euroscepticism? The focus is primarily cast on Euroscepticism as employed by the governing parties of Croatian Democratic Union/HDZ and the Serbian Progressive Party/SNS. Attention is paid to the intersections between Euroscepticism and the thematic areas of minority rights, geopolitics, gender-related issues, and immigration, as well as the economy.¹ This article also touches briefly upon varying Euroscepticism between different intra-party factions, especially in the case of the ruling HDZ in Croatia, as well as the employment of Euroscepticism by smaller parties with a populist and/or a radical right-wing orientation.

This study demonstrates that whereas Euroscepticism among Croatia's political parties is multifaceted with an emphasis on domestic ethnopolitics, gender-related issues, and economic anxieties, the Euroscepticism of Serbian political parties has become 'single-issue' with a stress on geopolitics. Nevertheless, the governing apparatuses of Croatia and Serbia converge in their pragmatic and adaptive employment of Euroscepticism. This demarcates the tactical and situationally adaptive adjustments of HDZ and SNS from the more ideological and pervasive dominance of socially conservative agendas among ruling parties of the conservative right in the Visegrad Four (i.e. FIDESZ and PiS).

The timeframe of this study concentrates on party-based Euroscepticism in Croatia and Serbia from 2016 until 2019 with references to earlier stages where deemed necessary. This article is situated inside the framework of a qualitative political analysis and has been structured according to the pattern of a thematic and paired comparison (Tarrow 2010). A paired comparison can correct generalizations from single case-studies and test the validity or universality of older conclusions that a researcher has reached. It can also operate as an intermediate step between a single case-study, which suggests a general relationship, and a multi-case analysis that tests or refines a theory.

In addition, this work has relied on: (a) legal documents concerning minority rights, expert reports, and public surveys; (b) semi-structured interviews with political representatives and government officials, journalists, NGOs, and locally based academic researchers (political scientists and sociologists) with an expertise in nationalism and Euroscepticism (conducted in 2018). The research embeds this information in scholarly and theoretical literature on Euroscepticism in Europe and the two country-cases.

A typology of Euroscepticism: Europe, Croatia, and Serbia

Euroscepticism: conceptual definitions

Schematically, Euroscepticism is the 'outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration' (Taggart 1998, 365–366). Hard Euroscepticism consists of the principled opposition to the EU and may even demand the withdrawal of given states from the EU or object to their prospects of EU membership (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002, 4; Kopecky and Mudde 2002). Soft Euroscepticism does not entail the principled opposition to the EU but centers on policy areas where a divergence between the 'national interest' and the EU trajectory is perceived (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008; Kopecky and Mudde 2002).

Left-wing Eurosceptics tend to scrutinize European integration as a project which is embedded in the neoliberal principles of globalized capitalism (Della Porta 2017). Two areas of utmost concern for right-wing Eurosceptics are: (a) varying degrees of opposition to immigration and insistence on the principle of hard borders (Arzheimer 2015; Evans and Mellon 2019); (b) safeguarding national sovereignty from the 'domination of Brussels' (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008; Brunazzo and Gilbert

2017). All manifestations of Euroscepticism can be articulated both on the party-based and the public (or grassroots) levels – inside and outside the EU.

The Euroscepticism of political parties is dependent upon ideology, political and socioeconomic circumstances, and the distinction between domestic and foreign policy. Therefore, the engagement of Eurosceptic parties can be subject to malleability and/or ‘situational adaptability’. Within this context, Kopecky and Mudde further diversify the dichotomy between hard and soft Euroscepticism. The authors argue that Eurosceptic parties tend to adopt softer stances and do not oppose the idea of European integration per se. However, they object, to varying degrees, to its materialization. It is the ‘Euro-reject’ parties that assume harder stances and oppose both the idea and the materialization (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 302–303).

Flood proposes an analytical classification of party-based Euroscepticism which comprises the revisionist, reformist, gradualist, maximalist, minimalist, and rejectionist categories (Flood 2002, 5). The revisionist category opts for a return to the state of affairs prior to a major EU treaty/decision whereas the reformist desires the modification of one or more existing EU institutions and/or practices. Gradualist Eurosceptics formally endorse the European integration process albeit at a slower pace and with greater care (Ibid.). Maximalists are in favour of pushing forward with the existing process as rapidly as is practicable towards higher levels of integration whereas minimalists tend to accept the status quo but resist further integration (Ibid.). Lastly, rejectionist parties adamantly oppose participation in the EU or any of its constituent institutions (Ibid.). For the purposes of this section, greater attention is paid to the revisionist and the gradualist categories because as demonstrated later in the analysis: (a) the former is mostly applicable to the Eurosceptics of the ‘right-wing faction’ within HDZ; (b) the pragmatic Euroscepticism endorsed within the ranks of SNS generally tends to assume a gradualist approach.

Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe: a retrospective overview

Several Central and East European states endorsed the accession process to the EU from ‘eclectic’ angles throughout the 1990s. Primary attention was paid to foreign investment, free movement, and regional security. Therefore, the external engagement of the EU and the Copenhagen Criteria (1993) over areas such as the management of interethnic relations inside the candidate states was frequently met with misunderstandings. A series of (usually right-wing) parties started formulating their nascent Euroscepticism along the lines of a conceptualization that the EU ‘imposes’ minority rights from the exterior and weakens national sovereignty (e.g. the cases of Slovakia, Latvia, and Estonia), (Bustikova 2015, 2018; Pytlas 2015; Minkenberg 2015).

The outbreak of the migration crisis in 2015 engendered one ‘center versus periphery’ cleavage – the dispute between the European Commission and the Visegrad Four (and later Italy) over the EU’s refugee quotas. In light of these developments, the brands of Euroscepticism among certain conservative right-wing parties across the Continent have undergone a qualitative transformation; they are no longer focused on negotiating a compromise over the terms of a state’s membership of the EU but, rather, they harbor ambitions to *revise* the EU’s configurations (at least in regard to selected policy-areas) and *reform* its existing institutions and practices from within.

In Hungary and Poland, the dominant patterns of Euroscepticism possess ideological underpinnings. Especially inside the former context, Euroscepticism appears to be anchored into PM Orbán’s promotion of *illiberal* democracy as an ‘alternative’ model with a greater stress on national and Christian values as well as a more centralized and leader-centered pattern of governance (Palonen 2018; Brubaker 2017). This outlook is shared by PM Jarosław Kaczyński and PiS (Kovacs and Scheppele 2018; Krzyżanowski 2017). Both leaderships converge along their calls for EU’s ‘return’ to fundamental norms and values that have been allegedly forgotten or betrayed and an ambition to juxtapose the Visegrad Four as a geopolitical and sociocultural ‘anti-model’ to the EU center (Agh, 2016; Bozóki and Hegedűs 2018).

Euroscepticism in Croatia and Serbia: literature review

Visnja Samardzija argues that 'Euro-realism' would be more topical than Euroscepticism in Croatia (Samardzija 2016, 125; Butković and Samardzija 2009). This term consists in the rational calculation of the advantages of EU-membership as well as a simultaneous attempt to minimize shortcomings. Therefore, Euro-realism should not be regarded as a 'sub-variant' of Euroscepticism because it places the primary emphasis on the actual benefits of EU membership. Regarding Croatia's accession process to the EU, the author highlights that a major emphasis was placed on economic benefits (foreign investment and the EU Cohesion and Structural Funds), free movement, and regional security (Samardzija 2016, 135–140).

Along comparable lines, Bojana Kocijan and Marko Kukec underline that Croatia's dependence on the EU's financial aid has been functioning as a constraint for the emergence of hard Euroscepticism across the left-right spectrum (Kocijan and Kukec 2016, 42; Arnold, Sapir, and de Vries 2012, 1345; Raos 2016). This hints at the prevalence of rational calculations and the 'beneficiary member mindset' among most affiliates of Croatia's major parties (Kocijan and Kukec 2016, 56; Maldini and Pauković 2016). The authors argue that the dominant version of party-based Euroscepticism in Croatia can be termed as soft, with a stress on subjects of a cultural and/or symbolic nature (immigration and the reluctance to cede part of national sovereignty to Brussels) (Vachudova 2008) and that this variant of soft Euroscepticism is mainly propagated by the 'right-wing faction' within ruling HDZ (Kocijan and Kukec 2016, 45, 51, 53–54, 57).

Jelena Subotić examines the sociocultural origins of party-based Euroscepticism in Serbia. Subotić argues that, since the 1990s, a political culture of self-victimization has been constructed along the foundations of the EU's biased outlooks on Serbia's interests. This culminated in the portrayal of the EU as an occasionally adverse 'other' in a series of domestic, political, as well as academic and clerical, discourses (Subotić 2010, 597, 604, 2011, 323, 326; Perica 2006). Cooperation with Hague Tribunal and the question of Kosovo's status acquired centrality (Subotić 2011, 325; Antonić 2012, 69–70, 78).

Subotić contends that these narratives were communicated on the political level by hard Eurosceptic parties (e.g. the, nominally center-right, Democratic Party of Serbia/DSS) along the lines of the argumentation that it is 'either EU membership or Kosovo' (Subotić 2011, 321, 324; Antonić 2012, 70) and obstructed the accession process and revealed key weaknesses of EU conditionality (e.g. the 'trade-in' between cooperation with ICTY and EU-membership) (Subotić 2010, 612, 2011, 325–326). Complementary studies highlighted the deficient coverage of EU-related topics and the abundance of Eurosceptic standpoints in the Serbian press (Marković-Tomić 2016, 13–15; Antonić 2012, 73–76). If only at a first instance then, the shades of rejectionist Euroscepticism in Serbia are a lot more vivid in comparison to those in Croatia (especially on the right-wing angle of the party spectrum and among the radical right-wing parties which are in the parliamentary opposition).

