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## Decentralization Processes in Croatia and Slovenia

*Ladislav Cabada*

**Abstract:** *The article analyzes the decentralisation processes in two post-Yugoslavian countries that underwent a distinctively different development after their secesion from Yugoslavia. The analyzes verifies two basic hypothesis: 1) the the process of joining the European Union, especially the demand to accept specific criteria of home politics, includes the demand for subsidiarity and decentralization; 2) that the development of democracy encourages the decentralization process more than the development in an authoritative regime, or in a regime with limited, e.g. formal democracy.*

**Key words:** *European Union, Croatia, Slovenia, democracy, development, home politics*

### Introduction

Decentralization has been one of the principal subjects in political research in recent decades. The rise in interest in decentralization processes has been primarily related to the emphasis on the application of the principle of subsidiarity in the evolving European Union (see e.g. Fiala et al., 2002). However, the debates about the possibilities of decentralization also implicitly involve historical issues (see e.g. Tägil 1999, various Czech publications dealing with Central Europe, but also e.g. Moravia). Naturally, “regionalism“ and “decentralization“ are not synonyms, but the relatively high level of correlation between the question of regional identities and the principle of decentralization, as well as of subsidiarity, is more than obvious.

Even today, there are black and white views still to be found in (not only) Czech politics and political science discourses. These simplistic views reflect, on the one hand postwar development in the western part of Europe as “natural”, including the question of “democratic decentralization and the application of the subsidiarity” principle, and the development in the countries of the socialist community as completely centralizing and prohibiting any natural activity on local and regional levels, on the other hand. It is beyond any doubt that the Soviet-controlled countries of real socialism – Stalinist Albania and Tito’s Yugoslavia – were to a great extent modelled on the idea of democratic centralism; however, here too, we could observe indications of relatively independent local political and social formations (based especially on historical regional ties), though shaping under continuous – often not very severe – supervision of the central authorities. On the contrary, we can regard

various post-1945 signs of regionalism in Western Europe as “artificial”; the best example are some of the cross-border regions (Greber, 1999: 180-181), the formation of which continues in the new EU Member States.

We have a tendency to forget the fact that after the Second World War – but also in previous periods – the countries of Western Europe did indeed pass through a process of strict centralization, which manifested itself at both cultural-political (liberal nationalist trends towards the unification of citizens) and economic levels (creation of state monopolies and nationalization in certain business sectors). It was only at the end of the first phase of postwar stabilization that the Western European countries approached – with differences in willingness, speed, and intensity – political decentralization.

Similar processes can be observed in the Central European area, which passed through democratic transition in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and is now passing through a process of reconfiguration of territorial-political relations. Let us remind the reader that in 1991-92 a more or less violent break-up of three post-communist states, which had declared their federative character already in previous periods – the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – took place. The moment that political ties in these multinational formations loosened, individual nations and ethnic groups, or their political representations, tended to the idea of national self-determination, independence and state sovereignty.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the maps of Europe, the Transcaucasus and Central Asia saw the emergence of 20 new state formations with different qualities of statehood. On one hand, we have historical formations which to some extent succeeded in preserving their identity of “succession states” – Russia, the Czech Republic, and Serbia. On the other hand, some states emerged as if “by mistake”, and their current position roughly corresponds to that of forgotten or even failed states (Moldova). Croatia and Slovenia, the countries examined in this study, lie somewhere between these two extremes. These two countries do not want to be associated with Milošević’s Yugoslavia (they do not seek the position of “succession state”), but at the same time see their development in Royal and Tito’s Yugoslavia as an important part of their national evolution. The development is also identified with the idea of federation and with the countries’ relatively autonomous existence within Yugoslavia.

In 1991 Slovenia and Croatia decided to leave Yugoslavia and become independent states. While Slovenia went through the process of secession relatively peacefully, the attempt at Croatian secession led to the Croatian-Serbian conflict, which later exhibited the characteristics of civil war, and resulted in the subsequent separation of the Serb-populated regions from Croatia. Hence, it was the very nature of secession that determined some of the differences in the political development of both post-

Yugoslav countries, including the development of decentralization tendencies in both societies (although there is also some correspondence to be found – see below).