Contemporary euroscepticism in Croatia and Serbia

One essential commonality between the Croatian and the Serbian party spectrums is their domination by conservative parties of the center-right. This establishes a common ground with respect to political principles, intra-party arrangements, and the policymaking patterns espoused by HDZ and SNS. HDZ emerged victorious in the 2016 parliamentary elections, although it had to rely on support from smaller coalition-partners.² President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović was the HDZ nominee for the 2015 presidential elections.³ Following the outcome of the parliamentary (2016) and the presidential (2017) elections,⁴ President Aleksandar Vučić and SNS dominate a continuum that stretches from the boundaries of the liberal center to the conservative right. Both SNS and HDZ converge along their formal endorsement of the European integration process. This leaves both countries with smaller, usually right-wing, political actors that harbor and promote explicitly rejectionist agendas, such as

the Croatian Party of Rights/HSP and Croatian Pure Party of Rights/HČSP in Croatia and the Serbian Radical Party/SRS and DSS-*Dveri* in Serbia.⁵

Opposition to legal provisions on minority rights and Euroscepticism

Croatia's Law on the Use of the Languages and the Alphabets of National Minorities (2000) guarantees that minority languages and their scripts are to be equal with the Croatian language before the law (article 1). It endorses their public use in these communities where national minorities make up a local percentage of 30 percent in the areas of local administration, public information, signposting, and the naming of geographic locations (articles 4, 5, 8, 10, 13 and 18). The Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities/CLRN, (2002) safeguards and establishes this right (articles 7 and 11). Throughout the accession stage, it was marginal parties of the far right (mainly the HSP) that objected to the EU's soft power and sought to draw a linkage between opposition to the new legal framework on minority rights and their hard Euroscepticism.

Nevertheless, the public use of the Serbian Cyrillic script in Vukovar, and other municipalities of Slavonia where the ethnic Serb population meets the prescribed 30 percent threshold, has not been implemented. In Vukovar, the implementation of the legislation was obstructed between 2013 and 2016 by the systematic mobilization of the Croatian War Veterans Association/UHRV.⁶ More significantly, throughout 2018, HDZ's 'right-wing faction' and grass-roots groupings (*Narod odlučuje*/'The people decide') had been spearheading a proposal for a referendum in order to amend the Constitution (article 72) and reduce the number of the ethnic minorities representatives at the *Sabor* (parliament) to six ('*Zahtjev za Raspisivanje Državnog Referenduma*', 13 lipnja 2018).⁷

One might contend that this 'revisionist' project, as coordinated by extra-institutional and political actors, represents one more example of 'post-accession non-compliance' (Interview 1). However, the political ramifications of these developments bear a higher significance. Opposition to the public use of the Serb Cyrillic script has prompted the formation of a nexus which comprises actors as diverse as the UHRV, former HDZ-affiliates/current 'dissidents' (e.g. the former Minister of Culture, Zlatko Hasanbegović) and local representatives of the HDZ's 'right-wing faction' (e.g. the mayor of Vukovar,⁸ Ivan Penava⁹).

The formation of this nexus has emboldened its components to protest certain decisions of the political establishment and any (perceived) external interference to Croatia's domestic affairs and the sovereignty of the national majority inside their homeland (Interview 3).¹⁰ At the first instance, this prompted their attempt to revise Croatia's legal framework on minority rights. The further-reaching objective of this nexus, though, is to voice its discontent with the external engagement of the EU towards the improvement of minority rights legislation (e.g. EU conditionality between 2000 and 2002).

In Serbia, throughout the 1990s, the ruling Socialists/SPS, as well as the SRS, repeatedly accused the EU of jeopardizing the state's territorial integrity and sponsoring 'secessionist' parties (e.g. the Alliance of Hungarians in Vojvodina/VMSZ).¹¹ The party-manifesto of SRS still judges that: 'throughout the past 50 years, the rights of the national majority had been violated, whereas the members of the national minorities had been privileged' (SRS 2009, 28). However, the SRS-manifesto no longer comprises any structured attempts to draw links between rejection of the EU and the party's opposition to clauses of the legislation on minority rights.

Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council (1999) reaffirmed 'the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia' but it, *de facto*, paved the way towards the enhancement of Kosovo's governing institutions and the recognition of its independence by powerful global actors. This, in combination with the change of guard in Serbian politics, resulted in the prioritization of geopolitical and foreign policy concerns by a sequence of governments in post-Milošević Serbia and the readjustment of the intersection between regional geopolitics and domestic ethnopolitics. Serbian policymakers prioritized areas such as the redefinition of relations with Montenegro, cooperation

with ICTY, and relations with *Republika Srpska* in Bosnia while struggling to maintain Kosovo inside the administrative bounds of the Serbian republic (Noutcheva 2007, 17–18).

The relaxation of the intersection between ethnopolitics and geopolitics engendered the dissociation of Eurosceptic narratives from the question of interethnic relations within Serbia. Since 2008, the question of Kosovo has been transformed from one that once pertained to the realm of domestic ethnopolitics into one that pertains to the sphere of foreign policy and regional geopolitics. Moreover, the positive neighborly relations with Hungary, the normalization of relations with Croatia, and the continuous cooperation between SNS and VMSZ (the largest minority party) in the established governing structures hint at the absence of a security-threat emanating from any of the minorities in Serbia's most ethnically diverse region, Vojvodina.¹²

As an aggregate of these developments, by contrast to their Croatian counterparts within HDZ, Serbian Eurosceptics within SNS do not intertwine their criticism of the EU with the management of minority issues in Serbia. The political program of SNS subscribes to safeguarding the collective rights and freedoms of ethnic minorities as these are stipulated in the state legislation (education, political representation, public use of minority languages, and cross-border links to the kin-states) (SNS 2011, 44–45). The program regards the existence of ethnic minorities as a 'strength and wealth of Serbia' and judges that 'the violation of the constitutional and legal arrangements on the individual and collective rights of ethnic minorities represents a direct threat to the Serbian national interest' (Ibid, 43).

Geopolitical concerns and Euroscepticism

The enhancement of regional security via the 'joint' membership of NATO and the EU functions as one of the strongest arguments in favor of Croatia's participation in the EU-structures. This dual membership corresponded to the quest for a solution to Croatia's security agenda following the warfare in the 1990s, as well as to the unanimous yearning for a 'return to Europe'. The Stabilization and Association Agreement for the Western Balkans upgrades Croatia's geopolitical status as a 'bridge' between the EU and the candidate states from the former Yugoslavia (Samardzija 2016, 139). Quantitative research has detected remarkably positive attitudes in favor of an EU common defense and security policy as well as the formation of an EU army among the Croatian party-elites and the public (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2015). Therefore, Eurosceptic narratives in Croatia tend not to be comprised of a geopolitical component.

By contrast, in Serbia, geopolitics make up the main component of Euroscepticism. The manifesto of SRS underlines that: 'Serbia has no reason to become a member of international alliances that favor the interests of certain groups of states at the expense of others' (SRS 2009, 29). The ruling SNS subscribes to Serbia's EU accession process as a trajectory which is expected to enhance the country's democratic institutions, accelerate economic growth, and modernize the state's infrastructure (SNS 2011, 40). In all of this, the party opts for military neutrality and envisages Serbia's global role as 'a bridge between East and West', which should be open to cooperation with global actors as diverse as the United States, China, Japan, and Russia (Ibid, 41). Regarding relations with Russia, the SNS-manifesto underlines the necessity to promote the Orthodox and Slavic cultural bonds between the two nations (Ibid). As the former party-chairman and Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić stated on a series of occasions: 'Serbia wants to join the EU because it is an organized family of nations ... but, at the same time, we have a close historical and religious connection to the Russian Federation'.¹³

One might argue that SNS inherited aspects from the program of the 'old' SRS on Serbia's global neutrality and modified them like conditional endorsement to the EU accession process. One might even draw some, however non-linear and tentative, correlations to the legacies of Yugoslavia's participation in the non-aligned movement. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the impact of pragmatic and timely considerations. In addition to political and economic stability, the SNS-led government legitimizes the accession process through reference to the existence of a vibrant Serb

diaspora in Central and Northwestern Europe and the 'remittances factor' as well as to the export–import ratio between EU and Serbia (Đukić 2015, 35).¹⁴

At the same time, though, Russia is Serbia's staunchest ally at the UN Security Council regarding the question of Kosovo. Since 2008, the Serbian government has established a steady cooperation with Gazprom (Subotić 2011, 322), and Russia remains a key partner in energy cooperation. In addition, the ongoing impact of the economic and migration crises throughout the EU functions, if only subtly, as an additional incentive for Serbian policymakers to prolong Serbia's geopolitical oscillation between East and West (Vuksanović 2018). Serbian policymakers may often reflect upon the Croatian precedent and the belief that Croatia did not reap all the economic benefits that it anticipated from EU-membership (Interview 11). The aggregate of these catalysts has resulted in the consolidation of a soft and gradualist version of Euroscepticism with a geopolitical profile (Interview 8). This gradualist Euroscepticism is contested by the rejectionist stances which are espoused by smaller political actors, in regard to all themes of European integration, further on the right-wing angle of the party spectrum (i.e. SRS and DSS-*Dveri*).