This study does not aim at analysing the development and the nature of decentralization processes in Croatia and Slovenia in an exhaustive manner. Such a goal would require much more time and space. Our goal is to present and analyse basic (de)centralization trends in both examined countries and thus provide an introductory contribution for subsequent comparative studies that would set Croatia's and Slovenia's decentralization processes into a broader context of Central-East European countries, or the European Union.

The possibilities for decentralization in Tito's Yugoslavia, and the Second World War and its outcomes represented a radical turning point for the idea of regional development and decentralization in Tito's Yugoslavia. The turning point is reduced by the vast majority of literature to the arrival of the Communist Party and the application of a highly centralized model, with the deciding voice of the Communist nomenclature or the representatives of repressive forces (secret police and the Yugoslav People's Army). It is apparent that – regardless of the democratization efforts from the 1950s to the 1980s, which resulted in a far more tolerable and hospitable régime than in the countries where real socialism applied – Yugoslavia, too, preferred a centralist state model. These trends were no doubt further fuelled by the fact that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had been completely paralysed by nationalist tensions and that one of the fundamental promises made by the AVNOJ (Tito's) Yugoslavia was to reconcile individual nations.

The Second World War and the arrival of Tito's régime thus also resulted in a territorial-administrative model which considerably differed from interwar Yugoslavia. The régime recognized the autonomous existence of five "state-forming" nations (Montenegrins, Croats, Macedonians, Slovenians and Serbs; in the second half of the 1960s, Slavic Muslims – Bosniaks or Bosnian Muslims – were recognized as a nation also) living in the six Socialist Republics of the federation (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia), and speaking four languages (Croatian, Macedonian, Slovenian and Serbian; after the 1950s language union, Croatian and Serbian were considered one language – Serbo-Croatian – with two different alphabets).

It is evident that the arrangement was well received, especially by the Slovenian public<sup>6</sup>, despite the fact that as early as in 1946 Tito, or the Yugoslav Communists, decided to transform Yugoslavia into an exemplary follower of the Soviet Union and of the model of democratic centralism. As Janko Prunk argues (2002: 155), the

<sup>6</sup> It is obvious that the new arrangement of national relations satisfied mainly Macedonians and Montenegrins.

second Yugoslavia was in many aspects more centralized than the pre-war kingdom, but Slovenia lived its autonomous cultural and educational life. It had its own flag, constitution, legislation, parliament, Government and other institutions typical of nation-state (see Cabada, 2005). Postwar Yugoslavia regained the region of what is today the Slovenian Littoral (annexed to Slovenia with the exception of Trieste and its territory) and Istria (the largest part annexed to Croatia; the other, much smaller, part to Slovenia) which were ceded by Italy. The union of the Slovenian historical regions (in the cases of Carinthia and Styria only the southern parts of them) into a single administrative-political unit no doubt represented a good move for Slovenian society.

As for Croatian society, such a positive attitude cannot be talked about, especially regarding the fact that Croats found themselves in an (seemingly) independent state (the Independent State of Croatia) established during the Second World War. While characterized by genocide against Serbian, Jewish and Roma minorities, the Fascist puppet state was perceived by many Croats as the embodiment of their desire for an independent state, which was declared both within the Kingdom of Hungary (mainly in the middle of the 19th century), and in the later Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The integration of Croatia into Yugoslavia thus represented a regressive step for many Croats.

After the Tito-Stalin split, Yugoslavia set out on the path of “constitutional adventurism”, which also affected the system of local administration. The 1952 General Act on People’s Committees introduced communes (*opština*, *opština*, *općina*), districts and cities as units of local and national state administration. Communes were designated as a means of decentralization to reduce the role of the state, combining the functions of both local and public administration (Cabada, 2000b: 121). Gradually, they became the key mediator between collective elements (subunits, e.g. parents or tenants associations) of society and economic-political institutions. In the second half of the 1960s, however, the activities of communes were supplanted by self-autonomizing reformists in the lead of the Leagues of Communists of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The loosening of relations between the central government headed by Tito and the governments of the Republics culminated in 1968, but after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, Tito decided to re-centralize the system.