The gradualist Euroscepticism employed by the SNS-led government consists of the occasional criticism of the EU's alleged bias over the collective status of ethnic Serbs in Kosovo (or, secondarily, the relations between Serbia and *Republika Srpska*), which is frequently coupled with statements of gratitude to Russia (Pavlović 2015), (Interviews 6 and 12). In greater detail, President Vučić has been reiterating, in a series of interviews to Russian media-outlets, that: 'I feel very comfortable about Vladimir Putin's words of further support for Serbia's territorial integrity which is not only an issue of Serbia, it has become an issue for many sovereign states'.¹⁵ At the same time, the Serbian President has been issuing charges of 'double standards' and/or 'hypocrisy' against powerful EU member states along the lines that: 'How can Serbia open a Pandora's Box? Who opened this Pandora's Box in 2008 having accepted, acknowledged, and recognized the unilaterally proclaimed independence of Kosovo? They were doing so, not us!'¹⁶

Gender-related issues and Euroscepticism

To comprehend the broader implications of opposition to LGBT rights in Croatia, one should take into consideration the pact between Croatia's religious authorities and the political establishment, as stipulated in the Vatican Contract.¹⁷ As part of this semi-formal arrangement, HDZ granted its assent to the constitutional referendum on the same-sex marriage ban (December 1st, 2013) (Petričušić 2015) and condones the Church's opposition to sexual education (Čepo 2017, 17–18), (Interview 3). Throughout 2018, the ruling party's 'right-wing faction' concentrated their engagement on opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (2017) and its provisions for LGBT rights.¹⁸ As it is the case regarding minority rights, Eurosceptics within HDZ do not explicitly interlink their criticism of the EU with their standpoints on gender-related issues.

In compliance with the party-line to portray Croatia as a 'Christian and European country', HDZ's 'right-wing faction' criticizes the Istanbul Convention from a predominantly gender-related angle. However, HDZ-backbenchers and smaller actors (e.g. the Labor and Solidarity Party under the leadership of Milan Bandić) further allude to the external 'imposition' of alien ethical norms on the Croatian society and issue calls for the reformation of the EU via means of return to its 'original' ('European and Christian') principles and values (Čepo 2017; Zakošek 2010, 6–10). One might argue that HDZ's 'right-wing faction' conforms to a revisionist endeavor among right-wing conservatives across Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. PiS and Latvia's National Alliance) to portray their pleas for a more socially conservative turn from the part of the EU, as an appeal for a 'return' to fundamental norms that have been allegedly forgotten or betrayed (Braghioli and And Petsinis 2019, 7).

In Serbia, the cooperation between EU advisors and a sequence of governments, including those led by SNS, resulted in the establishment of an extensive legal infrastructure for the protection of LGBT rights (European Commission 2009, 17–19). Decisions such as the appointment of (openly gay) Ana Brnabić to the post of prime minister have also been interpreted as symbolic gestures towards

Brussels in regard to the Serbian government's standard commitment to the system of values espoused by the EU (Petsinis 2017).

Serbian media-NGOs have monitored the occasional propagation of allegations in domestic tabloids that the EU encourages the promotion of homosexuality. Nevertheless, this sociocultural aspect is sidelined by the paramount stress of Serbian Euroscepticism on geopolitics and foreign policy issues in the same outlets (Interviews 9 and 12). Therefore, by contrast to HDZ and its 'right-wing faction', gender-related issues do not form a significant component of the Eurosceptic narratives propagated by SNS-affiliates and the pro-government tabloids.

Migration crisis and Euroscepticism

Regarding the migration crisis, the HDZ-led government scrutinizes the long-term viability of the EU quotas for refugees. The empirical survey conducted by Kocijan and Kukec discovered that 52.09 percent of HDZ-affiliated respondents judged that immigration policy must remain under the authority of member states (the highest percentage among Croatia's largest parties) (Kocijan and Kukec 2016, 53). However, the then PM Zoran Milanović disapproved of Hungary's decision to erect a razor wire fence along its southern borders (2015). Furthermore, by contrast to Hungarian PM Orbán¹⁹ and/or Slovak PM Fico,²⁰ Croatian PM Andrej Plenković from HDZ (and, previously, Milanović) refrained from resorting to the cultural argumentation against the accommodation of refugees/migrants on Croatian soil but concentrated on the limited infrastructure.²¹ The latest report by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles/ECRE for Croatia assessed that the conditions at the Croatian accommodation centers for refugees were overall satisfactory (ECRE 2017, 83–85).

The aggregate of these observations hints that, unlike the precedents of FIDESZ and/or PiS, no segment within HDZ appears to perceive any interest in the 'weaponization' of the party's skepticism over the EU refugee quotas. In contrast to the party-leaderships of FIDESZ and/or PiS, HDZ chairman Andrej Plenković has shifted the official party-narrative more firmly towards the center and curtailed the intra-party potential for explicit dissent vis-à-vis the EU. This corresponds to Croatia's more recent entry to the EU and the ensuing benefits. This confirms Kocijan and Kukec's key argument that Croatia's dependence on the EU over financial aid and regional security regulates any propensities to a potential conflict with Brussels from the part of the political establishment. Moreover, the fact that most refugees tend to view Croatia as a transit country (ECRE 2017) relegates the migration crisis to a secondary area of concern in domestic Eurosceptic agendas.

Moving to Serbia, the country received financial assistance from the EU towards the management of the migration flows.²² SRS was the party which vehemently opposed the stay of refugees on Serbian soil. The leader, Vojislav Šešelj, explicitly stated, 'Following Viktor Orbán's example, I would erect a barbed wire fence and if this was not sufficient, I would set up minefields along the border'.²³ Nevertheless, in a similar vein to Croatian PMs Milanović and Plenković, President Vučić (earlier, Nikolić) never resorted to anti-refugee rhetoric on a cultural basis in a potential confrontation with Brussels. As in the Croatian case, the primary focus of the SNS-led government was cast on insufficient infrastructure.²⁴ Most importantly, the period since autumn 2015 saw the successful mobilization of the state administration and Serbia's civic society towards the accommodation of the migrant waves (UNHCR 2014, 13, 15; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung-Serbia, 2016, 7–8, 20–21; European Commission 2018, 35–36).

Economic anxieties and Euroscepticism

The EU Cohesion and Structural Funds contributed to the improvement of the infrastructure in Zagreb and Croatia's urban centers (Split, Rijeka and Osijek).²⁵ EU-membership facilitated Croatia to promote and upgrade its tourist industry whereas, considering the youth unemployment, it enabled highly qualified professionals to seek employment opportunities within the common European

space.²⁶ To this, one should add the remittance flows from the diaspora in wealthier Western European countries towards Croatia.

Nevertheless, despite its steady recovery, Croatia's economy had been burdened by a six-year recession (2009–15), and the purchasing power of Croatian citizens remains weak (Samardžija 2016, 135; Tica 2011, 1–19). The collateral damage of free mobility within the EU-space corresponds to the emigration of highly qualified personnel out of Croatia and the ensuing brain-drain. Moreover, the more peripheral and less developed parts of the country do not seem to have taken adequate advantage of the EU Cohesion and Structural Funds, as their technical infrastructure remains outdated and scarce employment opportunities have been created (Szilard 2014, 87–105). In the rural localities of Slavonia (e.g. Pakrac and Vukovar), the complexities of interethnic reconciliation coincide with economic malfunction, blue-collar emigration to Western Europe, and depopulation (Čipin and Ilieva 2017), (Interviews 2 and 5).

The ruling HDZ and Croatia's major parties converge along the conviction that the EU's financial aid remains of vital significance for development and tend to understate these side-effects. This emboldened smaller actors to fill this vacuum and capitalize on economic grievances. Under the leadership of Ivan Vilibor Sinčić, the party of *Živi Zid*/Human Shield is represented by two deputies at the *Sabor*. Fashioning themselves as an 'activist-political organization that consists of humanitarian and non-corrupt individuals who fight for social and economic justice' (*Živi Zid*, 2015, 6), the party's agenda centers on the economy. *Živi Zid* holds that 'the EU is not run by the elected representatives of the people but by an impersonal bureaucracy and corporations' (Ibid, 65). The party contends that the EU is structured in accordance to the 'neo-feudal and neocolonial principle', rejects the austerity measures and underlines that 'we do not desire Croatia's isolation, however we would not desire our country to become a colony of foreign interests to the detriment of its citizens' (Ibid, 65, 67).

These principles, in combination with *Živi Zid*'s espousal of 'global neutrality' and endorsement of parties such as Spain's Podemos (Ibid, 67–69), brings the party's agenda close to the orbit of left-wing Euroscepticism. Nevertheless, *Živi Zid* equally: (a) objects to its classification along the right-center-left axis and is self-designated as a (non-ideological) 'humanitarian party' (Ibid, 9); (b) stands for the reduction of certain taxes and the abolition of others in order to encourage domestic entrepreneurship (Ibid, 26–28); and (c) pledges to safeguard 'national values' and proposes the formation of a 'third' Croat entity in Bosnia (Ibid, 69). This syncretic scope that aims to accommodate heterogeneous demands within the society was largely to account for *Živi Zid*'s steady augmentation of public appeal between 2017 and 2018.²⁷ Taking into consideration the feeble appeal of hard Eurosceptic parties such as HSP during the pre-accession era, it might not be an exaggeration to contend that *Živi Zid* emerges as Croatia's first political actor with a full-fledged and ambitious hard Eurosceptic agenda.

In Serbia, DSS-*Dveri* is the Eurosceptic party whose agenda revolves around economics. Departing from their accusations of the EU over the alleged disregard of Serbia's interests in Kosovo, DSS-*Dveri* expanded its Eurosceptic platform to the economy. The party does not object to the maintenance of bilateral cooperation with individual EU member-states but rejects Serbia's bid to the EU and, in a similar vein to *Živi Zid*, favors the establishment of closer connections to the BRICS (Stojić 2017, 247–250). Nevertheless, by contrast to *Živi Zid*, DSS possesses a more concrete and longer ideological trajectory as a conservative party of the center-right whilst, under the leadership of Vojislav Koštunica, it was key-partner in coalition governments (early and mid-2000s). Furthermore, in contrast to *Živi Zid*'s popularity, the public appeal of DSS-*Dveri* has remarkably declined.²⁸

Moving to the halls of power, in a similar vein to their HDZ-counterparts, SNS-policymakers tend not to question the economic benefits from accession to the EU. However, their oscillation between East and West is secondarily dependent on the toll of the economic and migration crises across the EU and the 'Croatian precedent'.