In an attempt to subdue criticism of intervention against the liberal leaderships in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, Tito decided to reform the Constitution. The result was the Constitution of 1974, which gave the Republics the right to decide independently on their status (it was later used in the debate over the legality of independence), and created among others a new definition of the system of local and national state administration. The powers of communes were further extended to include the right to levy taxes on the inhabitants of communes; this measure is

clearly at variance with the view of Yugoslavia as a highly centralized state. However, the communal independence was limited by a number of obligations flowing from the Constitution (e.g. civil defence, income security for veterans etc.). “Communes were established by law and could merge. Each commune approved its own status, defined by the Constitution as a social contract of the communal members” (Cabada, 2000b: 127).

In many respects, communes only masked the unlimited rule of local leaders allied with the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. However, on the other hand, we must mention the fact that especially in the 1980s, communes in Slovenia, and partly also those in Croatia, were “infiltrated” by the emerging civil society, and were seen by many inhabitants as a positive manifestation of decentralization, or as an attempt to bring politics closer to the people. Notwithstanding these facts, the independence processes and following months and years in both Croatia and Slovenia were marked by a relatively strong prioritization of centralizing tendencies, or rather the suppression of true decentralization political processes. The causes are to be found not only in the “immanent” tendency of the former secessionist movements to centralize new states, but also in the belief (which was partly well-founded) that the political representatives of local units would have a hampering or restricting influence on the processes of democratization, unification and homogenization of society, or over the processes regarding the integration into Western structures, especially the EU.

### **Differences in (De)Centralization processes in Croatia and Slovenia in the 1990s**

As mentioned above, immediately after declaring independence, Croatia became embroiled in a conflict with the “residual” Serbo-Montenegrin Yugoslavia, which also determined, to a certain extent, the separatist tendencies of Croatian Serbs. In this situation, the attitude of the Zagreb political representatives, led by President Tudjman, towards the idea of a stronger decentralization was logically rather reserved. In the first half of the 1990s there was a continuous increase in authoritarian tendencies in the régime; President Tudjman established himself as an “absolute” ruler in the quasi-presidential system, but became more and more dependent on quasi-legal groups engaged in the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cabada, 2000; Zakošek, 2002).

On a formal level, after 1991, Croatia decided on a stronger decentralization than in the period of Socialist Yugoslavia. In addition to municipalities, which were preserved, cities emerged as another form of the lowest level of local administration. The 1990 Croatian Constitution ensured the right of municipalities and cities to adopt their own statute. These are headed by the elected mayor (*općinski načelnik*,

*gradonačelnik*) (Cabada 2000a: 175). At the turn of the millennium, Croatia was divided into 547 municipalities and 123 cities (Mimica 2003: 2), with a city constituting a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants.

In 1993 the first Chamber of Counties (*Županijski dom*) election was held; the Chamber represented 20 Croatian counties (*županije*) and the capital of Croatia, Zagreb (Hloušek, 2004a: 139). Counties<sup>7</sup> represented the level of local administration standing between the smallest units of local administration – municipalities and cities – and the municipality in Zagreb. However, in practice, counties were significantly limited in their self-governing politics, both by the (in)appropriate setting of financial standards and the significant interference in their affairs by central authorities headed by President Tudjman.

As for the financial conditions of local governments, it is possible to illustrate the progressive centralization by the fact that while in 1990 round total of all local budgets amounted to 120 per cent of the state budget of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, in 2001 Croatia's state budget exceeded the total of local budgets five times (Lašić 2001: 2)! As regards the restrictions placed on the functioning of Croatian local authorities, the best example seems to be the right of the President not to appoint an elected county president. Tudjman took the option several times, provoking among other things, relatively violent protests in Zagreb, which led to the separation of certain groups from the then ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HZD) (Zakošek, 2002: 647). The President's veto was abolished only by the 2001 amendment to the Law on Local Self-government.