Conclusions

Whereas in Croatia Euroscepticism appears to be multifaceted, in Serbia it has become 'single-issue'. The patterns of party-based Euroscepticism in the two states are subject to Croatia's political and

socioeconomic realities as an EU member-state and Serbia's opportunity structures as a state which is not a member of the EU and oscillates between the EU and Russia. Correspondingly, Eurosceptic narratives among Croatia's political parties may become interwoven with instances of post-accession non-compliance over the implementation of the legislation on minority rights and perceptions of not fully fulfilled economic expectations. Meanwhile, the Euroscepticism of Serbian political parties revolves around rational calculations with the objective to safeguard the country's oscillation between East and West and the persistence of ambiguities over state sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as occasional portrayals of the EU as an adversarial 'other'. In all of this, one should not underestimate the impact of sociocultural specificities (e.g. the entrenchment of Eurosceptic narratives into the frame of the Vatican Contract in Croatia). Lastly, controversies over the migration crisis do not constitute a crucial component of Eurosceptic narratives within the governing parties of either state.

The domination of Croatian and Serbian politics by parties of the conservative center-right provides a crucial common denominator between the two contexts. In Croatia, the official party line of HDZ vis-à-vis the EU seems to conform to the 'beneficiary member mindset'. Correspondingly, the party's 'right-wing faction' appears to have been vested with the task of catering for those target groups not accommodated by the pro-EU party line and opposing 'external interference' to policy areas such as minority issues and/or established gender norms in society.

In Serbia, President Vučić's occasional criticism of powerful EU member-states over Kosovo, coupled with the expression of gratitude to Russia, also aims at catering for these SNS target-groups with a hard Eurosceptic disposition. This criticism frequently intercedes with the extension of positive gestures towards Brussels regarding policy areas such as gender-related issues, minority rights, and the management of the migration crisis. One might argue that this tactical and situationally adaptive maneuvering between East and West resembles the model of Euro-realism. However, this pattern of policymaking becomes legitimized through longstanding narratives over the EU's biased outlooks on Serbia's geopolitical interests. Therefore, it is more accurate to cluster this pattern under the broader category of soft Euroscepticism, with a cautious and gradualist outlook (Flood 2002, 5).

This consists in the Serbian government's oscillation between the EU and Russia and the simultaneous endeavor to safeguard the benefits that, in accordance to SNS policymakers, Serbia is reaping from this oscillation. On the level of rhetoric, the SNS-led government may also sporadically oscillate between 'maximalist' (i.e. vocally reaffirming Serbia's commitment to the EU's system of values) and 'rejectionist' tones (i.e. criticizing Brussels whilst praising Russia's role on Kosovo). The occasional employment of more powerful, 'quasi-rejectionist', tones of Euroscepticism in its rhetoric is also what differentiates HDZ's 'right-wing faction' from the situationally adaptive approach adopted by the rest of the party in Croatia. This interplay between a gradualist pattern of policymaking and a rhetoric that can occasionally display elements of 'maximalist' as well as 'rejectionist' Euroscepticism, in Serbia, can provide a trajectory for additional research.

The governments of Croatia and Serbia converge in their pragmatic and adaptive employment of soft Euroscepticism. This situationally adaptive model demarcates HDZ and SNS from the ruling parties of the conservative center-right in the Visegrad Four. In the precedents of FIDESZ and/or PiS, one can observe the more ideological and pervasive dominance of socially conservative agendas that regularly manifested amidst the tensions between the Hungarian/Polish governments and the Commission over the EU refugee quotas. This friction seems to be amplified by center-periphery relations and the apparent ambition by the Visegrad Four (Poland as the largest partner) to juxtapose a geopolitical and sociocultural 'anti-model' to the EU center.

By contrast, in the cases of HDZ and SNS, one can speak of more pragmatic, tactical, and situationally adaptive arrangements. These consist of the occasional employment of soft versions of revisionist Euroscepticism in Croatia and a gradualist Euroscepticism, which is contested by the rejectionist voices of the radical right, in Serbia. In regard to HDZ, this phenomenon also hints at the

potential interactions between Euroscepticism and intra-party fractionalization. Studying why and how in countries such as Croatia and Serbia ruling conservatives are adaptive whereas in Poland and/or Hungary they opt for establishing 'illiberal democracies' can provide the most insightful trajectory for further comparative research.

The intersection between economic insecurities and Euroscepticism becomes increasingly relevant in Croatia and this generates repercussions in Serbia. This occurrence hints at the growing relevance of the economy not solely for anti-austerity initiatives in Southern Europe but also for a new generation of anti-establishment parties in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that were most negatively affected by the economic crisis (e.g. Latvia's 'Who Owns the State?'/KPV), (Eurobarometer 2018, 2; Austers 2016, 91).²⁹ This stresses the necessity for the more extensive and comparative study of intersections between Euroscepticism and the economy along the eastern part of the Continent.