Under the Constitution counties were represented by the Upper House in Parliament – Chamber of Counties), the majority of which involved representatives elected in counties. The Constitution ensured each county the same right to elect three representatives, and the first elections took place in 1993 (Hloušek, 2004a: 139). The other five members were appointed by the President; therefore the chamber was not exclusively represented by counties. The Upper Chamber held a veto over legislation, which could be outvoted by the lower chamber – the Chamber of Deputies (*Zastupnički Dom*) – only by a two-thirds majority (Cabada, 2000a: 172). However, there were no fundamental disputes before 2000, since both chambers were dominated by Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union (HZD). The Chamber of Counties was abolished under wider Croatian public administration reforms in March 2001 (Zakošek, 2002: 651).

<sup>7</sup> Croatia is divided into 20 counties and the capital. These are listed in Croatian: Zagrebačka; Krapinsko-zagorska; Sisačko-moslavačka; Karlovačka; Varaždinska; Koprivničko-križevačka; Bjelovarsko-bilogorska; Primorsko-goranska; Ličko-senjska; Virovitičko-podravska; Poreško-slavonska; Brodsko-posavska; Zadarska; Osiječko-baranjska; Šibensko-kninska; Vukovarsko-srijemska; Splitsko-dalmatinska; Istarska; Dubrovačko-neretvanska; Medžimurska. Dragan Antulov (2000) presumes that many counties were defined on the principle of gerrymandering.

The aversion to a stronger decentralization of Croatian politics throughout the 1990s was caused by a combination of various factors. We have to mention the impact of the war in the 1990s and secessionist tendencies in regions inhabited by the Serb minority in the first half of the decade, which was manifested in the authoritarianization of the régime, including the tendency towards strengthening central institutions, especially the Presidency. This centralization was accompanied by an intensified need to control financial flows, caused by the efforts to efficiently gather resources for militarization and warfare, but also for keeping needed (or chosen) groups of population. Tudjman's régime did not proceed with any radical reform or transformation of economy in the 1990s; the (post) socialist economy was controlled from the centre, which could be considered as not really democratic, on the other hand, we must note that, in this respect, decentralization without the preceding transformation would only worsen the situation.

Ironically, in the first years of democratic and independent existence, Slovenia decided on an even more centralized model of politics and public administration than Croatia. Slovenia has different geographic conditions than Croatia – while Croatia is geographically extremely heterogeneous (in the northwest lies the Istrian Peninsula, jutting towards the west from central Croatia; to the southeast runs a narrow and long coastline of the Dalmatian coast separated from the mainland by Bosnia and Herzegovina) – Slovenia's territory is more homogeneous, with the capital (Ljubljana) and its agglomeration as the geographically natural centre of the country. Its population – which is more than twice as small as Croatia – is ethnically much more homogeneous as well.

We cannot say that Slovenia lacks any regional diversity that could constitute the basis for a decentralized model of public administration. From the very beginning of independence, all the larger political parties spoke about the need for decentralization; however, on the other hand, they linked the need with the lowest units of local self-government – municipalities. Ironically, the process of founding municipalities began with their relatively hasty abolishment in 1991. “The debates on future functioning of public administration involved various suggestions with the common denominator of doubts about the ability of certain villages and cities to self-govern ... This scepticism resulted in the return to the municipal model, which was passed in 1993 as The Act on Local Self-Government” (Cabada, 2005: 217).

The law defined two types of municipalities – “basic” and urban. After the debates provoked by the lack of interest of certain municipalities envisaged in the law to self-establish, in 1994 the Parliament decided to establish 147 municipalities, which could afterwards be divided or merged if so decided in a local referendum. Slovenia is now divided into 193 municipalities varying in terms of size and financial security. Although the law envisages municipalities financing their



operations from their own sources, the majority of them are currently co-financed by the state.<sup>8</sup>

An important factor characteristic of the functioning of municipalities in Slovenia, is the fact that the mayors are eligible to stand for election as Members of Parliament. Many mayors (around one third of 90 MPs) sit on a regular basis in the lower house of the Slovenian Parliament – the National Assembly (*Državni zbor*). These mayors bring local and regional issues, mainly preparation of the state budget law, into parliamentary discourse.