Notes

1. Neither HDZ nor SNS tend to interlink Euroscepticism with the economy. This has provided smaller Eurosceptic parties with an opportunity structure to capitalize on economic insecurities, hence, the additional stress on the economy in this study.
2. HDZ garnered 33.04 percent of the vote and won 59 seats. After HDZ split with its original partner, *Most* (Bridge), it later formed a coalition with the centrist-liberal Croatian People's Party/HNS, but most of the ministers originate from HDZ.
3. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović secured 50.74 percent of the vote.
4. SNS garnered 48.25 percent and Aleksandar Vučić 55.06 percent of the vote.
5. The decision of DSS to form a coalition with the more nationalistic *Dveri* ('Gates') in 2014 concretized the party's shift further to the right. The Croatian radical right remains out of parliament whereas the Serbian radical right manages to retain its parliamentary representation. SRS and DSS-*Dveri* are represented by 22 deputies, altogether, at the *Narodna Skupština* (national assembly). This is an important factor which makes EU-rejectionist voices more relevant in Serbia than in Croatia.
6. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/vukovar-bilingualism-introduce-faces-violent-resistance> .
7. It should be borne in mind that the engagement of these grass-roots groupings and associations has been of a secondary and/or complementary significance to the overarching role of political parties (or, as in the case of HDZ, certain factions within them).
8. The official position of the municipal authorities in Vukovar is that they are engaged in the improvement of the living standards for the entire population and the prompt implementation of the minority rights legislation (proportional representation at the national minorities councils, education, and public use of minority languages and their scripts) (Interview 13).
9. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/interkulturna-skola-vukovar-nezeljeno-dijete/29559596.html>; <https://euractiv.jutarnji.hr/PiD/obrazovanje/skola-koja-je-trebala-biti-primjer-integracije-i-dijaloga-nema-ni-jednog-ucenika/7965822/>.
10. <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/135837>; <http://hr.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a337004/Upcoming-protest-in-Vukovar-divides-right-wing-groups.html>.
11. Declaration of the 3rd congress of the Vojvodinian SPS committee (issued in January 1996) in Socijalistička Partija Srbije- Pokrajinski Odbor SPSa u Vojvodini, 'Vojvodina 2000. Korak u novi vek- izveštaj', Novi Sad 1996, p2.
12. VMSZ juxtaposes its consensus approach to the, allegedly, more confrontational attitudes espoused by the political representatives of other minority groups (e.g. the Bosnjaks of Sandžak), (Interview 10).
13. <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2016/11/tomislav-nikolic-serbia-won-align-east-west-161124105054362.html> .
14. Transactions with EU member-states amounted to 63.07 percent of the total external trade between 2017 and 2018. On this issue, see: <http://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/20180928-spoljnotrgovinska-robna-razmena-avgust-2018/?s=1701>.
15. <https://www.rt.com/shows/sophieco/440384-vucic-kosovo-serbia-tensions/>.
16. Ibid.
17. <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/31604-vatican-praises-its-contracts-with-croatia>.
18. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/anti-istanbul-convention-protesters-turn-against-croatian-pm-04-13-2018>; <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/135837> .
19. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/03/migration-crisis-hungary-pm-victor-orban-europe-response-madness>.
20. <https://www.politico.eu/article/migrants-are-central-europes-new-roma-refugees-viktor-orban-robert-fico/>.

21. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2015/sep/18/refugee-crisis-hungary-builds-border-fence-with-croatia-live-updates#block-55fbea61e4b0c46d88e0313a> .
22. 80 million euros were allocated by the European Commission and the EU member-states to assist Serbia in managing the migration waves (2015–16). For this figure, see: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/serbia_en.pdf .
23. <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/2660/izbori-2017/2679047/seselj-ogradom-ili-minskim-poljem-smanjiti-priliv-migranata.html> .
24. <https://visegradpost.com/en/2016/10/03/serbia-closes-her-borders-to-migrants/>.
25. 10.7 billion euros have been allocated for Croatia between 2014 and 2020 (European Commission, 2016, 74).
26. <https://tradingeconomics.com/croatia/youth-unemployment-rate>.
27. *Živi Zid* ranked as Croatia's third most popular in a series of surveys conducted during the second half of 2018 (<https://www.tportal.hr/biznis/clanak/crobarometar-hdz-najjaci-zivi-zid-za-dlaku-ispred-sdp-20181224>; https://europelects.eu/european-union/croatia-2/?fbclid=IwAR3Oz1Nm61qOd7vwsAa8ZcrT2Cf5sMvm2-i_Rz83YfdnnHOKl_t4dkwLSzM). However, following the European parliamentary elections (May 2019), the party split when one of its main MPs defected and formed the newly designated 'Party of Ivan Pernar'.
28. DSS-*Dveri* garnered 5.04 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections of April 2016.
29. <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/11/13/owns-state-latvian-anti-establishment-party-aims-power/>.

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Interviews

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