In contrast with Croatia, Slovenia did not establish an intermediate level of public administration between municipalities and central authorities throughout the 1990s – and has not done so, in reality, until now. The discussion over the establishment of self-governing regions was launched in the same period as the debates on the definition of municipalities. In addition, the Constitution adopted in 1991 envisages the creation of “wider self-governing units”. In this respect, Article 143 says: “Municipalities may independently decide to join wider self-governing local communities, as well as regions, in order to regulate and manage local affairs of wider importance. In agreement with such communities, the state may transfer specific matters within the state competence into their original competence and determine the participation of such communities in proposing and performing particular matters within the state competence”. In this respect, we have to consider the fact that municipalities have 22 representatives in the Upper House of the Slovenian Parliament – National Council (*Državni svet*). Since there are more than 22 municipalities, they have to agree on joint candidacies (Cabada, 2005: 223).

The Slovenian political parties settled on the years 1994-98 as the period dedicated to the stabilization of municipalities, followed by the establishment of regions. As early as 1997, however, the Slovenian political scientist Marjan Brezovšek stated that: “regions may exist in Slovenia, but the constitutional system and political relations inhibit them from establishing themselves as a useful and necessary part of the political system” (Brezovšek 1997: 181). The situation remained almost unchanged even after 1998, when the regionalization of Slovenia was either completely refused by the political parties, or presented as forced upon it by the European Union and in principle unnecessary. Moreover, the main political parties – the ruling Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) and the opposition Social Democratic Party of Slovenia (SDS; today the Slovenian Democratic Party) – proposed projects involving different numbers and definitions of regions; which prevented any consensus on this question.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis of the creation and functioning of Slovenian municipalities, see (Cabada, 2003) and (Cabada, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the discussion on the potential establishment of regions in Slovenia, see (Cabada, 2003) and (Cabada, 2005).

We can conclude that in the 1990s Slovenia was a more democratic system than Croatia; however, as regards decentralization, Slovenian governments behaved in a similar centralizing way as the HZD governments in Croatia.

In contrast with Croatia, in 1996 Slovenia signed the Association Agreement with the EU. The Slovenian border regions were thus able to receive financial support from the EU – INTERREG II Programmes: the total investments in Carinthia and Styria in 1995-99 totalled 282 million Austrian schillings (Roblek, 2000: 107). After 2000, Slovenia received support from INTERREG III Programmes as well.

### Developments after 2000

Tudjman's death in 1999, followed by the defeat of the HZD in the 2000 parliamentary elections, represented an important turning point in the development of Croatian political system. As early as the end of January 2000, the new coalition government, headed by Ivica Račan was formed, composed of Social Democrats, Social Liberals, but also the Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS). The most successful regional political party in Croatia thus joined the government – the IDS won every election for the Istria County Regional Parliament. The party programme, which operates under Croatian, Italian and Slovenian names (*Istarski demokratski sabor – Dieta democratice istriana – Istrski demokratski zbor; IDS-DDI-IDZ*), includes creation of a multicultural Istria, development of regional cooperation, and primarily long-term decentralization (Hloušek, 2004b: 237; Zakošek, 2002: 657). One of the priorities defined by Račan's government was therefore the increased decentralization of the state (Hloušek, 2004a: 147).

At first, the achievement of this goal, which used to be identified with “the highest” objective – the accelerated accession to the European Union – appeared to be the true priority of the Government. In November 2000 the Croatian Government even signed a cooperation agreement with the *Open Society Institute* foundation. Under the agreement, the foundation was authorized to prepare the three-year Decentralization of Public Administration project; the coordination of this project was entrusted to the Croatian Law Centre. “The project covered several specific areas: the electoral system of local elections, the territorial organization of local and regional self-government, the legal status and competences of local self-government, the status of local officials, decentralization in the fields of primary and secondary education, health care, social services and culture, and the financing of local and regional self-government” (Vidačak, undated: 82). Nevertheless, the Government decided not to implement the project.

One of the factors limiting the Government's wish for real decentralization was the effort to meet the EU accession criteria as soon as possible. The Government assumed that it should centralize its activities to meet the Copenhagen criteria and

feared that the transfer of competences to regions or municipalities would slow the process. But what was also important was the fact that in 2000-01, the representatives of the oppositional HZD dominated most of the regions. Igor Vidačak cites other reasons (undated: 85) for the present inability of the regions to play a more important role in Croatian politics – underfunding, reluctance of local political élites and officials to adapt to the new circumstances, ignorance of foreign languages etc. Considering these facts the Government decided to prefer the status quo (stability) over reform, the result of which is very much in doubt (Antulov, 2000: 6), and that despite occasional declarations to the contrary. For example, in October 2002 a big conference was convened in Zagreb, at which several models of reformed public administration were presented to the Croatian public. The conference was not, however, followed up with any significant applications (*Report on Progress in the Implementation ...*). In May 2001, in response to the Government's reluctance to decentralize politics, the IDS minister left Račan's government. Neither it nor the subsequent government led by Ivo Sanader (HZD), which came to power after the autumn 2003 election, still did not and has not found the proper formula for real decentralization. Nevertheless, at the European level, Croatian politicians continue declaring their efforts to decentralize: see for instance the speech given by the Minister of European Integration in May 2003 (Mimica, 2003), in which he envisaged a foundation of the National Agency for Regional Development in 2005 (I have not found any reference to its actual foundation so far). Regardless of the rather declaratory statements by Croatian politicians, the country came to participate in EU INTERREG III B (transnational cooperation) and INTERREG C (interregional cooperation) programmes.

Hence, we could suppose that the Europeanization of Croatian politics regarding the EU accession efforts could also mean decentralization and application of the principles of subsidiarity in Croatian politics. It is, however, the case of Slovenia, becoming a full EU member on 1 May 2004, which shows that this correlation is not evident, and that tendencies for purely limited decentralization could possibly occur in the politics of Croatia and other Southeastern European countries seeking to join the EU.

It was the Slovenian Government or more precisely some of its ministries (mainly the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior) that became key actors of the decentralization process after 1999. The principal reason for this was the EU's criticism of Slovenia's inability or reluctance to establish regional self-governing structures. The creation of regions from above, however, was inhibited by the dispute between individual political parties with different views on the size or number of regions and, naturally, potential regional competences (Cabada, 2005: 225).

The main political parties agreed on the idea that regions, or provinces (*pokrajine*), should be created as self-governing units with competences transferred from the state or municipal level. The major difference lies in different views on the number of regions – while the rightist parties (Slovenian Democratic Party, Slovenian People's Party, New Slovenia) promoted a greater number of regions (23-25); the left-wing and centrist parties (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, Social Democrats) prefer 8-12 regions. However, these positions are not strictly defined – for example, the Vice-president of the ruling SDS and current Minister of Education Milan Zver came up with the idea of mere three regions: “the rich Western Slovenia, Ljubljana and the poor (that is receiving structural funds support) Eastern Slovenia” (Cabada, 2005: 226).<sup>10</sup> These regions vary greatly in economic performance and stability – while the GDP of central Slovenia (Ljubljana and surroundings) reaches almost 90 per cent of the EU average, it is 80 per cent in the case of western Slovenia and only 50 per cent in the case of eastern Slovenia. This has resulted significant migration from the east to the centre and west (Gosar, 2000: 87). Many political scientists – including the author – thought that Slovenia’s accession to the EU would conclude the debate on the definition of regions. But at the end of 2007, three and a half years after the accession to the EU, Slovenia was still waiting for the establishment of regions. Slovenia remains divided into 12 statistical units at the NUTS 3 level 3, while the levels 0 and 1 represent the whole country and the level 2 two units “Ljubljana and surroundings” or “the rest of Slovenia” (Roblek, 2000: 105). As the Slovenian political geographer Anton Gosar puts it (2000: 105), the notion of a Europe of the Regions is, in the case of Slovenia, transferred to the state level. In addition, Slovenia refuses to be associated with the Mediterranean and especially the “Balkan” dimension of its existence and declares itself to be a “purely” Central European state.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, this study does not aim at analysing the development and the nature of decentralization processes in Croatia and Slovenia in an exhaustive manner. Rather, it is a summary of the basic phases and trends

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the discussion on the potential creation of regions in Slovenia and the analysis of the attempts to establish regions from below – under Article 143 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia – see Cabada, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> As Gosar (2000: 73) argues, the Slovenian governments, too, refuse other than Central European “state ideology”, which provokes certain tensions in relation to the east and southeast of the country (regions bordering with Croatia), but also to the Slovenian Littoral including the Slovenian part of Istria (compare the activities of the Istrian Democratic Assembly in Croatia – see above). The Central European focus is reflected in e.g. the content of schoolbooks, in which the Mediterranean and Balkan influence on Slovenian society and history are ignored.

of the (de)centralizing processes that took place in both countries from 1990 to 2005. As we showed, regardless of the differences in the developments after gaining independence, both countries had significant difficulties in applying the principle of subsidiarity in the form of decentralization of politics and public administration. On the other hand, we also described the variance caused by different political developments including the different approach to and the timing of the accession to the European Union.

We can say that Vjeran Katunarić's finding, which he presented in 2003 on the basis of the analysis of decentralization processes, is still valid. According to him, Croatia and Slovenia dispose of centralized structure, in which municipalities play an important role. Other southeastern European countries, the then most promising EU candidates – Romania and Bulgaria – were directly denoted as centralized (Katunarić, 2003: 6-8).

We may conclude that Croatia and Slovenia are far from fulfilling the principle of subsidiarity and even more the less poetic principle of decentralization and regionalization of politics and public administration. On the other hand, in comparison to other post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet countries in the region, both countries made the greatest progress towards a properly functioning decentralized model. In both countries, the decentralized model is functional primarily at the level of basic administrative units (municipalities), while the creation of regions (Slovenia) or their functionality (Croatia) is still somewhat retarded.

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## Austria's European Policy and its Coordination and Decision-making System at the Turn of the 21st Century<sup>12</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The study describes Austria's relationship to the EU and the processes the country underwent in the past thirteen years as an EU member state. Due to its EU accession Austria went through a process of Europeanization. This paper analyses the top-down and bottom-up effects of this process. The author begins by asking to what extent Europeanization had an impact on the coordination mechanisms of Austrian politics, in particular, the executive and the legislative, and the specific features of the Austrian political system: federalism and corporatism. The analysis shows that the adaptation of institutions to EU model significantly affected Austrian politics. The second part of the paper analyses the bottom-up effects, how domestic political processes influenced the Austrian European policy. Despite the strong Europeanization of Austria's domestic institutions the research found some problem junctures in the relationship between Austria and the EU. This included the issue of the coalition government that was formed with the participation of the FPÖ in 2000 and the sanctions other EU member states placed on Austria as a response. Another case occurred when Austria threatened to veto EU eastern expansion in 2001. On the basis of these two cases it was found that despite the adaptation of domestic institutions, domestic politics can still have a strong effect on European relations. However, the long-term trend in Austrian European policy indicates that the relationship between strong institutional adaptation and the country's positive pro-European policy is primarily harmonious.*

**Keywords:** *Austria, political system, European policy, coordination system, European Union, federalism and the EU, corporatism*

### Introduction

Austria has been a member of the European Union for over a decade now. Austria's official request for full membership in the EC<sup>13</sup> did not come until 17 July 1989. It was preceded by a domestic political debate over the advantages and disadvantages of membership in the EC, against the background of the changes that were occurring in the East-West relationship and intensifying European integration.

<sup>12</sup> This article was not proof-read by the Politics in Central Europe. The autor holds the full responsibility for the language quality of the article.

<sup>13</sup> ECSC, EEC and EUROATOM.